CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH (E-WOM)
AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS TOOL

The information role of consumer opinions in the case of TripAdvisor

Ph.D. thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Dóra Horváth, Ph.D.

Éva Markos-Kujbus

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http://www.cre8tv.eu/

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1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of the present dissertation is in-depth study of the role in marketing communications of a specific manifestation of the phenomenon of consumer participation, namely electronic word-of-mouth, or e-WOM[1].

The opinion of family, friends, and acquaintances has always played a greater role in consumer decisions about a product or service than organizations' marketing (communications) activity. At the same time, information sources quickly became scarce once an interested consumer ran out of people in their proximity with actual prior product experience, and had then to assume more risk. Technological development and the digital sphere have made it possible to come by consumer opinions about products and services that one's own acquaintances might not have experience or information about. An increasing number of platforms offer access to consumer opinions, and there is equally an ever increasing number of product and service categories than one can find consumer opinions about. As such, today one can not only find consumer reviews about electronic appliances but also about hotels, restaurants, and there even exist online platforms that aggregate reviews of physicians, or teachers. These opinions are not only important for consumers but also for manufacturers and service providers, who, however, are only starting to grasp the importance of this form of consumer feedback. E-WOM is therefore a highly topical research area.

Beyond the obvious personal use, the author's interest was directed towards the topic at the beginning of her doctoral studies when it became apparent to her that the phenomenon as a focal research area had dated back to a mere ten years. While processing the relevant literature her attention came to an ill-studied detail within the phenomenon of e-WOM, namely the study of e-WOM from a content point of view. E-WOM was choses as a focal topic for the dissertation following the observation that using it efficiently for marketing communications purposes is impossible without having a detailed knowledge of all stages of the process.

It is however important to note that even though the dissertation deals with a process taking place in the digital environment, the core phenomenon of word-of-mouth is hardly a novelty; an adapted examination of the phenomenon, nonetheless, is required in a new environment and along new angles.

The relevance of the topic is further demonstrated by the fact that it had been included in the Cre8tv.eu research project supported by a grant of the 7th Framework

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[1] In the following we refer to electronic word-of-mouth as e-WOM.

Programme (FP7) of the European Commission. Within this project, the related research task was to establish a deeper understanding of consumer-generated contents, and thereby to explore the related competitive factors for the creative industries, and the marketing communications industry within. The final framework, outcome, and empirical research of the dissertation were thus determined within the framework of, and equally supported by the Cre8tv.eu research project.

1.1. Significance of the results

As mentioned beforehand, a focus on the content elements of e-WOM can be justified by a relative lack of related research: even though recent studies have reported on the influencing factors of e-WOM, but these studies were primarily directed at the study of the sender and receiver of the message. In contrast, there has been a shortage so for about the actual contents of these messages, especially using a more complex methodological and theoretical approach. The present research therefore aims to contribute to an area of research this far neglected, thereby enriching the literature on e-WOM.

On the practical side, the dissertation's aim is to support the vision that instead of merely being a constraint for organization, it can be exploited as a genuine marketing communication tool. For instance, by mapping the contents of these messages, organizations are enabled to gain a deeper understanding of consumer needs, or to acquire valuable development ideas from thus gathered consumer feedback.

Our aim is also to draw the attention of organizations to the fact that educating consumers in their writing of reviews can also be a beneficial marketing communication tool. This is supported by Lepkowska-White's (2013) results, who finds that good quality consumer-generated e-WOM is more effective than designing highly sophisticated recommendations systems. It is therefore necessary for organizations to realize that consumer education in this field can prove to be a subsequent source of both valuable business information and an effective marketing communication tool, by, among others, gaining valuable insight into a process which is otherwise uncontrollable by other means to the organization. The importance of this phenomenon is detailed in the next section.

1.2. Effects of the changing communication environment

Technological change has affected the practice of marketing communications in many areas. The digital communication space brings about a particularly complex environment for organizations, radically changing the characteristics of

communication by dramatically increasing the number of participants in the process. Along with the transforming communication space, consumers' communication habits and expectations are equally evolving, while organizations are losing their dominant position as sources of information. Many signs today indicate that organizations' influencing power has deeply suffered in the process, even though the new communication channels have opened up new avenues for reaching consumers in more targeted ways.

Online channels facilitate the immediate and mass flow and transmission of information, as well as information dominance at the grassroots level (e.g. consumer initiatives), the personalization of information and, in theory, an unlimited reach. The issue of quality and quantity dynamics of information arise: as a growing mass of information is available online, the quality of which being uneven, it becomes necessary to apply some kind of filter (Fehér, 2011; Vilpponen et al., 2006). Another major feature of the new communication environment is that the information in the online space can be considered a public good, as it is accessible and freely usable to anyone, which highly facilitates the dissemination of information (Cheung – Lee, 2012). Interactivity can therefore be considered a fundamental characteristic of the online space (Fehér, 2011; Lievrouw, 2009). These factors highlight the fact that the online sphere requires a new approach from organizations: the role of technology is no longer limited to facilitate communications, but becomes, itself, the basis of any communication activity (Lievrouw, 2009).

The diffusion of digital spaces, with the increased amount of information available as well as the increased opportunities to communicate bring about a number of issues, such as credibility, reliability, and verifiability. Anonymity can also be cited as one of the most important disadvantages of the online sphere, as one is also enabled to post reviews about experiences that have never happened (Ba – Pavlou, 2002; Rab, 2011), and thereby to introduce false and unverifiable information into the information cycle. That is why the study of consumer trust in online information is a particularly important research subject (Archer-Brown et al., 2013), as is strengthening trust through various methods (e.g. the compulsory use of one's full name when writing product reviews; the request for key personal information along with one's online review; etc.) a key practical field for service providers. The fact that digital data can be easily copied and modified can be considered another issue related to online e-WOM, as this activity may lead to diverting the meaning of an original message. All in all, the increased amount of information available can be considered a new kind of uncertainty factor (Schwartz, 2006) and as such an actual risk factor which may potentially lead to information overload (Park – Lee, 2009).

Digital communications therefore bear certain specific characteristics, such as anonymity, mass access, the co-existence of synchronous and asynchronous communication, and interactivity (Vilpponen et al. 2006). The most significant impact of the digital sphere on communications lies in the participation of consumers in the creation of information, and the advent of a many-to-many type of communication, and the subsequent possibility to interact with all participants. While information used to be generated and disseminated by professional media outlets in traditional mass media, with a unidirectional flow of information and thereby a very limited (and indirect) possibility of consumer feedback, consumers are playing a lot greater role in the new communication environment. Indeed, their participation in the creation of information is even increasing, while information altogether can be diffused in a multitude of directions simultaneously. This process highly contributes to the phenomenon of democratization of information and knowledge (Evans, 2008), while participants are undergoing a transition from content consumers to content creators (Botha et al., 2011). In other words, due to the changed environment and opportunities, consumers in the online sphere are transformed from passive observers to active participants (Napoli, 2008).

The scope of consumers' communication opportunities is extended, and their roles are changing. In the face of dissatisfaction with companies, consumers can either exit the market, or express their voice (Hirschman, 1970). While exit only implies that the consumer no longer purchases a given company's products or services, one's negative (or, equally, positive) experiences and opinions can be expressed through voice directly to the company, but also to one's acquaintances and to other consumers. Such expressions are magnified in and by the online sphere, while their impact and diffusion can be far greater than before, in the offline space, thanks to universal access and searchability. The number of ways to express one's opinions has also considerably increased, as consumers can have recourse to myriad platforms from various social networking sites, through rating systems (e.g. online stores), to online portals specialized in hosting consumer opinions (e.g. Tripadvisor) (Napoli, 2008).

All the above leads to the phenomenon of consumer empowerment, in which "consumers are enabled to express their views and thereby to influence their own consumption" (Csordás, 2015: 24). This equally implies that companies can no longer consider their consumers as passive recipients of marketing messages. Rather they should be perceived as active and self-conscious actors craving for control who knowingly put to use their power gained through their various acts of consumption in order to construct unique experiences and meanings around their consumption activity (Markos-Kujbus – Csordás, 2015).

Parallel to their changing roles, consumers equally acquire new communication behaviors (Archer – Brown et al. 2013; Fehér, 2011; Kozinets, 1999): the process of

information gathering is accelerated, to a point where the immediate access to information is becoming an expressed consumer need. Because of the above, information can no longer be considered a static "product" that is consumed or transmitted, but rather a dynamic "resource", that consumers can use and modify to transmit their own messages and meanings. They can also thereby affect the information's diffusion patterns (Napoli, 2011). Moreover, the pool of information consumption options has considerably expanded, as consumers have a much wider choice of and control over as to what, when, where, and how to consume (Napoli, 2008) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Consumers' changed opportunities for information consumption in the digital space

WHAT?	WHEN?	WHERE?	HOW?
• information received from the organization **AND** • information received from users (e.g. from another consumer, or a third-party [independent] organization) **AND** • content shaped/transformed by the consumers themselves **AND** • content created by the consumers themselves	• immediate (synchronous) **AND** • delayed (asynchronous) **AND** • deliberately retrieved (asynchronous)	• the organization's own platforms (owned media) **AND** • paid-for platforms (paid media) **AND** • channels generated by independent third-parties or consumers	• interpersonal (one-to-one) communication **AND** • during information search (one-to-many communication) **AND** • through participation in communities, during communication (many-to-many communication)

Source: own elaboration

The new (virtual) space can be characterized by an extensive social connectivity, and online consumers by a more intense communication activity than their offline counterparts. Moreover, online consumers can be said to have a greater willingness to participate and, in some cases, thanks to, among others, the possibility of anonymity, a greater ease and boldness to express their opinions. Beside activity, online consumers can be characterized by a greater level of interactivity as they are enabled to engage in conversations through various channels and communities. Furthermore, the online sphere enables the consumer to fulfill many roles. As such, they can be a user, consumer, content generator, meaning maker or brand advocate at the same time (Archer–Brown et al. 2013; Fehér, 2011; Kozinets, 1999).

The digital space has led to the apparition and appreciation (both as a communication channel and as a social networking platform) of a new type of community, namely: virtual communities. Relationships are being redefined within this new social platform, while they are primarily organized around shared interests (Cova – Cova, 2002).

As such, certain virtual communities can even focus on and be built around commercial brands. However, it is important to note that consumers will only get in touch online with individuals and brands who and which they believe are transparent and authentic, making consumer trust also a key factor of this new form of relationship (Archer –Brown et al. 2013). Consumers participating in such virtual communities expect not only to be heard, but also to be answered to and committed to by the company.

In an interactive relationship, organizations find themselves in direct connection with active consumers who contribute to co-creating contents and value, thereby strengthening the relationship between the company and the consumer. The result of the co-operation is an increased likelihood of consumer loyalty to the organization (Godes – Mayzlin, 2004).

Another crucial aspect of the digital sphere for marketing (communications) is the relative loss of direct control of the organization in the new communication space over the flow of messages concerning them as consumers not only converse but also create, modify and share organization-related contents (Kozinets, 1999). While not in direct control, organizations are still able to quickly distribute information and knowledge therefore maintaining an opportunity to influence (Csordás et al., 2013). As such, organizations are required to revise their goals, with the appropriate use of information prevailing over its control, in the ultimate aim to building strong and long-term relations with consumers (Kozinets, 1999).

1.3. Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation's theoretical review first addresses the framework of e-WOM as a communication process by providing a structuring overview of the notion of virtual communities. After reviewing the definitions of virtual communities present in the literature, the various typologies thereof are presented. The investigation of the communication environment is followed by a study of community members.

Next, a comprehensive summary on the concept and literature of e-WOM is provided. To achieve this, the notion of e-WOM is first drawn up and a related conceptual confusion is addressed. A typology of e-WOM is then drawn up, as well as its process and its effects on consumers and on companies. An emphasis is put in the theoretical framework on the study of the factors influencing the process of e-WOM, which are presented based on the basic communication model, namely along the respective sides of the sender, receiver, and the message, i.e. the content of e-WOM. As this latter occupies a key role in the dissertation, a comprehensive picture is given on the most recent research results in the area, which will then serve as a basis for the dissertation's empirical research. The characteristics of negative e-WOM are presented as a

concluding part of the dissertation's theoretical part. It was deemed necessary to provide a separate assessment of the concept in view of the fact that the majority of the literature address positive e-WOM.

The theoretical review is followed by a description of the goals and methods of research, and a presentation of the dissertation's research questions. The various phases of the empirical research are presented sequentially, which layout adequately reflects the succession and complementarity of each phase.

Part I. Literature Review

2. Virtual communities

In social psychology, phenomena related to intrapersonal and group communications equally appear during online communications. This way, intelligence on traditional group communications can also be applied to the online sphere. Indeed, even though there is a lack of face-to-face contact, individual behavioral patterns are hardly any different online.

Moreover, it became apparent that communities come to the fore as a dominant online social medium, it is therefore a primordial task for marketers and marketing science to explore the characteristics of virtual communities in depth.

2.1. Defining virtual communities

2.1.1. Difference between groups and communities

Before defining the notion of community it is important to examine that of the group, this latter being a core building block of a community. A group is comprised of two or more individuals with the following characteristics, out of which the first three can be referred to as minimal constituent requirements (Dutsch, 1973 in. Smith – McKie, 2005; Johnson – Johnson, 1987 in. Bagozzi – Dholakia, 2002):

(1) one or several attributes shared by members,

(2) perception by participants of the group as an entity clearly distinguishable from any other entity, i.e. awareness of their membership in the group and awareness of fellow group members,

(3) awareness by members of a positive relationship between various goals and interests,

(4) existence of interaction between members,

(5) existence of mutuality between members' respective goals (the mutual goals of the virtual community may be both functional or hedonic) and that of a collective effort to achieving it,

(6) development, over time, of shared norms which regulate and manage member interactions, and of a series of rules that confer specific group activities, obligations and rights.

Tönnies (1887 in Smith – McKie, 2005), through his typography, equally argues in the favor of differentiating between the two notions by proposing a dichotomy of personal social interactions, differentiating between the notions of **community** (in German: Gemeinschaft) and **society** (in German: Gesellschaft). A community involves, by definition, an emotional engagement, with a dominance and high frequency of personal contact, along with characteristic traits, such as solidarity, conformity, or

control. A society, on the other hand, involves less personal attachment, and more formal contact between members and impersonal communications are more characteristic.

As Tönnies (1887 in Smith – McKie, 2005) points out, a community is more than the sum of its members. At the same time, the definition of community is constantly revisited (Weelman, 1982 in. Preece – Maloney-Krichmar, 2005), making the same all the more true for virtual communities and its respective typologies (Porter, 2004).

It can, however, be said that a community is a group of individuals "gathered" together in the aim of sharing mutual interests or settling mutual obligations through which interactions and bonds are formed between them (Heller, 1989 in. Koh – Kim, 2004; Rothaermel – Sugiyama, 2001).

To extend the above definition, McMillan and Chavis (1986) cite the following as defining elements of a community: membership (sense of belonging or sharing of common traits), influence (sense of importance of self), integration, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

Communities exhibit three core markers that differentiate them from society (Muniz – O'Guinn, 2001):

(1) consciousness of kind: an intrinsic connection felt by members toward one another, and a collective sense of difference from others outside of the community (Wellman et al., 1996),

(2) shared rituals and traditions: most communities have their own traditions, language and interactions ruled by shared norms (Bagozzi – Dholakia, 2002),

(3) sense of moral responsibility (Muniz – O'Guinn, 2001) and interest (Bagozzi – Dholakia, 2002).

In order for a group to be the scene of and driving force behind the deepened relationship between a company and its consumers, establishing such groups is merely a first step.

According to Tuckman (1965) **four stages are necessary before a group can develop into a community**:

(1) During forming, group members are acquainted and faced with the task of identifying and clarifying the driving force behind the group's founding.

(2) The next, most critical, stage is that of storming. Differences arise (e.g. because of differing norms, attitudes, cultural background etc.) and conflicts are revealed between members and struggles erupt for defining in-group status and roles. By the end of the second stage, in-group hierarchy is determined, as are the roles of individual members.

(3) In the third stage, norming, norms and attitudes are defined (and, at best, voluntarily agreed upon) that will define the group's common identity. Ideally,

at the end of this stage, conflicts between members are resolved. The earliest emergence and resolution of conflicts contribute to the possibility of moving to the subsequent stage.

(4) The last stage, performing, with intimacy established, members can focus on achieving the common goals already known to everyone. By the end of this stage, a community is born if the aforementioned constituent factors are reached.

2.1.2. Approaches to the definition of virtual communities

While one can indeed observe the reproduction of social psychological phenomena of the physical world, these latter are best defined and studied on their own, as there are certain fundamental differences between traditional and virtual communities (Bagozzi – Dholakia, 2002):

(1) participants of virtual communities make contact with each other using a communication medium (Chang – Chuang, 2011), relegating personal interaction to the background

(2) the membership of virtual communities is always voluntary while one can, for instance, also be born into a traditional community

(3) the role of community as a source of information is greater in the virtual world

(4) virtual communities are characterized by a faster information flow and greater interactivity as online users are a lot more active (Kozinets, 1999)

(5) members of virtual communities can benefit from the anonymity offered by the digital infrastructure, enabling larger, social effects often surpassing the interpersonal levels of traditional communities

Essential features of virtual communities include shared goals, interests, principles and interaction (Balasubramanian – Mahajan, 2001; Preece, 2002). The sole presence, however, of these components does not define a virtual community. A virtual community is born through a process which involves the sustained presence of communicators, interactivity, membership, and a dedicated virtual space (Jones, 1997). A virtual community, also, cannot be sustained without clear purpose or vision, flexibility, a clear definition of member roles, online and/or offline events where members can interact with each other directly (Koh – Kim, 2004).

Although there is no universally accepted definition of virtual communities, one can identify the main dimensions along which scholars have attempted to approach the concept: technological, network and system science, knowledge and information sharing, community exchange, relationship, and social-technological approaches.

Virtual communities can be described through the lens of various dimensions, one of which is the *technological approach*. This approach focuses on a computer- and cell phone-mediated virtual space. These communication tools provide new opportunities for the integration of content and communication by putting user- (and member-)generated content to the fore (Hagel – Armstrong, 1997; Stáhlbröst – Bergvall-Káreborn, 2011).

In another approach, the emphasis is placed on *networks and systems*. In this approach, virtual communities are considered as self-sustaining community systems, social networks of people with shared interests that support the interaction among individuals through a network of personal relationships (see e.g. Wang – Chen, 2012; Wellman et al., 1996).

The most often quoted approach in the definitions of virtual community is that of community *exchange*. This approach, in turn, can be divided into two areas: the exchange of information and/or of knowledge, and the exchange of resources such as kindness, status, information, money and other commodities and services (it is also common that multiple forms of exchange take place within the virtual community) (Foa, 1971 in. Chan – Li, 2010).

Regarding the exchange of knowledge/information, virtual communities can be considered knowledge communities of sorts, where members share interests or goals and where the interactions are primarily focused on the sharing of knowledge/information in the aim of collective learning or problem-solving (Chen et al., 2011; Chiu et al., 2006; Koh – Kim, 2004).

Virtual communities can be characterized using the community exchange dimension as follows (de Valck, et al., 2009; Kozinets, 1999):

    (1) online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of an activity, or interest;

    (2) the exchange of information is carried out in a public arena, and the production and consumption of content is voluntary and democratic;

    (3) members understand and abide the values, beliefs, norms, traditions, rituals, and language adopted by community;

    (4) social ties between members can form;

    (5) information, community, and emotional support are provided by members, friendships are formed, emotions are expressed and exchanged, information/knowledge is exchanged, discussions, brainstormings, gossiping are carried out, plans are made and members participate, among others, for recreational entertainment.

The next approach that definitions of virtual communities mention is the *relationship* dimension. These definitions put an emphasis on the communication, interaction, and relationship between participants and on membership roles within the community.

Virtual communities in the 'relationship' approach are characterized as social relationships through repeated contacts (Fernback – Thompson, 1995 in. Koh – Kim, 2004) that enable and encourage communication between members (Szmigin et al., 2005) and foster (even continued) interactions among members within the community (see e.g. Koh – Kim, 2004; Kozinets, 1999). As a result, generally week relationships / connections are formed among members (Chang – Chuang, 2011) – which is a characteristic trait of traditional communities (Koh et al., 2007). Communications within virtual communities can be characterized as asynchronous, interactive, and cost-effective (Miller et al., 2009), although many of these interactions are "fleeting and ostensibly functional" (Kozinets, 1999: 253).

The last dimension that characterizes virtual communities is that of the *social-technological approach* that combines aspects of the relationship and technological approaches. This complex approach has only seldom appeared in the related literature so far, most works maintain a clear separation between the two aspects. The use of a complex approach, however, is supported by rapid technological change on one hand, and the consequences thereof on the other, namely that myriad types of virtual community are being established.

According to this approach, virtual communities can be characterized as groups of individuals or business partners (Porter, 2004) who are engaged in and regularly resort to computer-mediated community interactions (Miller et al., 2009; (Ridings et al., 2002; Ridings et al., 2006) by primarily interacting with each other using online information and communication technologies (see e.g. Blanchard – Markus, 2004; Preece – Maloney-Krichmar, 2005) that can be both synchronous or asynchronous (Lee et al., 2003). Membership is driven by norms and rules (Preece – Maloney-Krichmar, 2005), and a sense of identity, belonging, and interconnection is developed (Blanchard – Markus, 2004; Blanchard, 2008) into forming personal relationships (Rheingold, 1993 in. Chan – Li, 2010). The sense of togetherness is a key dimension, as it includes the emotions of belonging and "we-ness" (McKenna – Green, 2002). The objective of virtual communities according to this approach is to establish a specific body of knowledge that enables members to carry out community functions, utilize the knowledge, and collectively build upon it (Lee et al., 2003).

Table 1 gives an overview of the diversity of the definitions of virtual communities along the above dimensions.

Table 1. Keywords of the definition of virtual community

Core dimensions	Keywords	Authors
technology	computer-mediated environment, integration of content and communication, user-generated content	Hagel – Armstrong, 1997
technology	new and varied ways to communicate and influence both through their PC and their mobile phone	Stáhlbröst – Bergvall-Káreborn, 2011
network / system	interpersonal communications, network of personal connections	Chu – Chan, 2009; Wang – Chen, 2012; Wellman et al., 1996
network / system	social phenomenon, social network of people with common interests	Toral et al., 2009
network / system	self-sustaining system, commitment, relationship	Rheingold, 1993; Schuler, 1996 in. Blanchard, 2008
knowledge / information exchange	knowledge community, shared interest or purpose, interaction for the sharing of information or knowledge; goal: learning or problem solving	Koh – Kim, 2004
knowledge / information exchange	sharing of information and knowledge, commitment to community interaction	Chiu et al., 2006, Chen et al., 2011, de Valck, 2009
social exchange	shared enthusiasm, knowledge, activities	Kozinets, 1999
social exchange	exchange of feelings, conversations, emotional support, exchange of knowledge, creation of plans, brainstorming, gossip, finding/losing friends, games	Rheingold, 1991 in Bagozzi – Dholakia, 2002
social exchange	attachment, information and community support	Wellman et al., 1996
social exchange	open exchange of information and support	Jones, 1997 in. Blanchard, 2008
social exchange	democratic and voluntary generation of information, consumption, problem-solving	Lampel – Bhalla, 2007
social exchange	common interests, traditions, language, rituals, sharing of norms of interaction	Foster et al., 2010
social exchange	understanding of values and beliefs adopted by the group, commitment, achieving individual and common goals	Dholakia et al., 2004
relationship	e-WOM networks with multi-directional dyads	Bristor, 1990 in. de Valck et al., 2009
relationship	social connections, repeated contact, shared interests/goals, interaction	Koh – Kim, 2004
relationship	mediated social spaces	Bagozzi – Dholakia, 2002
relationship	low-cost interaction; asynchronous, interactive communication	Miller et al., 2009
relationship	continuous interaction, shared enthusiasm or specific consumption activity or special knowledge	Kozinets, 1999
relationship	social network, common goal / interest / activities, interaction	Chiu et al., 2006
relationship	discussion of various topics (hobbies, emotions, experience, connections)	Ciborra – Patriotta, 1998 in. Chen et al., 2011
relationship	community interaction, social bonding, common venue	Kozinets, 1999
social technology	online information and communication technologies, interaction; identity, sense of community: feelings of belonging and attachment	Blanchard, 2008; Blanchard – Markus, 2004
social technology	"social aggregations that emerge from the Internet when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace"	Rheingold, 1993: 5 in. Chan – Li, 2010: 1034
social technology	information technology supported by the virtual space, organized around interaction and communication, generation of specific knowledge, execution of joint functions learning, contribution, collectivity	Lee et al., 2003
social technology	online personal contacts; common interest, norms, regular communications, content created by members	Ridings et al., 2006
social technology	members' influence on each other, common task / goal, sense of belonging: membership, "we-ness"	McKenna – Green (2002)
social technology	"'aggregation of individuals or business partners who interact around a shared interest, where the interaction is at least partially supported and/or mediated by technology and guided by some protocols or norms"	Porter, 2004

Source: own elaboration

Based on the above definitions one can summarize the concept of virtual community as follows – a summary definition that will be used in the following parts of the dissertation:

Virtual communities are groups of individuals and business partners with shared interest or goals, with existing links to other members and to the group as a whole, who understand and abide the norms, values, beliefs, rituals, and language formulated by the community, who primarily interact with each other in a virtual space using online information and communication technologies.

2.2. Types and characteristics of virtual communities

The growing number, and variety of virtual communities (e.g. auction sites, social networking services, blogs, virtual gaming communities, content sharing sites [Miller et al., 2009; Nov et al., 2010; Stáhlbröst – Bergvall-Káreborn, 2011]) makes it difficult to give a long-standing definition and typology thereof.

The literature therefore often approaches the typology of virtual communities along the characteristics primordial to their respective research projects (Porter, 2004). According to Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) a common feature of the otherwise wide-ranging virtual communities is that they are based on primarily text-based digital interactions which therefore act as a primary force in shaping the community's development, dimensions, preservation. Virtual communities can equally be characterized by and along the following aspects (Porter, 2004):
   (1) purpose: content of interaction;
   (2) platform: interaction through synchronous/asynchronous/hybrid design;
   (3) interaction structure of members (pattern of interactions: small group, network, virtual community spaces). (Small groups are defined by Dholakia et al. [2004] by close relations between members, high group interaction, and a focus on maintaining the special relations within the group. Network-based communities [Dholakia et al., 2004] are based on functional goals such as information distribution, problem-solving; they are shorter-lasting and members are primarily driven by utilitarian needs. Such virtual community spaces are relatively transparent and open, where all groups of individuals are free to participate in and contribute to the interactions.)

Beyond the above-presented attributes, the following set of criteria can be identified in the literature to classify virtual communities (Lee et al., 2003) (it is worth noting,

however, that neither classification criterion can be referred to as universal, i.e. pertaining to all cases of virtual communities):

(1) origin: Koh et al. (2007) distinguish between virtual communities originating from online or offline interactions;

(2) type of establishment: Porter (2004) distinguishes between member- (or individual-)initiated and organization-sponsored communities;

(3) level of interactivity offered by the used communication technology: one can distinguish between synchronous, asynchronous, or hybrid designs of virtual communities (Blanchard, 2008; Porter, 2004);

(4) level of cooperation (Bagozzi – Dholakia, 2002): fully cooperative (individual action appears as contributory togroup action); partially cooperative (coordination only covers a portion of the group action); minimally cooperative (members have the same goal but act individually);

(5) community structure (Kozinets, 1999): one can distinguish between communities with either weak or strong social ties;

(6) focus (Armstrong – Hagel, 1995; Kozinets, 1999): communities based on information exchange, or social interaction;

(7) relationship orientation (Porter, 2004): social, professional, commercial, nonprofit or government organizations

(8) community organization (Dholakia et al., 2004): network-based (for a definition, see member interaction structures – e.g. mailing lists) and small-group-based (for a definition, see member interaction structures – e.g. MSN, or real-time chat rooms)

Even though there exists no single, widely supported typology of virtual communities, Markus (2002) and Porter (2004) offer the most exhaustive and functional list of various virtual communities, along their general purpose: networking; entertainment; professional; educational; commercial – B2B; commercial – B2C; nonprofit; government. Naturally, a number of communities are at transition points between various types.

Networking communities are primarily founded online by members with preexisting closer relationships and are characterized by a tighter community structure, and cooperation. The purpose of the community is not only to maintain interactions but also to exchange information on topics of interest to the community. Because of the development of closer relations, a real sense of community can develop and membership, altogether, can be characterized by higher levels of interaction. An example of a networking community can be a Facebook group founded by a user bringing together enthusiasts of a given hobby.

Entertainment communities are equally primarily founded by members. The main goal and connecting element here is the aim of offering experiences to each other. Tighter community structures are more typical of their organization and they can be characterized by higher-level, synchronous interactions. One also must note, however, that as the community grows, community structure and the level of cooperation might loosen up. As an example, one can bring up communities where members share funny videos with each other.

Professional networks and educational communities are primarily founded for professional purposes, leading to the flow of information becoming a dominant element of their operation. As a consequence, they can be characterized by a volatile community structure and variable cooperation levels. For instance, there may exist a community regrouping students/professionals of a special area, whereby close relationship and a strong degree of cooperation can develop. There might also occur cases where a community is founded around a broader topic, leading to a larger number of participants and lower levels of connection between members. One illustrative example is the creation of virtual communities related to (e.g. university) courses where members can share materials related to that course, or a community of researchers of a special area where they can share and discuss results and issues related to the field.

Even though the above-mentioned communities are most often founded by individuals, organizations can appear within them as members, and can also provide connections between member-initiated communities and their own (organization-sponsored) community, thereby forging relationships with their consumers.

Nonprofit and government organization-sponsored communities are special types of organization-sponsored virtual communities. These serve a double purpose: first, to support the interaction between the founding institution and community members and second, to provide a transmission channel to the information related to the organization. As these communities can be quite diverse, they can be characterized by a varied structure and closeness of relationships as well as by differing levels of coordination. The organization at the origin of such a community must, however, aim at achieving higher levels of engagement between the organization and members. One example of such communities can be the official Facebook pages of government organizations.

The remaining part of organization-sponsored communities are primarily related to some kind of commercial activity, be that directed towards B2B or B2C relations. These communities equally serve a double purpose, as it is equally important to offer a direct communication channel about the organization and its activities, and also to

foster a relationship and communicate with more engaged consumers, members of such virtual communities.

Even though the nature and depth of interactions and cooperation within these communities can be also varied, one can state that these virtual communities act as direct communication channels between the organization and its partners (be they individuals or other organizations), therefore it is once again important to deepen the relationships there.

The most important characteristics of virtual communities are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of virtual community

Types of virtual community	relation-ship building	entertain-ment	expert network	learning	B2B commu-nity	B2C commu-nity	non-profit	govern-ment
establishment (member-initiated – organization-sponsored)	member	member	member	member	organi-zation	organi-zation	organi-zation	organi-zation
origin (online-offline)	rather online	rather online	both	both	both	both	rather offline	rather offline
organization of community (network-based – small-group-based)	small-group	small-group	network	both	network	network	network	network
social structure (loose - tight)	tight	tight	variable	variable	loose	variable	variable	loose
	both	interaction	information	information	information	both	both	information
group focus (information exchange - social interaction)	fully or partially	fully or partially	variable	variable	variable	variable	variable	rather minimally
extent of cooperation	rather high	high	variable	variable	rather low	variable	variable	rather low
interactivity level of used technology	hybrid	rather synchro-nous	rather asynchro-nous	rather asynchro-nous	rather asynchro-nous	hybrid	rather asynchro-nous	rather asynchro-nous

Source: own elaboration

A variety of virtual communities are already present in the online sphere, and technological advances bring about an increasing number of hybrid types of virtual communities, with ever varying characteristics. Thus, a deep level of understanding of a given community is essential in being able to successfully operate it. Thus way organizations are provided an opportunity to either successfully operate their own communities, or, in some way, to connect to other, member-initiated communities.

2.3. An element of successful social management: roles within virtual communities

It was shown before that founding and managing virtual communities could represent a competitive advantage for organizations (Jalilvand et al., 2011). They, however, must not focus on controlling the flow of information about them. Instead, they should focus on the appropriate use of this body of information to build solid and long-lasting relationships (Kozinets, 1999): community building thus needs to be perceived as a creative activity and participating members as partners.

Not every community, however, is able to survive and operate successfully. The successful creation, survival, and development of a community is a factor of a number of criteria, among which the active participation (Welbourne et al., 2013) and proactive behavior (Bock et al., 2005, Chiu et al., 2006; Wasko – Faraj, 2005) of members are the most primordial.

Member activation thus appears as a main task of active community management. Member activation is also of special importance as member interactivity itself can be considered as a form of consumer engagement towards the given (brand) community (Seraj, 2012). A distinction should be made, however, between the notion of engagement in a traditional and in the online context. In an offline context, consumer engagement can be defined as "the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with the organization's offerings and activities" (Vivek et al., 2012: 127). In an online context, engagement is "the cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand" (Mollen – Wilson, 2010: 5). Moreover, engagement, as an active contribution, is susceptible to communicate brand value (Mollen-Wilson, 2010). A main focus of organizations in the online sphere should be on reaching a state of consumer engagement. However, effective community management requires an in-depth knowledge of its members as it not only affects the flow of information, but also individual behavior.

Member activity is stimulated by the following factors (Koh et al., 2007; Preece, 2002; Wang – Chen, 2012; William - Cothrel, 2000):

- Used technology: The more technology supports member interaction (e.g. through ease of use, data transmission capacity), the higher the observed activity.
- Rules: The more members feel close to community norms and rituals, the more they are able to identify with the community and thus show higher levels of engagement.
- Common tasks and (clear) vision: The more pronounced the common elements are among interactions, the greater community integration and cooperation are.

- Clearly defined member roles: The more transparent community structure is, the easier it is for a member to find their own place and other members like them within the community.

- Opinion leaders and their respective levels of enthusiasm: The more a community leader can be considered a person of reference, the more influence they have over other members, and the more active they are, the higher a "follower's" activity can be.

- Community relations management, variety of purposes, needs, and interests of members: The more diverse the members of a community, the more varied a member's relationship structure within the group and the more versatile the pool of information they can gather through participation.

- Existence of a strategy to ensure member development which determines how much and what kind of useful contents members can have access to through the community: the higher the quality and quantity of reliable information available, the higher the activity of members.

- Wholesomeness: The more enjoyable community participation is for a member, the more active they are in the life of the community.

- Motivations: The more an individual is motivated for either community (e.g. altruism) or individual (e.g. exhibitionism) reasons, the more active their participation. If a given community actively supports a driving motivation,

In order for community management to be successful, an in-depth knowledge of **group structure** and thereby that of communication systems within the group is a prerequisite towards mapping decisive stimulant factors within the community. Indeed, the existing, permanent group structure can effectively contribute to predict most of the daily interactions taking place within the group. More importantly, the emergence of a static group structure entails the establishment of communication channels within the group (Forgács, 2002).

In a communication point of view, it can be said that information is distributed unequally within the group (which effect the internet as a medium can either reduce, or amplify). Those members who are "closer to each other" (proximity, in the online sphere, does not refer to spatial, or temporal distance, rather to emotional, philosophical, or cultural distance) communicate with each other more easily, and frequently.

The knowledge of group structure, i.e. the distribution of roles within the group, therefore, contributes to the organization be able to effectively manage the community and to identify members who will be able to magnify the dissemination of organization-related (product, service, brand, company) information.

Consumer roles can vary among communities, the intelligence gathered on consumer behavior within one group, therefore, is hardly generalizable to other communities (Rothaermel – Sugiyama, 2001).

Two recurring types of members of virtual communities are identified in the literature: posters and lurkers, i.e. "silent members" (de Valck et al., 2009; Kozinets 1999; Marrett – Joshi, 2009; Ridings et al., 2006). Posters are individuals who (more or less often) express their experiences, while lurkers hardly ever or seldom express themselves, and during their time in their frequently-visited group, settle for reading contents produced by others. Lurkers represent a determining majority of members of virtual communities (Marrett – Joshi, 2009; Ridings et al., 2006). They can, however, be considered as useful members of the community, all the more that all members actively participating in content creation could easily and quickly lead to information saturation (Ridings et al., 2006).

Roles within virtual communities can be further studied along various dimensions.

Using members' level of interest (in consumption or in the group's activity) and the strength of social ties to the community as differentiating variables, Kozinets (1999) distinguishes between tourists, minglers, devotees, and insiders. Tourists lack strong social ties to the group and their interest to the activity of the group is uncertain. Minglers maintain strong social ties with other members, but their interest to the activity of the group is equally uncertain. Devotees' social ties to the group are limited, but they maintain a strong enthusiasm for the group's activity. As for insiders, they have strong social ties to the group and also highly involved in the group's activity.

Kim (2000) describes group dynamics according to the duration of membership and distinguishes between visitors, novices, regulars, leaders, and elders.

According to the role/activity of members, Bernoff and Li (2008) distinguish between creators (those who write/post information), critics (those who regularly comment, rate, and review), collectors (those who regularly share and aggregate information), joiners (those who only maintain their group membership), and spectators (those who read, watch, and listen but take no further action).

De Valck et al. (2009) identify six member types based on members' communication participation frequency and information usage patterns (cf. the categorization by Bernoff and Li [2008]). (1) Core members are the most frequent and active visitors and most active contributors of a virtual community, by retrieving, supplying, and discussing information. (2) Conversationalists can be characterized by an active supply, and discussion of information and a relatively high level of engagement through short, but frequent contributions. (3) Informationalists visit the group less often and mainly retrieve and supply information, rather than discuss it. (4) Hobbyists are characterized by frequent visits and a focus on maintaining and updating their own personal information. (5) Functionalists are interested in retrieving information, rather

than engaging in community practices. Finally, (6) opportunists are the community's least frequent and shortest-lasting visitors, and are characterized by marginal, directed information consumption.

Shao's (2009) typology of users takes into account their individual goals (uses and gratifications). Along these, he identifies consumption for information and for entertainment, participation for social interaction and for community development, and production for self-expression and for self-actualization.

Horváth et al. (2010) take into account the relevance of users' contribution, and differentiate between exhibitionists (who provide little added value to others), enquirers (who contribute to the discussion, although at a low level of relevance), affected (who relate more to the topic of discussion, complain about a product or service, raise issues about them, or even give advice to others based on their subjective experience), and experts (who provide comprehensive and fully relevant remarks, and address others' questions).

Dörnyei and Mitev (2010) characterize members of virtual communities along their personality traits, and distinguish between volunteer experts (who want to act like opinion leaders), genuine experts (who are considered by other members of the group as such), advertisers, enquirers (who ask the community's help to solve a particular problem), and dabblers (who provide little relevant new content, and rather make comments on previous topics).

Seraj (2012) combines the above typologies and examines the contribution of various roles to the community. He differentiates between the following roles producing online community value: Intellectual value is provided by seekers (who are led by their curiosity), educators (who are the chief participants of the process of co-creation of value and whose main objective is to share their knowledge with the community), challengers (who question the information provided and who hold opposing views). Cultural value is provided by challengers, governors (who ensure the quality of content and adopt a constructive position), and appraisers (who recognize and thereby encourage the contributions of others). Social value is provided by educators, players (who support the community with entertainment), innovators (who suggest new perspectives).

According to the above, one can contend that there exists no clearly and generally applicable typology of virtual community roles. Each community needs to be examined separately and members to be characterized along the most relevant dimensions of the given community.

In conclusion, one can state that all individuals who have already developed some kind of ties with each other in the digital sphere along their shared interests, activities, or goals, whose primary aim is to exchange resources, and develop relationships form a virtual community.

Building on this approach, virtual communities can be perceived as social aggregations that appear on the internet when enough people carry on public discussions long enough and, through that, form personal relationships (Rheingold, 1993 in. Seraj, 2012), thereby adding an emotional dimension to the interaction and personal gratifications therefrom.

Virtual communities can equally be thought of as informal networks, composed of information providers and information seekers who, over time, share group-related motivations and develop a sense of social identity that connects them (Bergami – Bagozzi, 2000). These social networks, however, not only influence the sense of belonging to a group, but also affect the flow of information between consumers (Steyer et al., 2006).

Virtual communities are varied in structure, characteristics, and member roles. In order for organizations to successfully create and manage their own virtual communities, they need to investigate beforehand the working mechanisms of the phenomenon of virtual communities.

The importance of virtual communities in marketing is indicated by the establishment of the approach of tribal marketing (Cova – Cova, 2002) which is primarily focused on consumer-to-customer relationships and interactive communications. In this approach, the organization appears as an enabler of this relationship, and the according role of the organization is not only to promote the communication between the organization and the consumer, but rather between consumers. The relationship is aimed at founding a tribe (community). In order to do so, the organization resorts to a variety of rituals with operating principles similar to offline communities. Establishing emotional loyalty among tribe members is another primary goal of an organization's tribal marketing activity, in the aim of gaining competitive advantage.

While the main topic of the present dissertation is e-WOM, the pool of all involved parties can be wildly interpreted as a virtual community (Scarpi, 2010). Participants are indeed linked together through a common point of interest, that can culminate, in turn, as a social experience, allowing for the formation of a sense community. Moreover, involved users typically get into contact with each other using only online communication tools, where their primary objective is to share and exchange experiences and information. As a community, weak and strong relationships can alternately appear between participants, and the level of cooperation might also be varying. The process of e-WOM might equally entail certain social conventions and a sense of membership, as participating users are linked by a focal product or service.

3. Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)

As seen beforehand, technological change induced a massive change in communication habits and channels. In this new context e-WOM occupies an important role, as consumers, in an ever growing advertising clutter, are increasingly skeptical of corporate marketing messages and are therefore turning towards more independent sources of information (Eszes, 2010).

3.1. The notion of WOM

To study the notion of e-WOM is it imperative to examine the definitions of traditional WOM, as these have served as a basis for the development of the electronic counterpart. Hence the claim of the present dissertation that e-WOM is in no way a new phenomenon, its specificity lies in the increased visibility, searchability and traceability of online communications, as opposed to traditional, face-to-face communications.

Even though WOM is one of the most ancient marketing communication tools, it has only been at the focus of studies on an academic level for about 50 years. The first, best-known definition was coined by Arndt (1967) who not only studied the concept of WOM but also confirmed Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) assumptions on its impact: positive shopping experience was first demonstrated to positively affect sales. Arndt (1967) characterizes WOM as a person-to-person communication about a product, brand, or service, where participants are perceived as independent from the company and whose goal is to reduce the perceived risk.

The extension of Arndt's (1967) definition can be referred to as the next phase of the conceptual development of WOM, with the basic descriptive characteristics remaining unchanged: the concept can be perceived as **informal communication** between two consumers and focusing on information related to the possession, use, attributes, or sales force of a product (Westbrook, 1987; Litvin et al., 2008). Brown and Reingen (1987) reinforce the view of WOM as informal communication by addressing the relational aspects of the phenomenon and establishing that the exchange of information should happen between **individuals with ties to each other**. Participants in this communication process assume a special role, as receivers of a piece of information, in turn, become senders, or "diffusers", ensuring the constant flow of information between consumers (East - Hammond, 2005).

WOM can be considered as a social phenomenon, as a flow of information between two or more individuals where comments, thoughts, and ideas are exchanged (Bone, 1992). Definitions equally include the criterion along which no participant in the

process should be a representative of the company (Bone, 1992; Harrison – Walker, 2001; Litvin et al., 2008). As such, WOM cannot be considered as a form of paid advertising, even though many still make the mistake (Armelini – Villanueva, 2010). As a social phenomenon, WOM is an interactive, face-to-face communication that includes the oral or spontaneous (unscripted) written transmission of information between a sender and a receiver (Harrison – Walker, 2001; Litvin et al., 2008).

The phenomenon thus can be studied in terms of interaction between participants. This dimension will be particularly important in the study of WOM on digital channels, considering the significant increase of the possibilities of interaction, the pool of participants, as well as the simultaneity of multiple interactions. Along these dimensions, WOM can be considered as a social interaction "taken place by an individual not actively engaged in selling the product or service that impacts other's expected utility for that product or service" (Godes et al., 2005: 416-7).

The above review of the dynamics of the concept of WOM in the past 50 years (see also Table 3) demonstrates the fact that the definitions have kept up the pace of the changing environment.

Table 3. Main characteristics of offline WOM according to the literature

Authors	Evolution of the definition of WOM
Arndt (1967)	person-to-person communication about a product, brand, or service, where participants are perceived as independent from the company and whose goal is to reduce the perceived risk
Westbrook (1987)	"informal communication directed at other consumer about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers"
Brown – Reingen (1987)	information exchange among consumers in strong-tie relations with each other
Bone (1992)	group phenomenon – exchange of comments, thoughts, and ideas among two or more individuals in which none of the individuals represent a marketing source
Stern (1994)	interactive and spontaneous comment
East – Hammond (2005)	participants in this communication process assume a special role, as receivers of a piece of information, in turn, become senders, or "diffusers", ensuring the constant flow of information between consumers
Godes et al. (2005) Armelini – Villanueva (2010)	an action taken by an individual not actively engaged in selling the product or service and that impacts others' expected utility for that product or service

Source: own elaboration

3.2. The notion of e-WOM

Along with the digital revolution came a new conceptual direction (Litvin et al., 2008): that of the introduction of WOM communications to the new digital platforms, enabling an "access" to a considerable amount of users. The object of this exchange of information can be a product, a brand, a service, or an organization, with, however,

this latter not being directly involved in the process (Harrison – Walker, 2001; Litvin et al., 2008). The communication often takes place between individual having no or minimal ties to each other (Dellarocas, 2003; Goldsmith – Horowitz, 2006, Sen – Lerman, 2007).

The most used concept of e-WOM – which will henceforth be adopted in the present dissertation – is an extended form of the above dimensions provided by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004: 39) who refer to e-WOM as "**any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet**".

As shown beforehand, both traditional and electronic WOM can be considered one type of social influence. In this perspective, e-WOM can be considered a form of social communication in the process of which, similarly to the traditional model of communication, the sender of a message transmits various (mostly verbal) stimuli for the purpose of altering other individuals' behavior (Cheung – Thadani, 2012). The four major elements of social communication are: (1) the communicator (source), (2) the stimulus (content), (3) the receiver (audience), and (4) the response (main effect). It is important to note that the organization, as well as any individual can be a participant in the process. Moreover, a participant can be both a source and receiver of various pieces of information and fill multiple roles simultaneously.

In summary, e-WOM can be considered as an extension of interpersonal communication to the virtual space where positive and negative information can be both present (Csordás et al., 2013), and where the roles of information seeker and sharer can appear simultaneously.

The main dimensions of the concept of e-WOM are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Main characteristics of e-WOM according to the literature

Authors	Main characteristics of e-WOM
Bergami – Bagozzi (2000)	the group of participants in e-WOM can be considered as an informal network, sources and seekers of information are connected through a feeling of social identity
Harrison – Walker (2001); Hennig-Thurau et al., (2004); Litvin et al., 2008	the subject of the communication can be a product, a brand, a service, or an organization
Dellarocas (2003); Goldssmith – Horowitz (2006), Sen – Lerman (2007)	process often occurring between individuals who are in minimal or no actual contact with each other
De Bruyn – Lillian (2008)	C2C communication about a product or service that helps the adaptation of the product or service
Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004: 39)	"any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet"
Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); Litvin et al. (2008)	the appearance of WOM on digital platforms

Authors	Main characteristics of e-WOM
Litvin et al. (2008)	"all informal communications directed at consumer through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers."
Cheung – Thadani (2012: 463)	a new form of social communication "by which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (usually verbal symbols) to modify the behavior of other individuals"
Cheung – Thadani (2012)	information-seeking customers (receivers) and information-sharing customers (communicators) are present in the process simultaneously; e-WOM can be considered a form of social communication (similarly to traditional WOM)
Yap et al. (2013)	"… it is more than words; it really is how you say it"
Robson et al. (2013)	"any statement – positive, negative or neutral – made by potential, current or former stakeholders about a product, service, company or person, which is made available to a multitude of people, organisations or institutions, via a digitally networked platform"
Csordás et al. (2013)	an extension of traditional interpersonal communication

Source: own elaboration

Based on the above, one can consider e-WOM as a form of social influence, and communication that takes place between consumers. During its process, the sender (source) transmits usually verbal stimuli (e-WOM message, or simply: e-WOM) towards the audience. The stimuli can be any positive, or negative statement about a product, service, brand, organization, or individual. These stimuli are available on the internet to both consumers and organizations, and both are enabled to a response.

Moreover, e-WOM can also be communication tool where a message is transmitted voluntarily by a narrow primary target group, direct receiver of a message, to a much wider secondary target group. As a corporate communication tool, e-WOM enables organizations to participate directly in the information dissemination and influence process and consumers to manifest themselves and use it as an interactive communication channel, thereby to strengthen their power position.

3.3. Conceptual confusion surrounding the notion of e-WOM

The notion of WOM is often mistaken with the activity of word-of-mouth marketing and/or advertising (WOMM); although the latter builds upon the former, WOM in many ways is to be contrasted with the notion of advertising (Table 5). Traditional advertising, by definition, is the paid-for placement of announcements and persuasive messages on channels operated by third parties (i.e. mass media) (Kotler – Keller, 2006; Sándor – Horváth, 2008). E-WOM, in contrast, e-WOM is an information or channel originated by consumers essentially independent from organizations (Jalilvand et al., 2011), where, though, the sender is often unknown.

Traditional advertising involves a transmission of corporate through mass media where they effectively have total control in the choosing of the medium, the message to be transmitted, and the parameters of transmission (frequency, dynamics). In contrast, the

organization has negligible influence over e-WOM messages and their dynamics. Therefore, in a marketing communications perspective, e-WOM can be classified as earned media (Corcoran, 2009).

In traditional advertising, communication between the sender and the receiver can be characterized as a traditional, mass media-specific one-to-many relationship, while in the case of e-WOM all three major types of communication relationships (one-to-many, one-to-one, and many-to-many) can occur, even simultaneously.

Even though, in terms of outcomes, both e-WOM and traditional advertising contribute to consumers' obtaining of information about a product, or service, consumers have many tools at their disposal to evaluate the messages of traditional advertising (e.g. information transmitted; verbal and non-verbal communication of the sender etc.). In case of e-WOM evaluation is harder, and consumers ought to consider more factors beyond information quality in their evaluation of a message, such as the total amount of information available, the perceived experience of the sender, the perceived credibility of the sender, etc. (see e.g. Cheung – Thadani, 2012).

In terms of the impact, consumers were shown to be increasingly dismissive of advertising, while receptive to and less annoyed by e-WOM as they perceive it as a useful source of information (Okazaki, 2009). At the same time, both channels can effectively affect (potential) customers and can thus influence, among others, brand awareness, brand attitude, but also brand equity.

However, as e-WOM about a product or service can equally contain negative elements, the positive effects only apply in the case of positive e-WOM. While both traditional advertising and e-WOM can affect sales, the effect of traditional advertising can be characterized as more short-term, while the (positive and negative) effects of e-WOM on sales can be both short- and long-term.

Standard and accurate metrics of the effects of traditional advertising have long existed, while in the case of e-WOM, being a more indirect marketing communication tool, the measurement options are more limited.

A summary comparison of traditional advertising and e-WOM is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. A comparison between e-WOM and traditional advertising

	advertising	e-WOM
type of communication	mostly one-to-many	all three possibilities (one-to-many; one-to-one; many-to-many)
type of communication	varied	varied
identity of source/sender	identifiable	varied
assessment of information received	can be based on several factors	difficult
credibility	varied perceived credibility, generally lower than that of e-WOM	higher perceived credibility
consumer reaction	often perceived as intrusive and rejected (advertising avoidance)	non-intrusive, or minimal intrusiveness
reach	high (planned)	limited (not controlled)
effect on brand awareness	high (planned)	limited (not controlled)
effect on brand equity	increases brand value by increasing brand awareness, shaping consumers' brand attitudes, and fostering consumers' intentions to try the product	positive WOM enhances brand equity negative WOM might reduce brand credibility
effect on sales	short-term increase	short- or long-term increase or decrease
duration of effect	both short- and long-term	mainly long-term
measurability	standard measurement tools	limited
control	(almost) full control over message, medium, and frequency	insignificant, but! possibility to influence
cost	relatively high	varied

Source: own elaboration based on Armellini – Villanueva (2010)

Another recurrent conceptual confusion surrounding the concept of e-WOM is viral marketing, often improperly used as a synonym for e-WOM (see e.g. Hsieh et al., 2012). The relationship between the two concepts can be described as follows: viral marketing is a (commercial) message embedded in media contents found on the internet whose main goal is to generate buzz and thereby transmission by users through e-WOM (Csordás – Szabó, 2013). E-WOM, in this perspective, can be considered both a channel and tool of transmission. It appears in the definition and process of viral marketing in the form of the latter, making the two concepts only related, but not equivalent (Vilpponen et al., 2006).

Another concept often confused with e-WOM is that of user-generated content (UGC). This latter can be any form of content (e.g. text, image, sound, or video) found on the internet that was created by users (Nyirő et al., 2012). Although the two concepts are closely related, the definition of UGC is a lot wider (Smith et al., 2012).

3.4. Differences between online and offline WOM

Even though traditional and electronic WOM have similar effect mechanisms (Bickart – Schindler, 2001), the two channels, and tools have different characteristics mostly caused by the fundamental differences between the settings where they appear (spoken word vs. internet). Only a few publications offer a direct comparison between the two tools/channels, even though this area could contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the practice of WOM-management (Godes – Mayzlin, 2004).

The communication interface of e-WOM (internet) allows for a (quasi) instantaneous flow of information(Chen et al., 2011) and feedback (Mitev – Markos-Kujbus, 2013) where participants can assume multiple roles simultaneously (Chu – Kim, 2011). Quick reaction times also engender a high speed of propagation, allowing for an asynchronous exchange of information taking place in a variety of ways (i.e. each participant is not required to be present, they can read, comment or modify the information later) (Cheung – Thadani, 2012). Moreover the search and diffusion costs of information are lower in the digital environment (Gupta – Harris, 2010).

The digital environment also allows for a one-to-one communication setting (even though, as mentioned beforehand, all varieties of communication relationships are achievable) which can result in the offering of individualized information to consumers (Litvin et al., 2008).

E-WOM can be said to have a broader influence (even from the standpoint of organizations) (Vilpponen et al., 2006) as informal digital channels offer a large variety of platforms for a large number of actors to be connected (Van Alstyne – Brynjolfsson, 2005) and even to form virtual relationships and to gather into virtual communities (Sun et al., 2006).

Because of its predominantly written form, e-WOM can be said to be more durable and accessible (Martin – Lueg, 2011): texts on the internet are (theoretically) archived and are therefore accessible and searchable to any user indefinitely (or, at least, for months or years back). Because of its format, quantity, and persistence, e-WOM is more observable and thereby, measurable (Cheung – Thadani, 2012).

The greater network of participants equally makes the potential target group considerably larger (Cheung et al., 2009), and information can be directed to multiple individuals simultaneously, without time or space constraints (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

The free and rapid flow of information are equally responsible for the greatest disadvantage of e-WOM in a corporate perspective, namely the rather limited control over the process (Litvin et al., 2008).

The strength of the tie between sender and receiver can equally be varied (Lee – Youn, 2009). The reason behind this is the absence of the familiarity of face-to-face communication and a larger propensity to come into contact with people with whom the individual has no social ties (Gupta – Harris, 2010). As such, behind the curtain of anonymity, senders often lack a sense of responsibility when creating a piece of e-WOM (Lee – Youn, 2009; Schindler – Bickart, 2012).

And, because of the features of the digital environment and the absence of face-to-face communication participants' (receivers') ability to judge the message and its sender along criteria such as credibility, physical appearance, or prestige are hindered (Cheung – Thadani, 2012). Therefore, there is a risk that companies will be able to disseminate messages disguised as consumers (Sen – Lerman, 2007).

Recommendations or reviews (i.e. the contents of e-WOM) are also often unsolicited. As participants do not actively look for information in some cases (De Bruyn – Lilien, 2008; Jalilvand et al., 2011), they then do not always attach a lot of attention to the received information (Vilpponen et al., 2006). Moreover, information clutter equally forces users to sort between the information available and to not read all (even relevant) reviews (Sen - Lerman, 2007).

The differences between traditional and electronic WOM are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. A comparison of offline and online WOM

	offline WOM	e-WOM
type of communication	primarily one-to-one	all three types possible
relationship between sender and receiver	generally tight	varied
consumer reaction	immediately identifiable	immediate and/or delayed
target audience	narrow, limited	wider, broad
number of sources/participants	limited	(theoretically) unlimited
goal of participants	targeted information search	it is common that they do not seek information
anonymity among participants	identity of participants is known	varied
interactivity	synchronous	asynchronous
accessibility of information	limited/varied	durable, accessible, searchable
speed of information diffusion	varied	quick (even instantaneous)
assessment of information received	based on information factors (e.g. trust in the sender)	difficult
level of control	moderate	limited
size and type of the operating environment	small, private	broad, various types
limitations	spatial and temporal	(theoretically) none
measurability	limited	more measurable

Source: own elaboration based on Mitev – Markos-Kujbus (2013)

3.5. Types of e-WOM

WOM can be classified along criteria such as origin, contents, and form.

Source can be a differentiating criterion for both traditional and electronic WOM. According to its source, one can differentiate between (1) organic, (2) amplified, and (3) exogenous WOM (Armelini – Villanueva, 2010).

(1) Organic WOM takes place when an individual voluntarily (i.e. naturally, without external pressure) recommends a product, brand, service, organization because they are happy with it, and have a desire to share this experience. This can be considered WOM's most "natural" form, when the consumer shares their actual experience and satisfaction with others for various reasons. One example can be a user satisfied with their new smartphone and their desire and action to share this feeling with their friends on a personal social networking site, such as Facebook.

(2) Amplified WOM occurs when consumers give positive feedback as a result of an external impulse (e.g. encouraged in some way by a company). A typical example is when a restaurant encourages its guests, e.g. by dint of offering various discounts, to check in using various social media applications thereby signaling that they consumer at the given establishment.

(3) Exogenous WOM is a special type of WOM and is originated by the organization. Firms can generate exogenous WOM "by identifying key influentials and creating programs that encourage them to talk about the focal brand" but also by actively participating in consumer-to-consumer conversations (Armelini – Villanueva, 2010: 35). The above-mentioned influetials can also be referred to as hubs, who possess an outstanding number of direct social connections within a network and thereby operate as high-impact influencers. These actors have a determining role in the flow of information within their respective communities (Holczinger et al., 2013). Hungary's Rézangyal spirit manufacturer's 2013 "TAG" campaign [Hungarian for "member", but also slang for "dude"] is an example to the role of hubs, where the company expressly sought for an individual with an extended offline and online network of relationships to popularize its products. The hub was tasked to organize social events (sponsored by the company) and then to relate these (and other brand-related experiences) on various social media platforms.

Bughin et al. (2010) provide another classification of e-WOM, differentiating between (1) experiential, (2) consequential, and (3) intentional WOM.

(1) Experiential WOM occurs when a consumer relates their consumption experience. A good example of experiential e-WOM is the pool of reviews on commerce communities that can focus not only on a product but also on the seller (e.g. Amazon and its performance in delivering the product), or consumer (protection)

blogs, where negative consumption experiences can be shared among users (e.g. Hungary's leading consumer rights blog, Tékozló Homár [literally: „prodigal lobster"). According to the authors, 50 to 80 % of WOM activity can be related to this form.

(2) Consequential WOM is triggered by an organization's marketing (communications) activity. (This category is similar to Armelini – Villanueva's [2010] "amplified WOM" category.) An example to this type of WOM is when a firm organizes a prize game on its social media page where consumers are not only asked to leave a comment (with e.g. the answer to a question) but also to share the content in order to participate.

(3) Intentional WOM can be triggered by organizations' buzz marketing and/or viral marketing efforts. This form of WOM is less common, as they require an initial investment from the company while the success of execution of such campaigns is often doubtful and their results difficult to measure. Moreover, after a certain time, these campaigns become uncontrollable by the organizations which initiated them. At the same time, one can affirm that a WOM generated by a third party will always have a stronger effect than a firm-initiated WOM message or one backed by an intermediary (Park – Lee, 2009).

Another possibility to refine the categorization of e-WOM messages is by the organicity of a message, i.e. whether it was generated by a genuine consumer or by a consumer "hired" as part of an organization's marketing communication activity, or by an individual involved in the organization's activities. As seen beforehand, e-WOM is considered by users as a trustworthy source of information which is independent from the organization. At the same time organizations have also recognized the importance and effectiveness of e-WOM and, hence, have engaged in an activity of positive e-WOM generation, either by encouraging consumers to provide it for them or by manipulating the messages themselves (or resorting to providers specialized in offering such services). Company employees (along, potentially, with their acquaintances) writing positive e-WOM about the organization is an existing phenomenon. There are also companies who generate fake user profiles in social media just to write positive opinions about the company on various digital platforms. Opinions wrote by consumers on their own behalf can also be referred to as "authentic", those written by companies, third parties (external, mandated actors), or consumers encouraged by the company about the focal company as "positive manipulated", and those about, and against a competitor as "negative manipulated" e-WOM.

If a company chooses to employ manipulated positive opinions as a strategy, it can enjoy several advantages at the beginning. This will likely be less expensive than endeavoring to meet their consumers, and encourage them directly and continually to

share their opinions. Moreover, they will also be able to take advantage of the benefits of the (artificially) higher number of positive e-WOM present in the digital space. On the long run, however, this strategy might also backfire. Even in case of an unsuccessful campaign, the quantity of e-WOM ought to be maintained, thereby leading the company into a cost spiral, and a growing number of platforms ought to be incorporated, further increasing the cost of the campaign. Furthermore, the presence of an unnaturally high proportion of positive online reviews might hinder consumer trust in the authenticity of related reviews thereby hindering brand equity on the long run (Hu et al., 2011). Companies, in this case, need also to assume the risk of consumers noticing the manipulated opinions which might negatively affect their attitude toward the brand which might also spiral toward a multiplication of negative reviews related to the brand (Bambauer-Sachse – Mangold, 2013).

Hence, consumers are equally aware of the possibility to manipulate reviews. While making a distinction between authentic and manipulated reviews is pronouncedly challenging, the literature has endeavored to identify the main features which can help in recognizing manipulated reviews (Banerjee – Chua, 2014; Dellarocas, 2006).

There is no clear characterization concerning the length of authentic online consumer reviews, but it can also occur that these are denser and thus generally shorter. This may be explained by the fact that in the case of manipulated e-WOM, one needs to convince the consumer of an imaginary situation, which would require more detail (Banerjee – Chua, 2014). It can also occur that authentic e-WOM is wordier and thus longer than its manipulated counterpart, because consumers writing them assume that shorter and simpler reviews are considered by other consumers as less credible and less valuable. In terms of the information content of opinions, authentic e-WOM, even though based on actual opinions, cannot be guaranteed to be informative for all users, since everybody looks for different details.

Consumer reviews are scattered over a wide range regarding legibility and readability as these largely depend on their writer's abilities and skills (e.g. communication skills, education, etc.). Given that the primary purpose of manipulated e-WOM is to influence the consumer towards the purchasing of a product, these are more likely to be more legible and readable, and thus unlikely to require much effort from the reader to be interpreted (Hu et al., 2012).

Moreover in the aim of persuading the reader, manipulated reviews are more likely to contain more explanation in order to appear more credible. At the same time, persuasion is undertaken in the form of providing both quantitative ratings and qualitative (text-based) reviews, since a text-only review might not be convincing enough. Hence a thorough description and support of the imaginary situation might be needed to be provided in order for it to look more realistic. Moreover, in order to keep the appearance that it was an actual consumer who wrote a given review, manipulated

reviews are likely to include an increased amount of emotional elements (Banerjee – Chua, 2014; Hu et al., 2012).

As can be seen from the above, it might be fairly difficult to distinguish between various consumer opinions. A last cue can be the opinion's writing style, i.e. the wording and grammar used within the text. Authentic opinions can be considered as highly diverse, but various reviews from the same reviewer as similar in style. Style, indeed, hardly varies even in time in the case of a given person, while different individuals have very different writings styles. In the case of manipulated reviews, in contrast, the use of templates can be observed to a certain extent, as well as stylistic similarities among different sources of opinion. In can also occur that an opinion is seemingly from the same reviewer, even though their respective reviews are all written using differing stylistic features. This may happen when multiple individuals write in the name of a same alter ego (Bambauer-Sachse – Mangold, 2013; Hu et al, 2012). Manipulated opinions are also likely to include a greater use of the past tense, which is likely to be aimed to strengthen the perceived authenticity of the described events. A similar technique is the exaggerated use of exclamation marks of organization-sponsored opinions, in the aim of demonstrating an increased level of emotionality (Banerjee – Chua, 2014). The most characteristic features of authentic and manipulated e-WOM are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Authentic and manipulated e-WOM

	authentic e-WOM	manipulated e-WOM
based on	generally a real experience	fictional situations
length	varied: compact or extended, verbose (especially in the case of negative e-WOM)	medium-length or wordy
legibility, interpretability	varied, a lot depends on the reviewer's background (qualifications, communication skills, etc.).	more readable
level of information	varied	noninformative (ambiguous; relating a situation that never happened)
writing style	variable from one person to another (generally constant for a given person)	possibility of same style among various sources
grammar	more frequent use of present tense more frequent use of question marks for emphasis	more frequent recourse to past and future tenses use of multiple exclamation points
type of evaluation	varied: number only, text only, mixed	contains both a score and a textual evaluation
balance of opinion	more balanced	extreme parts more likely (but presence also of normal level)
affective components	varying levels of emotional elements	emphasized recourse to emotions

Source: own elaboration based on Banerjee – Chua (2014), Bambauer-Sachse – Mangold (2013), and Hu et al. (2012)

E-WOM can be classified into positive and negative e-WOM based on its contents. Positive WOM can be perceived as the willingness of the consumer to recommend a product to others (Gruen et al., 2006). In contrast, negative WOM, by definition, focuses on the weaknesses of, and issues related to a product or service, and aims at dissuading users from adopting and using the product or service (Cheung – Thadani, 2012). The relationship of positive and negative e-WOM and the attributes and effects of negative e-WOM are further detailed in chapter 3.8.

The number of e-WOM channels has considerably increased along with the development of internet applications. Its most important manifestations are microblogs, message boards / forums, newsgroups, and other news sharing services, virtual communities, product review and boycott sites, online messaging services, online brand / consumer / trading pages and other websites, as well as emails (Bickart – Schindler, 2001; Cheung – Lee, 2012; Jansen et al., 2009; Litvin et al., 2008). The most common and obvious manifestation of e-WOM is related to online consumer opinion platforms (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sen-Lerman, 2007), but social networking services (virtual communities) and blogs are also popular channels (Cheung – Lee, 2012). Online consumer opinion platforms are websites usually operated by an independent third party specialized in the aggregation of consumer opinions where consumers can share their experiences with other users about areas such as catering, or hospitality services, books, or even medical, or maintenance services. Social networking sites (such as Facebook) are important in the phenomenon of e-WOM because their main function is to manage networks of personal acquaintances (with users being able to connect with their acquaintances, other groups, or fan communities) and to disseminate and organize information shared by one's friends. Blogs operate as a kind of personal diary where users (bloggers) can express their views about the most varied sort of matters, including experiences about a product or service.

E-WOM appearing in these varied contexts is also very heterogeneous in their attributes (Cheung – Thadani, 2012), which also leads to the effects thereof being the most varied (Lee – Youn, 2009). In terms of the level of interactivity, i.e. the time dimensions of the communication one can differentiate between synchronous and asynchronous communications. In terms of the relationship between the sender and the receiver one can differentiate between one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many relationships. In a one-to-one relation the relationship is between two participants. A one-to-many relation occurs when one sender is associated with multiple communication partners (organizations, or individuals), which is also the communication model for traditional mass media communications. Lastly, a and many-to-many exists when the same piece of information is disseminated

simultaneously by multiple senders to multiple directions. A typology and characterization of the channels of e-WOM is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Typology of e-WOM channels
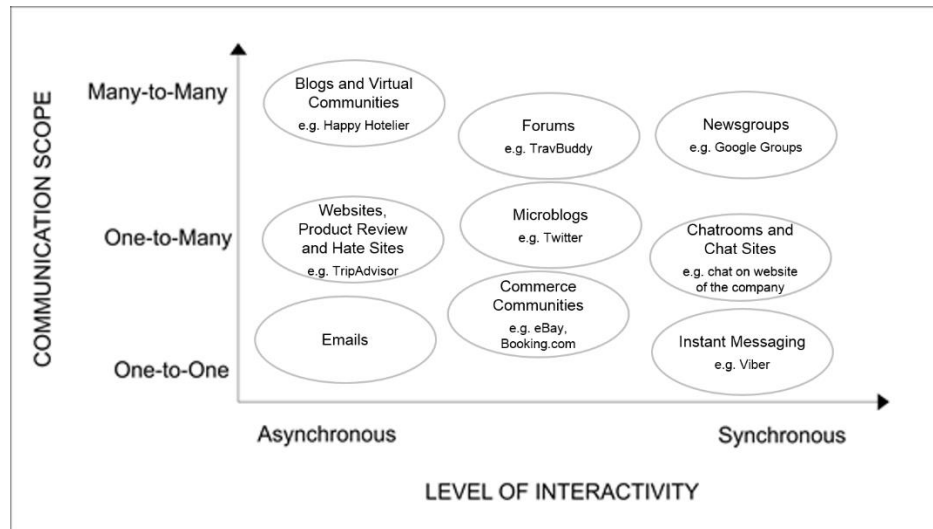
Source: own elaboration based on Mitev – Markos-Kujbus (2013: 411)

3.6. The process and effects of e-WOM

The process of influence has been depicted along different models in the literature (Cheung et al., 2009). All models, however, focus on the relationship between information processing and attitude change. One of these is the Yale Attitude Change Model (Hovland et al., 1976 in Smith – Mackie, 2005, Cheung et al. 2009). According to the model, in the process of information processing and influencing, the source of a communication (in the case of e-WOM, one might also consider multi-source information and anonymous sources), the nature of the message (information or other content), the receiving audience (here: the community, or the individual as a member of this community) all influence the attention, understanding, and adoption of an information and therefore, attitude. One can therefore state that persuasive communication is affected by a number of factors (e.g. credibility of the communicator; quality of message; attention of audience).

According to an extension of the theory, the following steps take place in the individual after being exposed to a message (McGuire, 1969 in Smith – Mackie, 2005): (1) presentation (exposure), (2) attention, (3) comprehension, (4) yielding (acceptance), (5) retention, and (6) behavior. According to this extension, personal skills and motivations greatly affect the processing of information and thereby individual persuasion.

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The Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) (Chaiken, 1980; Chaiken et al., 1989 in. Smith – Mackie, 2005) is another model of information processing and persuasion takes into account both the content and the context of the message. Based on this model, individuals can process information in two distinct ways, in a systematic, or in a heuristic manner. During systematic processing, the comprehension of information and its linking to prior knowledge are of special importance. The individual also pays great attention to the strength and quality of the presented arguments while systematically processing information. Heuristic processing involves superficial information processing, with individuals using heuristics, i.e. applying easy rules which can help them process information based on small bits of information (e.g. popularity of the sender). Although heuristic processing contributes to decreasing the required cognitive efforts, its effect do not lead to genuine attitude change. In contrast, in the systematic processing mode source reliability and message content are primordial for the individual, and the received information will have a lasting impact on them.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty – Caccioppo, 1986) greatly resembles the above-presented HSM model: individuals can process information in two ways, but the model proposes a central and peripheral route of persuasion. According to the ELM, information processing (i.e. the choice between the two routes) is a factor of individual skills and motivation. Under the peripheral route, the individual is unmotivated or incapable to carefully process an information, which is then replaced by a superficial processing based on heuristics. Under the central route, the individual is able and/or motivated to carefully consider the information, and they therefore pay close attention to the message, understands its contents, and reacts to it. In the final stage of the process, they yield to it. The results of attitude change engendered by the central route can be considered more enduring than that acquired under the peripheral route.

The various information processing models demonstrate that beyond the attributes of the receiver, those of the message (e-WOM as content) and those of the sender are also determining in the communication context. Even though persuasive communications can be said to have a number of effects, they achieve maximum impact on attitude change, which may lead to the adoption (or the interruption of the use) of a given product or service.

The effect of e-WOM and its practice is a two-tear process with a corporate and an individual (consumer) level (Cheung – Thadani, 2012; Jalilvand et al., 2011). In the study of its corporate effects, e-WOM can be considered as an aggregated consumer opinion. As such, its study should focus on the effects of e-WOM on the market

performance of a product or service. On the individual level, e-WOM is an informal process that has an effect on consumer decision making.

The individual and corporate effects of both offline and online WOM are identical, therefore the effects described hereinafter are valid for both communication tools.

3.6.1. The consumer side – individual effects

There is no consensus in the literature as concerns the magnitude of the impact of e-WOM. The majority of the literature agrees on the fact that e-WOM has a considerable impact on consumer decision making and behavior (see e.g. Smith et al, 2005; Wangenheim – Bayón, 2004). At the same time, a few studies suggest that, because of anonymity, e-WOM has no real effect on communication (Guadagno – Cialdini, 2005). The literature distinguished between two dimensions of interpersonal influence: normative and informational influences (Chu – Kim, 2011). Informational influence refers to the tendency of an individual to accept information from others as a proof of truth. Normative influence denotes the tendency to conform to the expectations of others.

In an information point of view, the biggest benefit of e-WOM is in supporting consumers during their decision making process (Racherla – Friske, 2012). Indeed, e-WOM provides consumer-oriented information, but also provides feedback on a product or service (Gupta – Harris, 2010) thereby alleviating uncertainty. Moreover, by aggregating various types of information at one place, e-WOM can considerably contribute to reducing decision making times.

Even though consumers can obtain more information though e-WOM, they may have difficulty evaluating it: the traditional evaluation criteria (e.g. sender's reliability) might not be relevant in the online environment in the absence of face-to-face communication (Cheung – Thadani, 2012). Information saturation is another difficulty related to the processing of e-WOM (Park – Lee, 2009), which might confuse the consumer and/or increase the time and cost of information retrieval. This phenomenon usually emerges when the nature of information is unsure, ambiguous, novel, or complex. Information that appear in online WOM can be characterized with the following attributes: the source cannot always be identified, there can exist both positive and negative information for the same thing, and a piece of information can appear simultaneously and at different times in many places and in different formats.

The appearance of e-WOM has brought about important changes in the consumption environment by reinforcing consumer power against organizations. Varadarajan and Yadav (2002) identify the four following factors that contribute to strengthening

consumers' position in the new digital communication environment: (1) consumers are becoming content creators and thereby contribute to information value creation. (2) consumers have multiple sources and large quantities of information at their disposal to evaluate products or competitors. (3) Diminished information asymmetry by dint of which consumers are enabled to easily compare between various offers along their price and other attributes. (4) Free and rapid flow of information between consumers, improving the quality of information available.

The role of e-WOM from the consumers' side is summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Consumer effects of e-WOM

source of information	• reliable • credible
decision-support tool	• reduce uncertainty • informal referral • reduce search costs • greater control over information source
strengthened consumer power against organizations	• contribute to value creation • obtain information from multiple sources • reduce information asymmetry • increased amount of available information

Source: own elaboration

3.6.2. The corporate side

an organization can profit from the positive effects of e-WOM if a proper organizational structure is available that can consider e-WOM as a strategic information input (Csordás et al. 2014; Williams – Buttle, 2011) and is able to manage it adequately (i.e. proactively and in real time) (Dellarocas, 2003; Ha, 2006; Helps et al., 2004). The use of e-WOM as a strategic asset requires the organization to monitor the entire communications environment, including the products, services offered by the organization, the communication process, opinion leaders, business partners, and employees. An organization needs to be aware of the fact that this process involves opportunities but also threats. WOM can be considered a global phenomenon that enables organizations to reach and influence masses of consumers at relatively low cost. Anonymity, on the other hand, as a basic feature of the communication environment, poses a challenge by potentially resulting in the introduction of negative, misleading, or hijacked user-generated content into the communication flow.

Electronic communication networks can be converted to a network of influence (De Bruyn – Lilien, 2008). That is, if the organization manages effectively its presence in the predominantly peer-to-peer communication environment, then it might exert influence upon the given network (community) and thereby directly on participants. Active participation in consumer discussions might result in a reinforced and direct relationship between the organization and its consumers, that might in turn lead to engaged consumers. The consequences of consumer engagement might include, among others, (1) an increased trust of consumers in the organization, its products or services. (2) By their increased engagement, consumers' willingness to contribute to the interactions within the given network might also intensify. (3) The increased activity of consumers within the network might, in turn, lead to the apparition of the phenomenon of consumer value creation: the organization then can obtain valuable information ready to be used in product development thanks to its consumers (e.g. in connection with its products or services). (4) The increased engagement of consumers can contribute to the establishment of a close relationship between the consumer and the organization, which is perhaps one of the most important consequences of the phenomenon, as it can engender a most long-term effect, consumer loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011). Loyal consumers, in turn, can become brand evangelists (Scarpi, 2010). The development and consequences of consumer engagement both confer a competitive advantage to organizations (Sedley, 2008).

However, in order to develop this relationship of influence, organizations must persuade consumers to transmit the information created and broadcast by them. This is a precondition for an effective participation of organizations in the new market dynamics (Litvin et al., 2008). The utility of corporate participation in these networks is also confirmed by the new dynamics of the two-step flow of communication, where a narrower primary target group can voluntarily propagate a received message towards a lot wider secondary target audience (Csordás et al., 2012). In can then be said that organizations must primarily seek to become a natural part of consumer conversations (Kozinets et al., 2010).

As an important driver of consumer adaptation of new technologies, e-WOM can also influence the acceptance of a product or service (Chevalier – Mayzlin, 2006; Cheung et al., 2009; Godes – Mayzlin, 2009). Moreover, e-WOM can play an important role in consumer decision making (Cheung et al., 2009) by its role, as an information source perceived as reliable, in product evaluation, and selection (Bone, 1995; Gruen et al., 2006).

It is important to note that the role and effects of e-WOM might change along the life cycle of a product (Godes – Mayzlin, 2004): while in the introduction stage, the quantity of e-WOM available is limited, but already plays an important role in raising awareness, in the maturity stage, the larger amount of e-WOM available will play a

greater role in consumer reinforcement. Product type also affects the role of e-WOM in consumer decisions (Park – Lee, 2009): e-WOM has a particularly important role for product categories relevant for the individual on a personal level (Csordás et al., 2012). For categories of experience and credence products e-WOM can allow virtual trialability (Lepkowska-White, 2013).

E-WOM, moreover, can not only affect products and services, but also brands. E-WOM was shown to have a considerable effect on brand recall as it can assure a regular presence in consumer conversations to the brand. E-WOM can also positively affect long-term brand evaluation (Armelini – Villanueva, 2010), thereby also contributing to the practice of brand-building (Dellarocas, 2003).

E-WOM was shown to affect corporate performance as a whole by contributing to increasing sales (Godes – Mayzlin 2004; Chai – Kim, 2010), consumer education, consumer activation, brand development, quality control, and supply chain quality control (Dellarocas 2003).

The role of e-WOM from the corporate side is summarized in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Corporate effects of e-WOM

Source: own elaboration

The process and effects of e-WOM presented beforehand are summarized in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The process of e-WOM

POSSIBLE SOURCES OF ONLINE WORD-OF-MOUTH

PARTICIPANTS OF ONLINE WOM AND THEIR POSSIBLE INTERACTIONS

MAIN OUTCOMES OF ONLINE WORD-OF-MOUTH
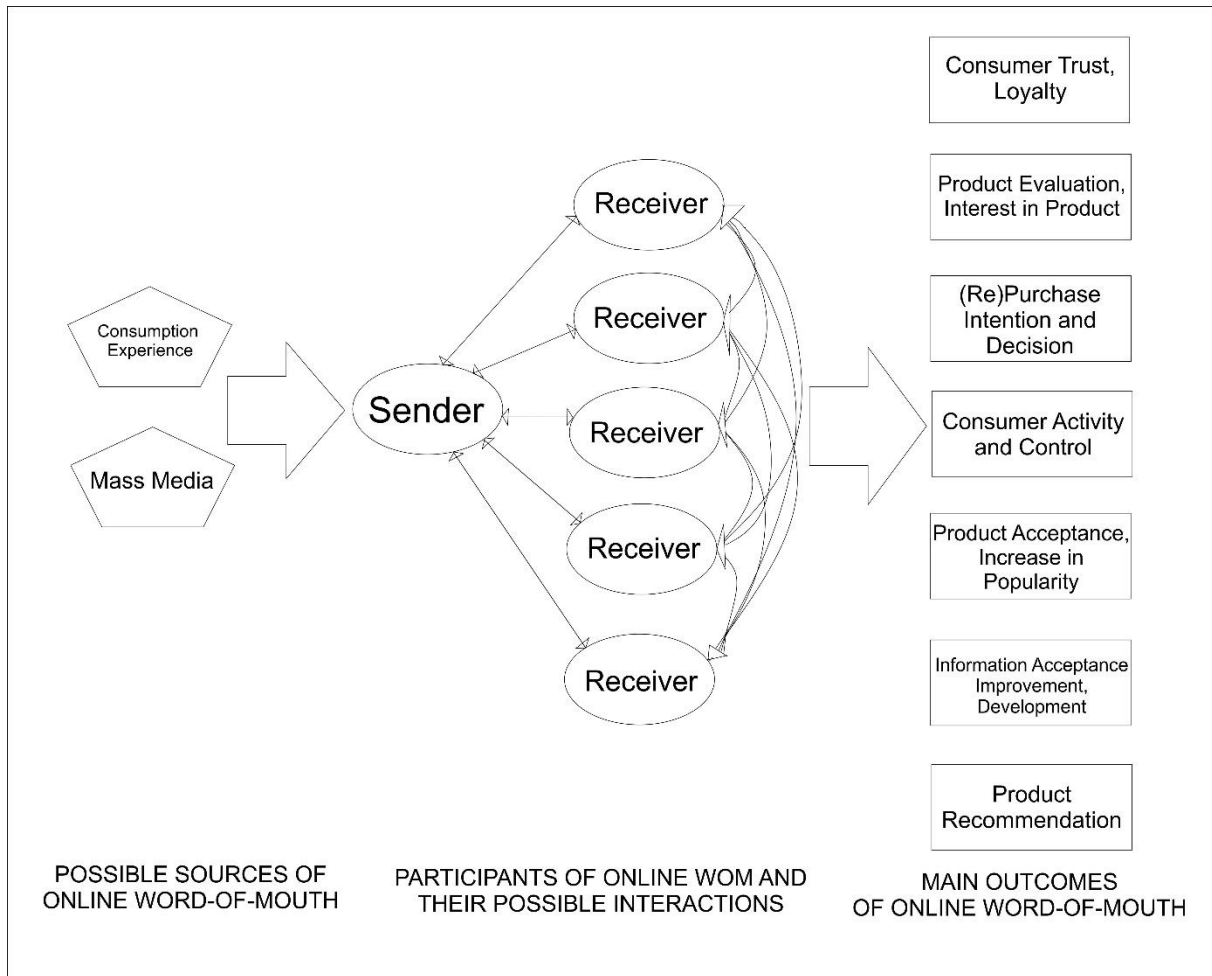
Source: Mitev – Markos-Kujbus (2013: 412)

3.7. Determining factors in the process of e-WOM

Successful information sharing involves both contributing and receiving information (Cheung et al., 2009). It is therefore important to examine the factors that influence participation in e-WOM and thereby its effects.

It was shown beforehand that, compared to traditional, face-to-face communications, anonymity and the lack of social ties are inherent attributes of e-WOM. The lack of personal interactions make it often difficult to assess the credibility and reliability of information in e-WOM. On the other hand, a number of factors can help evaluate the quality of an e-WOM message. Given the fact that e-WOM is simultaneously a channel and tool of communication, it is worth characterizing the factors affecting it along the various stages of the communication process, i.e. to analyze the factors affecting the source (i.e. the author of a message), the message (i.e. the contents of e-WOM), and the receiver (i.e. the consumer and the environment).

3.7.1. The sender of e-WOM

The senders of e-WOM can be categorized into two groups along their expertise: expert professionals (or semi-professionals) and peers (Chiu et al., 2006; Litvin et al., 2008; Markos-Kujbus et al., 2015; Racherla – Friske, 2012). Sources perceived as more professional by the user are likely to be perceived as more trustworthy and therefore relied upon in the process of e-WOM (Chen – Yie, 2008; Sweeney et al., 2014). The source's expertise determines their reputation (Ku et al., 2012), which, in turn, affects the credibility of the reviews that they post (Chang – Wu, 2014; Cheung et al., 2009). Thus, the higher the sender's expertise and reputation, the higher the perceived credibility of and reliance upon their opinions by others (Racherla – Friske, 2012).

Perceived Expertise is a function of a number of factors: arguments used in e-WOM to support the cognitive content (i.e. is the sender capable of substantiating the information they provide), wording (e.g. narrative style, used terminology, etc.), information about the author (provided either in an accompanying user profile, or by the author within their text). The more such information is available about the author that a consumer can evaluate, the more credibility will the sender enjoy (Cheung et al., 2009).

Beyond general expertise, perceived experience about the product or service is equally an important factor of evaluation. The greater the perceived "field" expertise of the sender by the consumer, the greater the effect of the e-WOM. Thus, if such a sender expresses their positive opinion, positive e-WOM will contribute to persuading a consumer about the quality of a product or service. Conversely, if the sender expresses discontent, the consumer will more likely dismiss the given product or service from among their pool of alternatives (Sweeney et al., 2014).

Perceived similarity is another characteristic of a sender that consumers take into account while evaluating a piece of e-WOM. That is, the more a consumer feels that the sender resembles them, the more reliable they will deem the message. Indeed, consumers are seeking other consumers similar to themselves based on certain attributes (e.g. same age, gender, hobby, world view). This way, the sender is perceived as belonging to the same group and therefore more reliable than other "outsiders" who do not resemble them. This phenomenon is referred to as homophily in the literature (Sweeney et al., 2014; Wagenheim – Bayón, 2004). The effect of homophily is supported in the research by Steffes and Burgee (2009) who posit that a consumer will be more likely to trust an information received from a sender perceived as similar, and it is also possible that they will consider such information as a primary source.

Another decisive factor is the perceived similarity of e-WOM messages, i.e. the extent to which the various information available online on a subject are consistent. The more e-WOM available is consensual among a number of different senders (i.e. the more senders circulate the same information), the higher the message's perceived credibility and reliability (Lee – Cranage, 2012), and thus the larger its influence and impact (Laczniak et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2008).

The sender's perceived intention is another determining factor of e-WOM's adoption: if a consumer deems an online opinion self-serving, or manipulative, they will be likely to perceive it as unreliable and useless. Self-serving opinions include messages written in the aim of one's impression management: these are the primary means of expression of a consumer's exhibitionism. In these opinions, the personality of the sender is put to the fore, while the product or service in question is hardly or minimally addressed. Opinions that are obviously written with the aim of regulating one's emotions (be they positive or negative) with no, or minimal meaningful information can equally be classified as self-serving (Berger, 2014). Manipulative messages, on the other hand, originate from an organization or a consumer on the behalf of an organization. Such messages will likely to be filtered by consumers based on various cues, and subsequently ignored (Banerjee – Chua, 2014; Markos-Kujbus et al., 2015). For a more detailed analysis on manipulated messages, see chapter 3.5.

Overall, one can state that consumers can evaluate a message's sender as well as its contents along the dimensions presented above. This evaluation will lead the consumer to determine the reliability and utility in their respective, personal contexts (Cheung – Thadani, 2012; Racherla – Friske, 2012).

3.7.2. The receiver of e-WOM

The effects of e-WOM will equally depend on the receiver's individual features (Cheung et al., 2009; Hsieh et al., 2012). These features will determine to what extent will a receiver be receptive to an information and in what ways will they utilize it in their decision making process (Laczniak et al., 2001).

According to Lee et al. (2008), receiver's involvement in the process of e-WOM plays a determining role in the process. Involvement can be characterized as the duration and intensity of the effort devoted by the consumer to participate in the process of e-WOM. This is confirmed by the elaboration-likelihood model (ELM) according to which information processing is a factor of individual skills and motivation. The higher an individual's level of involvement in the process of e-WOM, the stronger

their motivation to process an information (Lee et al., 2008) and the likelier their commitment to convincing arguments (Park – Lee, 2009) and to e-WOM as a whole (De Bruyn – Lilien, 2008). Moreover, the higher their level of motivation, the higher their willingness to process received e-WOM in sufficient detail and to look for further information in support of or against that information (Park – Lee, 2009).

Motivation therefore is a determining factor in the adoption of and process of participation in e-WOM (Gupta – Harris, 2010). The more consumers are motivated, the higher their commitment to quality e-WOM (i.e. e-WOM with higher information value) as a result of which they will also likely increase their participation in the process of e-WOM. The influence of e-WOM equally depends on the receivers motivation level, as ill-motivated individuals are likely to make suboptimal decisions based on e-WOM using it as a simple heuristic (Gupta – Harris, 2010).
Motivation involves the individual assessing the potential benefits that involve utilitarian or hedonic dimensions (Smith et al., 2005). When a consumer expects primarily utilitarian benefits, they will be likely to give more consideration to e-WOM originating from reviewers with larger perceived experience. Primarily hedonic expected benefits, on the other hand, will trigger the phenomenon of homophily (Smith et al., 2005).

Trust is another important facet in determining receivers' perception of e-WOM messages. Trust can be characterized as an attitude of certain expectations that online users have with regard to the process of e-WOM (Chai – Kim, 2010). There exist multiple dimensions of trust the adequate knowledge and management of which can contribute to engendering consumer participation and engagement. According to Chai and Kim's (2010) study of a specific area of e-WOM (blogs), the dimensions of trust are:
(1) Economy-based trust: participants' trust toward utilitarian benefits by sharing knowledge.
(2) Trust in other members (in Chai – Kim [2010]: bloggers): Belief of a new member that other members would not "harm" them. This form of trust can be interpreted as a trust in the sender of an information, i.e. that a consumer trusts that a sender will share reliable and credible information.
(3) Trust in the platform (in Chai – Kim [2010]: internet): Trust in that the platform where e-WOM can be found is structurally sound (adequate and secure). This form of trust highlights the important role of platforms in the process of e-WOM.
(4) Trust in the platform service provider (in Chai – Kim [2010]: blog service provider): Participants' trust toward service providers providing safe environment for information exchange. This dimension emphasizes the necessity for organizations to provide proprietary platforms (i.e. owned channels) for users to express their

company-related opinions, thereby gaining some control over the management of this information.

Trust is a crucial factor in the process of e-WOM through its role in the diffusion, and sharing of information (Kim et al., 2007), as well as in the transmission of knowledge (Chai – Kim, 2010). Indeed, consumers need to trust the person, and/or company, and/or platform sharing an information and they need to develop a right attitude to be able to adopt a piece of information and to participate in the information process. The higher the level of a consumer's trust in the various dimensions of the process of e-WOM, the higher they will deem it reliable, and the more likely they will be to adopt and utilize it to become engaged towards the information, its sender, or the brand (Brodie et al., 2011).

A receiver's attitude equally appears as a factor of trust. Attitude here can be interpreted as the ability to engage in the process of e-WOM (Gruen et al., 2006). Its importance is shown in the positive relationship between attitude and intention: a positive attitude of a consumer towards a product/brand/etc., the participants of the process of e-WOM, a piece of information, a piece of user-generated content will positively affect the likelihood of participation in the process of e-WOM (Chu – Kim, 2011; Daugherty et al., 2008).

Receivers' personality traits are equally a determining factor of e-WOM (Cheung – Thadani, 2012): the more open the personality of a participant, the higher the likelihood of their participation in the process of e-WOM (Chiu et al., 2007). Innovativeness is another significant predictor of e-WOM (Sun et al., 2006). Indeed, the innovativeness of a product is likely to generate e-WOM (Derbaix – Vanhamme, 2003), and thereby to trigger further consumer participation in e-WOM.

Prior consumer experience and behavior are equally determining in the process of e-WOM. The more frequently one receives relevant messages, the higher the likelihood of them sharing these with others (Camarero – San Jose, 2011; Sweeney et al., 2014). Prior consumer experience includes a consumer's relationship with and attachment to a brand, also an important factor in the process of e-WOM (Chang – Wu, 2014). Consumers with a high level of brand engagement will only regard positive e-WOM as reliable information, and will be more likely to disregard negative e-WOM (Kirby – Marsden, 2006). Consumers with high brand engagement will also privilege quality information, and can be characterized by active search practices. Consumers with low or no brand engagement will be more likely to use a peripheral route in their search for information (Chiou et al., 2013).

3.7.3. Characteristics of e-WOM as content

The investigation of content factors of e-WOM is crucial for several reasons: first, the analysis of user comments provides allows for a deeper understanding of consumer sentiments and perceptions about a brand, product, or service (Barreda – Bilgihan, 2013). Second, it can help understand the relationship between the sender and the receiver of a message, i.e. the main characteristics of e-WOM as a process (Toder-Alon et al., 2014). Finally, it can help identify the factors of efficiency and effectivity among consumer recommendations, thereby contributing to the development of review systems.

Content categories

Among the characteristics of e-WOM as content, the most obvious starting point is provided by content categories, i.e. to determine what kinds of information can be found within online consumer reviews.

While there exist several categorizations of WOM and e-WOM contents, Schindler and Bickart (2012) provide a system of three general categories. They differentiate between product (and service) evaluative, product-descriptive, and reviewer-descriptive contents.

Evaluative contents consist of concrete positive or negative judgments about (1) the quality of a product or service, thereby describing to what extent these met the consumer's prior expectations. (2) The can also be about the perceived value a product or service, i.e. whether it was worth purchasing them. (3) The reviewer's (positive or negative) personal experiences can equally appear, that may lead to the reviewer giving advice or recommendations to other users (Schindler – Bickart, 2012; Toder-Alon et al., 2014).

Descriptive statements present factual information about the basic features, price, or news about a product or service (Mangold et al., 1999; Toder-Alon et al., 2014). These can also be retransmissions of publicly available, official contents originally published by the organization. In this case, consumers participating in the retransmission confirm and support the official information provided by the organization, thereby contributing to raising that organization's credibility. For example, according to a hotel's official website, it is situated at a distance of 50 meters from the sea, which information can be corroborated by a consumer in their review of the hotel.

Descriptive statements can also include exclusive facts that can only become known after purchasing the product or service (Markos-Kujbus et al., 2015). By providing such information the reviewer provides other users with a sort of virtual trialability, and thereby contributes to facilitating consumer choice. For example, the presence of

a hotel parking can be a public record available at its website. A consumer review can also add in their review that there is hardly enough space for turning with the car.

Reviewer-descriptive contents, i.e. personal statements about the reviewer within the review can help increasing consumers' confidence in the review. Indeed, personal statements can make a review more personal and reinforce the relationship between the sender and the receiver of a message. They can equally reveal a lot about the sender's person, including their expertise, experience, role within the community, etc. which all can help increasing the credibility and reliability of the opinion (Schindler – Bickart, 2012).

Most publications about e-WOM address primarily textual contents (see e.g. Cheung – Thadani, 2012; Ludwig et al., 2013). However, consumers can generate e-WOM in different formats, e.g. by using multimedia contents: these can be standalone, full-fledged contents or they can accompany a textual content as a support medium. Visual elements are the second most common type of e-WOM content (King et al., 2014). The importance of multimedia contents lies in the fact that a visual presentation contributes to the transparence of the information, provides a specific perspective and alternative to the focal information, as well as a context for assessing the information (Lin et al., 2012). Making an information visible by illustrating it reduces the uncertainty related to it and increases its credibility (Lepkowska-White, 2013). Moreover, visual cues make long-term memorizing and recall easier. The present information environment can be characterized by increasingly high levels of clutter and growing consumer threshold. A piece of e-WOM presented in an unusual way (e.g. a textual review complemented with a photo) can, however, stand out and attract attention, thus increasing its chances of being read (Lin et al., 2012). In their study, Ring et al. (2014) confirm these results by showing that e-WOM containing a combination of text and photo is the most influential source of information in the context of an online travel community.

Quantitative dimensions

The contents of e-WOM can be further characterized by their qualitative and quantitative attributes. There is no consensus in the literature regarding the influence of these attributes. While Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) find that consumers read textual reviews even when a summary average rating is available, Filieri and McLeay (2013) argue that, in reality, consumers hardly ever read textual reviews and rather rely primarily on cumulative statistics and rankings.

The quantitative dimensions of e-WOM can apply to the numerical ratings of an opinion, to the effective length of the opinion, the total number of reviews available, or the ranking of a review among the total number of reviews available.

The aggregate amount of available consumer reviews was shown to have a strong effect on e-WOM as this can be regarded as a measure of the popularity and acceptance of a brand (Chan – Ngai, 2011; Chevalier – Mayzlin, 2006). The more reviews there are for a product or service, the higher the number of product or service adopters will be (theoretically), and the more information will be available (theoretically) for consumers. Thus, the higher the aggregate amount of available consumer reviews, the higher their persuasiveness (Park – Lee, 2009). This measure can equally help consumers to reduce search time and costs: options with an insufficient number of reviews (and therefore a lack of information) thus failing to provide virtual trialability (Lepkowska-White, 2013) can be disregarded in the search process. This is supported by Markos-Kujbus and Csordás (2015) who find that consumers tend to set threshold values as personal heuristics for the number of total reviews to be available to even start considering a product.

At the same time, the total number of reviews is not the only option in assessing the quality of e-WOM. The dynamics of online reviews can be a measure of the position of a product or service in their life cycle (Ho-Dac et al., 2013). Brands in the introduction phase can experience a heavier increase in the number of related reviews which is later slowed down. Organizations, however, are interested in having a constantly growing number of consumer reviews even in the maturity stage: even if, altogether, a product or service benefits from a large number of product reviews, if no new reviews are provided for a long time, the information available might become irrelevant. If, on the other hand, a constant flow of new consumer opinions can be a sign of a maintained interest in, and therefore the implied reliability of the product or service. A rapid increase in the number of product might also be a sign of the development of a product or service.

Beyond aggregate measures, the attributes of individual pieces of e-WOM can also be determining. As such, the length of a review can an indicator of quality Robinson et al., 2012; Xie et al., 2014): the shorter the review, the smaller its perceived value and utility for the consumer.

The length of a consumer review, measured in the number of words it contains, however, is only related to its perceived quality to a certain extent. While longer opinions give room to more detail and specific information and are therefore likely to be perceived as more valuable, excessively verbose reviews are likely to contain either unnecessary or irrelevant details (Lepkowska-White, 2013) that can confuse the reader (Schindler – Bickart, 2012), thereby decreasing the review's perceived utility and reliability (Baek et al., 2012; Xie et al., 2014).

Moderately, i.e. adequately long reviews can be characterized by the following attributes as regards their perceived value and utility (Korfiatis et al., 2012; Schindler – Bickart, 2012): they contain statements rather positive in tone, which provide specific information about a product or service. They also contain a number of statements regarding the reviewer, which can help increasing the opinion's perceived reliability. A number of entertaining details can also be part of moderately longer reviews. These details can help readers better process an information, and more easily memorize them thanks to the more colorful, unconventional manner of presentation. Longer consumer opinions' perceived utility can therefore be said to be higher, even though Mudambi and Schuff's (2010) results suggest that this the effect is greater in the case of search products.

The number of words, however, is not the only measure of quality of an opinion, the number and polarity of arguments included is also determining (Lin et al., 2012; Robinson et al., 2012). The higher the number of rational (negative or positive) arguments within a piece of e-WOM, the higher its perceived reliability and credibility for consumers. There also exists an optimal number of arguments in a review. If a review contains more than the optimal number, its perceived credibility might be reduced (Schindler – Bickart, 2012) as consumers might perceive it as biased or manipulated.

The brand's consumer rating scores as a well as its competitive position based on these scores are equally determining in the consumer decision process (Chan – Ngai, 2011): they can help simplify the processing of information by reducing the alternatives (Fillieri – McLeay, 2013; Lepkowska-White, 2013). As mentioned beforehand, consumers can use selection heuristics and set up threshold values, in this case by taking into account the ranking or the aggregate evaluation of a product or service, and simply disregard those above the set criteria.

Qualitative dimensions

The quality of online consumer reviews is equally an important element of consideration, as the quality of e-WOM was shown to positively affect purchase intent (Zhou et al., 2013). In the present communication clutter, however, the quality of e-WOM messages is highly fluctuating, and the majority of consumer manifestations can be considered as medium or low quality (Lee et al., 2008; Markos-Kujbus et al., 2014). This supported by Dickinger's (2011 in. Ring et al., 2014) results, according to which tourists doubt that they will be able to find quality consumer reviews on online platforms.

According to Park et al. (2007: 128) the quality of e-WOM is defined as "the quality of a review's contents from the perspective of information characteristics".

Such characteristics can be (Chen – Xie, 2008; Cheung et al., 2009; Cheung – Thadani, 2012; Fillieri – McLeay, 2013; Lepkowska-White, 2013; Lin et al., 2012; Mazzarol et al., 2007; Racherla – Friske, 2012; Schindler – Bickart, 2005; Senecal – Nantel, 2004; Wang – Strong, 1996; Zhou et al., 2013):

(1) Relevance: Usability by the consumer in decision-making of the information detailed in a consumer opinion (see e.g. Fillieri – McLeay, 2013; Park et al., 2007). As seen beforehand, one e-WOM's greatest advantage is to support decision making by reducing the associated cost and time. This, however, can only happen if the consumer obtains information in the process of e-WOM that will be effectively usable in their decision making process. It is also important to note that relevance is also a factor of consumer need, and thus is not generalizable. However, information relevant to a given target audience can effectively be filtered. For example, a childless consumer searching for a relaxing weekend at spa resort will most likely disregard information pertaining to the presence, or not, of playgrounds in the vicinity.

(2) Accuracy: The reliability of information in e-WOM (e.g. Chan – Ngai, 2011; Lepkowska-White, 2013; Lin et al., 2012). The more accurate the description of a product or service, the higher its role in virtual trialability, allowing for more informed decision making.

(3) Credibility: To what extent the contents of e-WOM are perceived as believable or worthy of trust by consumers (e.g. Fillieri – McLeay, 2013; Lepkowska-White, 2013;). The higher a reviewer's expertise and/or experience, the more credible their perceived credibility and the higher the reliance of consumers on the review in their decision-making (Reichelt et al., 2014). In a more complex review, a sender can resort to persuasive elements such as a number of arguments, examples, or complementary multimedia contents in order to assure their credibility (Lin et al., 2012).

(4) Objectivity: To what extent the information appearing in e-WOM is factual and unbiased (e.g. Chan – Ngai, 2011; Lin et al., 2012). The separation of a sender's opinion from factual data within e-WOM is a crucial factor in the consumer evaluation of its quality. The more factual data is included in a review, the easier it is for a consumer to evaluate the value of information.

(5) Topicality: To what extent the information appearing in e-WOM is current (e.g. Cheung – Thadani, 2012; Cheung et al., 2009). Because of the searchability of information in the online sphere, the e-WOM a consumer can come across can actually be outdated or obsolete. For example, a hotel might operate with a new staff who cannot be held accountable for potential criticism about prior staff errors found on the internet and therefore are not relevant for the consumer to consider. As a result, the possibility to assess the topicality of e-WOM is a key decision support factor which

can contribute greatly to the evaluation of alternatives. There also naturally exist some abiding information (e.g. a hotel's location), where topicality is not a relevant factor in the evaluation of the quality of the given information.

(6) Consistency (e.g. . Lin et al., 2012; Wang – Strong, 1996): inner harmony of a message, and degree of similarity of details among available messages. Consistency of style, for instance, can improve a message's readability and thus positively affect its perceived reliability. External consistency, i.e. the similarity of a message with other messages equally affects its perceived reliability (Lee – Ma, 2012).

(7) Legibility/Readability: The ease with which a reader can make out a message and understand its meaning (e.g. Bannerjee – Chua, 2014; Zhou et al., 2013). The higher a text's readability, the higher its utility for the consumer. Consumer opinions that are verbose or employ too many technical terms can easily entail consumers' information saturation and confusion. Readers may evaluate a message favorably if they perceive it to be well written (Lin et al., 2012).

(8) Informativeness: Completeness, i.e. depth and richness of information (e.g. Chen – Xie, 2008; Mazzarol et al., 2007; Racherla – Friske, 2012). With regards to the degree of informativeness, Chen and Xie (2008) distinguish between partial and full information. With regards to review elaborateness, Racherla and Friske (2012) distinguish between reviews and summary statistics. In other words, a review can provide statistical and narrative evidence (Martin – Lueg, 2011). Nevertheless, the richer a message (i.e. takes into consideration a number of aspects and provides detail) about a product or service, the higher its perceived quality and therefore its persuasiveness (Sweeney et al., 2012).

(9) Argument quality: the strength of persuasive argumentation (Cheung – Thadani, 2010). The quality of argument is evaluated by consumers in terms of the clarity, coherence, thickness and factuality of the text, and the stronger the argument quality, the higher a review's perceived credibility and reliability. Moreover, highly involved or motivated consumers are more likely to take into special consideration the quality of arguments within a review (Chan – Ngai, 2011).

Thus, a higher-quality review can be characterized as an objective, highly readable and persuasive text that contains relevant information as well as reliable and intelligible argumentation and explanation.

In contrast, lower-quality reviews are those that are primarily subjective, emotional and thereby contain mostly irrelevant and unreliable information written in a manner difficult to understand and with insufficient reasoning (Lee et al., 2008).

Semantic dimensions

As it became apparent in the previous parts, one needs to study both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of e-WOM. The latter contribute to the understanding of the evaluation and processing of information by consumers (Korfiatis et al., 2012). This knowledge can help identify the characteristics of efficient and effective online consumer reviews.

Among the qualitative attributes, a special focus needs to be directed at the semantic dimensions. Based on the various themes appearing in the relevant literature, these can be further categorized as the study of a message's affective elements, narrative style, and wording.

The expression of emotions plays a crucial part in online discussions, and therefore in e-WOM (Berger – Milkman, 2012): e-WOM readers can recognize the emotional cues embedded in consumer reviews which they interpret as a source of social information and interaction (Yin et al., 2014). They thus gain information not only about a community but also about the author of an opinion, that they can further use to evaluate the message's utility and reliability. Even though online consumer opinions rarely elicit a direct affective reaction due to the lack of personal ties and physical proximity. A personal opinion of a consumer about an online review, can also affect their evaluation of the related product or service.

On one hand, if the negative emotions appearing in the text are not perceived by the consumer as the effect on the reviewer, they will not likely affect the consumer's perception of the product or service in question. On the other hand, if the expressed negative emotions are clearly the effect of the reviewed product then they could lead to the withdrawal of a consumer to purchase the given product. If a reader of an opinion encounters positive emotions in a positive review then these will likely serve as additional product information and will likely positively affect product evaluation

Another feature of emotional wording is that they can be processed more rapidly and effectively, or even automatically, than non-emotional words (Yin et al., 2014). E-WOM messages that contain emotional content will thus likely be more remembered by consumers. However, it can also occur that a consumer will only remember the emotional part of the message, while miss the objective parts of the information – thereby projecting the former to the product or service.

The presence of emotions in consumer reviews does not necessarily mean that consumers will consider the review useful or be affected by it. It is generally true, however, that the expression of negative emotions will have a stronger impact, and negative information is generally perceived as more useful for decisions (Baek et al., 2012; Yin et al., 2014). A consumer can, also, be saturated by negative emotions: one-

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sided negative emotions in a text will negatively affect consumers' perception of the rationality of the review (Kim – Gupta, 2012). In these cases, consumer will regard the e-WOM as its author's venting of rage (Verhagen et al., 2013). One-sided positive reviews, containing exclusively positive emotions, have also no significant effect (Kim – Gupta, 2012), as they may be perceived by consumer as monotonous or biased (Markos-Kujbus et al., 2015).

The style and format of online consumer reviews can equally influence consumers' perception of e-WOM and the impact thereof. For this reason, the study of wording and style is an emphatic area for the study of e-WOM (Schellekens et al., 2013; Schindler – Bickart, 2012; King et al., 2014). Even though it is a particularly important dimension, the language used by consumers in their online reviews has been relatively neglected by the literature (Kronrod - Danzinger, 2013).

A most prominent area of semantic studies in the field is about the study of frequency and meanings of words used in online consumer opinions. Pollach (2008) in her study examined word choice in consumer reviews, an distinguished between:
(1) Words with positive or negative connotations, the interpretation of which is mainly determined by the context. If a message contains a number of these, then a greater cognitive effort is required to interpret the meaning of the message.
(2) Words expressing positive or negative feelings, which determine the vividness (Mangold et al., 1999) and richness (Mazzarol et al., 2007) of the message, that is, the elaborateness and expressivity of a message.
(3) Over- and understatements, which suggest a certain level of partiality by the reviewer, they therefore are often included in subjective consumer reviews. If a larger amount of such words is present in a review, then it is perceived as unreliable and therefore as irrelevant.
(4) Words indicating actions taken to reach goals and words indicating that goals have not been achieved. These give more representation and support for the reason behind a positive or negative review.
(5) Words indicating certainty or uncertainty. They can affect the evaluation of credibility and reliability of the message, as the more confidently a message is worded, the more credible the information they convey will look like.
 (6) Uncommon words (e.g. words indicating concepts of business and economics). These frequent use of technical terms, longer words, or complex sentences can increase a message's lexical complexity (Jensen et al., 2013). The use of such language can hint a greater expertise and experience and hence can also affect the level of confidence in the reviewer and in the e-WOM message. However, the overuse of such language can hinder a text's readability and lead to information saturation, potentially averting the consumer from the review (or even the reviewed product).

(7) Words indicating judgment and evaluation, which can make it easier for the reader to decide if they contain extensive and substantiated arguments.

(8) Words indicating qualities, which can be both objective and subjective, and can contribute to virtual trialability.

Kronrod and Danziger (2013) provide a linguistic examination e-WOM in the context of the appearance of figurative language in consumer reviews. Figurative language "is the use of words and expressions employing their indirect meaning to convey an additional connotation beyond that of their lexical sense" (e.g. "she drives me up the wall") (Kronrod - Danzinger, 2013: 726).

The authors find that figurative language use is more common in the context of reviews about hedonic products. This can be explained by the increased presence of emotional elements during hedonic consumption: an experience that can subsequently be expressed through a more vivid language use by the reviewer. This equally supports the findings by Polloch (2008) who argues that words with connotation – which include figurative language – are an important content category in reviews. Kronrod and Danziger's (2013) study also includes an investigation of reviews' titles. Indeed, this feature is increasingly present on consumer rating sites. A title, then, can also catch a consumer's attention who is only scanning through reviews. According to the authors' results, figurative language use is, again, more common in reviews about hedonic products. As concerns the direction of reviews, the extremity of reviews raised the likelihood of figurative language use in their respective titles.

A summary of the factors affecting the process of e-WOM is given in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Main influencing factors of the process of e-WOM

sender
- Experience (Godes – Mayzlin, 2004)
- Engagement (Brodie et al., 2011)
- Trust in the communicator (Chai – Kim, 2011)
- Reliability (Cheung et al., 2009)
- Sender's (perceived) credibility (Cheung et al., 2009; Martin – Lueg, 2011)
- Position of individual within the community (Kleijnen et al., 2009)

content
- Positive or negative (Cheung – Thadani, 2012)
- Quantity aspects (Park – Lee, 2009)
- Quality aspects
- Semantic aspects

receiver
- Involvement (Lee et al., 2008; De Bruyn – Lilien, 2008)
- Prior knowledge, experience (e.g. Cheung – Thadani, 2012; Doh – Hwang, 2009)
- Extent of individual's social network (e.g. Huang et al., 2009)
- Position of individual within the community (Kleijnen et al., 2009)
- Openness to innovation (Sun et al., 2006)
- Attitude (Daugerty et al., 2008)

Source: own elaboration

3.8. Negative e-WOM

By definition, E-WOM, just like traditional WOM, can be both positive and negative. Positive WOM can be perceived as the willingness of the consumer to recommend a product to others (Gruen et al., 2006). In contrast, negative WOM, by definition, focuses on the weaknesses of, and issues related to a product or service, and aims at dissuading users from adopting and using the product or service (Cheung – Thadani, 2012).

Negative e-WOM can be considered as an indirect expression of opinion, as it is the public expression of discontent with a company, its product, or service. Negative e-WOM can lead to an exit from the market, i.e. the termination of consumer–company relationship (Verhagen et al., 2013).

3.8.1. Characteristics of negative e-WOM

The basic attributes of negative e-WOM will be evaluated using the framework of the Yale Attitude Change Model, i.e. the source, the nature, and the receiving audience of a message. The study of the source can investigate the perceived motivations of the sender by others, thereby offering an outlook on the potential perceived utility of a message. The contents and style of the message can strengthen or weaken the value of information, while certain attributes of receivers may influence how and to what extent will they be able and willing to process negative e-WOM.

The sender of negative e-WOM

The common assumption that dissatisfied consumers only generate negative and satisfied consumer only positive e-WOM needs to be nuanced. Consumers sharing negative information can indeed also mention positive details in their opinion about a brand (e.g. by differentiating between who they recommend a restaurant to and to whom they don't). One reason behind this phenomenon is that a number of other factors equally affect the generation of e-WOM beyond (dis)satisfaction.

Senders of negative e-WOM can be characterized into various categories (East et al., 2007; Verhagen et al., 2013):

(1) Consumers complaining to manufacturers. They are the ones with an actual complaint about or issue with a company, its brand, or service seeking a communication platform to express it. There can be several reasons behind their turning to negative e-WOM as a channel: it is possible that they may have found no direct communication link to the company, or that they feel the need for underscoring

their issue by appearing simultaneously on various platforms, or, by simply perceiving e-WOM as the most convenient form of communication for them.

(2) Past customers, who believe that their current brand is superior. These consumers have no longer any relationship with the focal brand (i.e. have already opted for an exit strategy) and have experience with both the focal and their current brands which allows them to contrast the two. In can also occur that they are loyal to their current brand.

(3) Current customers giving advice against the brand. These consumers are disappointed with their brand, and their primary goal is to dissuade other users from the purchase thereof by sharing their negative experiences and feelings.

(4) Current customers giving advice. These consumers aim to support the further development of their brand by offering constructive criticism that gives the organization the opportunity to identify important insights and develop their product or service. These consumers represent great value for the company as they are among the most loyal consumers of the brands.

Perceived expertise is one of the determining factors of the attributes of the sender of negative e-WOM. A highly experienced, recognized source is more than an average consumer, and can be considered to be an expert. Negative information originating from these senders thus will be likely to have a greater impact as they will be perceived by consumers as reliable, and their message as high-quality and useful (Sweeney et al., 2014.)

Beyond general expertise, a sender's actual experience with a focal product/service/brand is equally important. Assessing the object and extent of a sender's discontent can help consumers evaluate to what extent the negative details present in a given negative e-WOM pertain to a given case, or, conversely, to a sustained experience with the brand. If the description is specific, it will more likely pertain to a given case, while if it is perceived as pertaining to a sustained experience, it will likely increase the credibility of the negative e-WOM (Laczniak et al., 2001).

According to Wangenheim (2005), consumers dissatisfied with quality are more likely to engage in negative e-WOM than those who are dissatisfied with price. The relationship between level of satisfaction and the quantity of generated e-WOM is U-shaped, that is, the more consumers are (dis)satisfied, the more e-WOM they will generate (Godes – Mayzlin, 2004; Litvin et al., 2008; Melián-González et al., 2013).

As Schneider and Bowen (1999) argue, most consumers range from moderately satisfied to moderately dissatisfied, which levels do not entail larger amounts of generated e-WOM. However, if an organization engages in the development of a product or service, that will bring about new, unexpected features. When met, these attributes may trigger additional satisfaction as well as an above average emotional charge from the consumer. In time however, that very function can move from being a delighter to a satisfier and later to being a dissatisfier (i.e. an elementary product

requirement). A product or service then failing to meet consumer-expected dissatisfiers may lead to consumer dissatisfaction and potentially to consumer outrage. These extreme cases of delight or outrage will, in turn, lead to more intensive e-WOM activity (Csordás, 2015).

Assessing the sender's motivation is crucial when evaluating negative e-WOM. Even though these motivations are similar to those presented at the motivations for joining virtual communities, a particularity of the motivations behind generating e-WOM is that they can not only be derived from an individual or social purpose, but also pertaining to an organization.

The importance of the study of perceived motivations behind a sender's motivations of generating negative e-WOM is highlighted by the fact that if a consumer perceives external motivations behind a sender's message, than they may assume that the issue was caused by the company. If, inversely, they perceive internal motivation (e.g. presence of interjections), then they may assume that the information received is rather subjective and therefore lacking of support (Chang – Wu, 2014).

According to Wetzer et al. (2007), and Verhagen et al. (2013), the ventilation of unpleasurable experiences is the strongest motivation behind engaging in e-WOM. Venting may help people to deal with (i.e. "let go of") negative consumption experiences, and hence to reduce stress and anxiety. Venting can help express emotions such as anger, frustration, irritation, regret, or insecurity. These may be caused for instance by undesirable consumption situations generated by others that could have been avoided, by the failed realization of a goal expected from an act of consumption, by the unforeseen need of extra effort in the achieving of a target, or by negative externalities occurred during the achievement of a goal. Frustrated consumers may also share e-WOM to take revenge on the company. This, however, equally affects the quality of the information transmitted this way, and most consumers can easily filter through such opinions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Verhagen et al, 2013; Wetzer et al., 2007).

Wetzker et al. (2007) propose that consumers may also engage in negative e-WOM to seek advice, support, or solutions from the company or the community in connection with an issue.

Consumers may also provide negative e-WOM during a comparison of their actual and prior consumption experiences where negative e-WOM will be a channel of reducing the cognitive dissonance pertaining to the perceived differences of quality between the two (Wangenheim, 2005; Wetzer et al., 2007).

Altruism can also be a motive of negative e-WOM. In these cases, individuals share to help or warn others (Litvin et al., 2008). It is also possible that a consumer share negative e-WOM in order to encourage the development of an organization (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Aside from conveying consumer experiences, one's motives to engage in negative e-WOM can also include various forms of self-representation. This can be considered a form of exhibitionism, where the information shared is primarily aimed at the representation of one's identity and role within a community, and/or at the aim of altering this role. According to the results by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Wetzer et al., (2007), signaling one's expertise can contribute to improve their reputation and, hence, power within a community.

Another case where information content is relegated to a secondary concern is the motive of entertaining others. Here, the sender of an information primarily aims to reduce social distance and strengthen their relationship with other consumers (Verhagen et al., 2013; Wangenheim, 2005; Wetzer et al., 2007). In these cases, the sender might not even have actual consumption experience and draw on information and impressions received from others (Markos-Kujbus et al., 2014). Sharing non-real experiences in e-WOM is harmful in several ways. On one hand, it increases the amount of information available, which can lead to information overload. On the other hand, such information may hinder the credibility and reliability of other available opinions, for readers might project their attitude onto other opinions.

Contents of negative e-WOM

The content structure of messages can affect the perceived credibility of a message, which is all the more true for negative e-WOM (Chang – Wu, 2014).

Senders often formulate negative e-WOM messages in such ways that they contain more personal details (Sweeney et al., 2012). This increased amount of detail about the sender may reinforce perceived similarity and can trigger an increased consumer confidence in the sender and in the credibility of the message (see chapter 3.7.). Negative e-WOM can equally be characterized by richer emotional content (Sweeney et al., 2014). This may contribute to decrease the perceived distance between sender and receiver and, again, to positively affect a message's perceived credibility. Extreme (negative) emotions in negative e-WOM can, however, diminish the perceived rationality and information value, and hence, credibility of a message (Chang – Wu, 2014; Kim – Gupta, 2012).

The proportion of negative statements in a review as a whole is equally an important dimension. According to Chiou et al. (2013), the presence of negative information in a message increases this latter's persuasiveness. Two-sided opinions (i.e. those that contain both positive and negative arguments) have a greater impact on consumers. Indeed, a small amount of negative information appearing in a review which is, altogether, positive, is a sign that the product/service in question might not be perfect,

but it is, nevertheless, of good quality (Jensen et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2013). Negative pieces of information might therefore appear in generally positive environments, thereby contributing to the perceived credibility of the positive arguments (Doh – Hwang, 2009).

Schindler and Bickart (2012) question the effect of two-sided reviews, as they find no statistical evidence about the optimal proportion of negative evaluative statements and message value, i.e. about whether positive reviews should contain negative elements. Previous studies have shown that positive e-WOM is far more common than negative e-WOM. Consumers, moreover, prefer unique and revealing details to generic reviews containing widely available information (East et al., 2008).

The perceived utility of negative e-WOM to consumers is not universal. Receivers in the case of services, utilitarian and experience products were shown to perceive negative e-WOM as more useful (Chen – Lurie, 2013; Verhagen et al., 2013). This is justified by the fact that services and experiential products have low trialability, where available consumer opinions are an important, and sometimes single source of information.

In the case of credence products and services[2], negative e-WOM proved to be more reliable when a consumer has stronger ties with the sender (Verhagen et al., 2013; Chen – Lurie, 2013). Provided that in these cases the consumer is unable to evaluate a product even after the act of consumption, assessing the information provided by the sender is even more difficult. Moreover, such opinions have little or no comparability with each other, hence the importance for consumers of information received from trustworthy people closer to them. Indeed, trust in the person will be projected to the credibility of information received from them.

The receiver of negative e-WOM

Consumers tend to consult several negative opinions, including potential reactions to negative reviews. In the process, they compare the available information, and check for consistency as a result of which they aim to determine the underlying motive behind the existence of the negative e-WOM (Laczniak et al., 2001; Lapinksi – Rimal, 2005 in. Chang – Wu, 2014). If they conclude that more reviews support a negative experience detailed in a first opinion, they will be more likely to attribute the problem to the organization (and the related product or service's inherent quality). If, on the other hand, few or no additional reviews support an original negative opinion, consumers will be likely to attribute the problem to the sender or the conditions (Laczniak et al., 2001; Lee – Cranage, 2012).

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[2] Credence attributes are quality features of a product or service that cannot be verified by direct experience (i.e. even after purchase or use), therefore consumers are unable to know with certainty if a credence attribute is actually present within a product (Bauer – Berács – Kenesei, 2007: 172).

The study by Lee and Cranage (2012) provides an illustration to this by finding that consensus in negative restaurant reviews affects how consumers evaluate the organization and their attitude towards the service. On the contrary, in low consensus situations, they were shown to be more likely to attribute the cause of a negative message to external or unforeseen factors and their attitude towards the service provider unchanged.

It is also important to highlight that perceived consensus on the negative details will positively affect a consumer review's credibility (Cheung et al., 2009).

As demonstrated beforehand, a number of factors related to the receivers influence the perceived attributes, process, and influence, of e-WOM. In the case of negative e-WOM, a receiver's prior experience and commitment to the brand stand out as factors of influence.

According to the study by Sweeney et al. (2014) consumers compare information in negative e-WOM to their own, prior experience and assess it accordingly. Moreover, the authors find that the influence of perceived similarity is higher in the case of negative e-WOM than in the case of positive e-WOM.

Prior experience is influenced by consumers' own experience with the brand, but also by the general familiarity of the brand on the market. Criticism of dominant brands on the market will more likely receive disproportionately higher consumer response than that of small brands that consumers are unfamiliar with. Familiarity may help consumers make negative judgments about brands more easily (East et al, 2007). This can be perceived as a "negative double jeopardy" (Csordás – Gáti, 2014; Krishnamurty – Kucuk, 2009), a sort of compensation of small brands in digital media for the phenomenon of double jeopardy on the market, i.e. for lower market share brands having both far fewer buyers and also lower brand loyalty.

Moreover, in the case of unfamiliar brands, negative information is likely to be more descriptive and diagnostic and thereby perceived as more impactful (Ahluwalia, 2002; East et al., 2008). Indeed, when no further relevant information or product experience is available, consumers can only rely on these pieces of e-WOM as a sole source of information.

Consumers' commitment to the brand is another decisive element when assessing negative e-WOM. Positive brand inclination toward a brand reduce the influence of negative e-WOM by making the consumer insensitive to it (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; East et al., 2008; Laczniak et al., 2001). During a shortened decision-making process driven by brand loyalty consumers will likely disregard negative e-WOM on their favorite brand, and, even if met, in order to reduce dissonance, they will more likely question its credibility (Chang – Wu, 2014). In contrast, in the case of lower-commitment brands, negative e-WOM was found to be far more effective (Laczniak et al., 2001).

The attributes of negative e-WOM are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. Differences between positive and negative e-WOM

	Positive e-WOM	**Negative e-WOM**
Sources	Consumer loyalty, trust in manufacturer, consumer engagement	Complaint, altruism, will to strike back, frustration, request for advice, search for solution, self-representation
Degree of influence	Questionable: - overall, and in general, more effective or - as effective as negative e-WOM	Questionable: - as effective as positive e-WOM or - more informative, diagnostic, greater effect on purchase decision
Degree of credibility	Positive-only is less credible	Supports the credibility of positive e-WOM
Diffusion	Slower	Faster
Major business impact	Consumer loyalty, interest, product acceptance	Influence on sales performance, categorization, and brand value

Source: own elaboration

3.8.2. Effectiveness and efficiency of positive and negative e-WOM

The effectiveness of positive and negative e-WOM is unclear, as a number factors may influence which of the two types of e-WOM is more effective.

(1)   According to Ahluwalia (2002) positive and negative information have a similar impact on attitudes when the brands are familiar. However, it is also apparent that this steady state stands only under certain moderating factors (here: brand awareness). Therefore, one cannot exclude the possibility that under different conditions, the opposing polarity of e-WOM will prevail as more effective.

(2)   In another approach, positive e-WOM altogether and generally can be considered as more effective (Sweeney et al., 2014). The concept of the "positivity effect" is related to this view. According to this, in the case of a consumer with negative prior expectations receiving positive information, the positive information will likely override the negative expectations, hence making positive e-WOM stronger and more effective than negative e-WOM.

(3)   Another approach views e-WOM as more effective as it is less common, it is generally more descriptive, diagnostic, and informative. In this case, a negativity bias[3] can be demonstrated, according to which consumers will attribute less importance to positive e-WOM than to negative e-WOM (Friske, 1980 in. Chen – Lurie, 2013; Chang – Wu, 2014). An explanation for this phenomenon is that consumers may have a wider

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[3] Negativity bias posits that people will always value positive information less than negative information. For example, the negative effect of a threat is higher than the positive effect of a reward (*Baumeister et al., 2001*).

variety of personal reasons for sharing positive experience. For instance, they can share a positive experience to feel better about a decision, i.e. to reduce dissonance. Another reason can be to communicate one's competence to others in the aim of increasing their reputation within the community. Considering that positive e-WOM is far more common, these messages are less and less perceived as valuable by consumers. Another value-diminishing factor is the perceived presence of self-motivation within the message. In these cases, consumers are less likely to attribute the negative product description to the product itself rather than to external causes (Chen – Lurie, 2013).

The relatively stronger effect of negative e-WOM compared to positive e-WOM is supported by a growing number of studies. Chen and Lurie (2013) provide an overview of the possible explanations of this phenomenon. According to the most common view which examines negativity bias on the frequency account, online positive reviews largely outnumber negative reviews (according to studies of the online sphere, to a ratio of 8 to 1 [Greenleigh, 2011]). This phenomenon can be traced back to social norms which increase the prevalence of positive information (both in the offline and online spaces), making positive reviews less influential (Chen – Lurie, 2013). The relative rarity of negative e-WOM increases its value and influence, a thereby, its impact (East et al., 2007).

Rarity also entails that negative information without emotional charge will be perceived as more informative, and will include more descriptive, diagnostic, and extreme (i.e. unconventional) details which are perceived as an advantage, compared to the commonplace positive reviews (East et al., 2007; Lee – Youn, 2009).

The frequency approach is supported by Pollac (2008), who finds that consumers are more likely to keep the memory of negative details for longer periods of time because they are rarer and thus more prominent.

According to the evolutionary approach of negative e-WOM, paying careful attention to negative information is a key to survival. On one hand, negative events are more consequential than positive ones, that is, a causal relationship is assumed between a problem and the negative experience detailed in the message (Sweeney et al., 2014). On the other hand, negative information can help differentiate between low- and high-quality product, and it can help consumers avoid a poor purchase decision and experience (Cheung et al., 2009; Pollach, 2008).

Negative e-WOM, however, may also bring about positive long-term outcomes under certain moderating circumstances. While, for instance, negative e-WOM can indeed dissuade consumers from purchasing a relatively unknown brand, the brand can still benefit from it on the long run. According to the study of Berger et al. (2010), while small brands with limited awareness initially have small market share, penetration, and loyalty, negative e-WOM can help, on the long run, increase their awareness and

therefore, sales. Indeed, information is filtered by consumers and on the long term, they will more likely remember the brand name instead of the context and direction of the information received previously.

3.8.3. Consumer and corporate effects of negative e-WOM

As seen beforehand, negative e-WOM stands out as a source of information for consumers perceive it as more substantial than positive e-WOM (Lee et al. 2008; Sen – Lerman, 2007). Negative e-WOM can also be perceived as a factor of authenticity by consumers, the lack of which negatively affects the perceived reliability of an opinion (Doh – Hwang, 2009). Its importance is equally highlighted by the fact that it may offer new, even exclusive details to consumers, that can help them assess the quality of a given product/service. Negative e-WOM altogether can help reduce information asymmetry, risks related to the buying decision, and reduce cognitive dissonance (Herr et al., 1991; Verhagen et al., 2013).

Negative opinions play a critical role in moderating consumer attitude towards the brand or the organization (Chang – Wu, 2014), although this attribute is influenced by the level of consumer involvement (Lee et al., 2008): the higher a consumer's involvement is, the less negative e-WOM will affect them. Negative e-WOM (in cases with lower consumer involvement) will likely entail a relatively higher attitude change. Subsequently, a negative attitude change may entail consumers turning away from the brand. This way, negative e-WOM can directly affect product decisions (Lee – Cranage, 2012; Fagerstrøm – Ghinea, 2011). A decrease in consumers' willingness to purchase may cause a decrease in sales, thus a decrease in turnover and market share for the organization. Negative consumer opinions can generally affect a brand or company's popularity, which can, in turn, lead to a decrease in reputation (Chevalier – Mayzlin, 2006; Cui et al., 2012; Sweeney et al., 2014).

In terms of brand effects, negative e-WOM was shown to have a strong effect on brand recall as it can assure a regular presence in consumer conversations to the brand. By its effect on brand attitudes, it can affect the practice of brand-building (Dellarocas, 2003). It also affects product and brand equity and brand evaluation (Bambauer-Sachse – Mangold, 2011). This effect can be reinforced by a lack of brand commitment, as consumers may be more responsive to negative e-WOM (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; East et al. 2008; Laczniak et al., 2001). As a result, consumers may rely more heavily on negative e-WOM in the case of unfamiliar brands (Ahluwalia, 2002). Moreover, in the case of less popular brands where consumer ties are limited, negative e-WOM communication is more effective. Moreover, if the consumer attributes the problem

appearing in the e-WOM to the brand or its performance, it will also affect brand equity (Laczniak et al., 2001).

Apart from consumer involvement, other circumstances affect the effectivity of negative e-WOM. For instance, negative e-WOM is ineffective when a message is internally or externally inconsistent which might confuse the consumer, thereby decreasing the perceived credibility of the message and leading to the consumer seeking for alternative sources of information (Chang – Wu, 2014).

4. Summary – Conceptual framework of the dissertation

A graphic overview of the theoretical foundations of the dissertation and relational structure thereof is presented in Figure 7. As mentioned in the introduction, the final aim of the dissertation is to provide a business-oriented analysis of the potential of e-WOM as a marketing communication channel.

The framework of study is provided by virtual communities wherein social aspects and roles fundamentally affect communication between consumers and whose channels also include e-WOM.

The e-WOM phenomenon was then redefined based on the available literature and e-WOM interpreted as a form of social influence, and communication that takes place between consumers. In its process, the sender (source) of an e-WOM message – who is either a past, a current, or a potential stakeholder from the organization's perspective – transmits predominantly verbal stimuli towards the audience. In the process, verbal stimuli can also be complemented or supplemented completely by visual and/or audiovisual stimuli. The stimuli can be any positive, neutral or negative statement about a product, service, brand, organization, or individual. These stimuli are available on the internet to both consumers and organizations.

In order for e-WOM to become a corporate tool, it is necessary to explore the underlying dimensions of its process. During this process, it is necessary to differentiate between positive and negative e-WOM as they show different effect mechanism, with different influencing factors. Among the determining factors, content dimensions, neglected so far in the literature, are deemed as most prominent and thus will provide a framework for the present dissertation's empirical study.

Figure 7. Theoretical framework of the dissertation
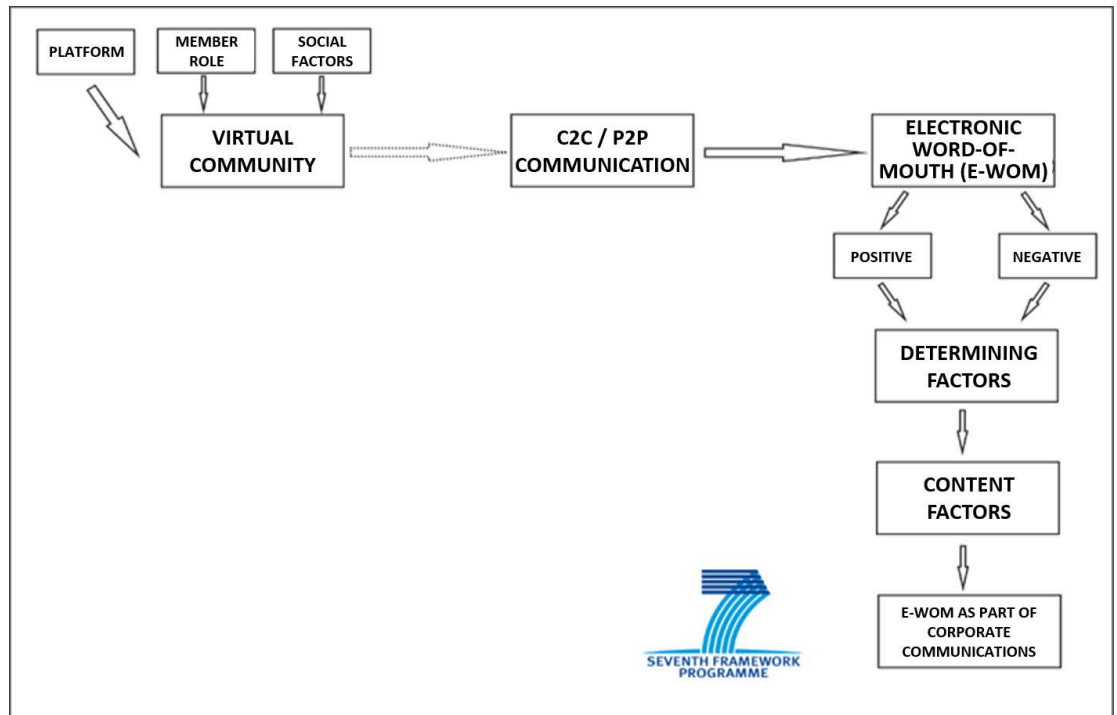
Source: own elaboration

Part II. Empirical research

5. Research methodology

5.1. Aim of the research

Consumers' role has changed in the new, virtual sphere: they are no longer simple, silent recipients of marketing communications messages, but are "more active, participative, resistant, activist, loquacious, social, and communitarian" (Kozinets, 1999: 261). Further changes even more relevant to marketing have equally occurred: the focus of communication in the dominant media environment has shifted from mass communication (one-to-many) to more personal forms of interaction (consumer-to-consumer, peer-to-peer). These interactions, can no longer be controlled as easily by organizations leading, in turn, to a shift in the way the audiences are to be approached: "the goal is not to control the information, but to use it wisely" (Kozinets, 1999: 263). Virtual communities and consumer communications within are therefore a growingly important area of corporate marketing communications, provided that e-WOM affects not only consumers, but also organizations through them. If the organization accepts that the online consumer who expresses their opinion in the virtual space is a "proactive actor of society, than a kind of future demand can be explored through the study of the [given online] space" (Dörnyei – Mitev, 2010: 62)., i.e. the virtual community and the there appearing e-WOM.

E-WOM has a considerably expanded role in services, as it can contribute to reduce consumers' perceived risk related to uncertainty, itself arising from the essential nature of services (Mangold et al., 1999). This decision-support function is particularly important in the case of high-value services, such as hospitality. Indeed, in the case of hotel reservations, online reviews have become the most important source of information for consumers (Xie et al., 2014). Our research therefore focuses on e-WOM related to services.

As seen in the theoretical overview of the present dissertation, e-WOM is not only a form of feedback but also a determining marketing communication channel for organizations (Cheung – Thadani, 2012). However, in order for them to "use it wisely", organizations ought to gather the deepest level of understanding possible about the channel.

Taking the above into consideration, the main aim of the present research is to examine how communication in a consumer-to-consumer context (i.e. e-WOM) can be included among an organization's marketing (communications) tools. To this end, our study

focuses on the information value of consumer reviews for organizations by exploring the characteristics of the content aspects of e-WOM. The dissertation's scientific goal is to contribute to the marketing literature on e-WOM.

The research questions were determined in the light of the above aims. It is, however, also important to note that the present research is an exploratory analysis (because, among others, of the variability of the environment and consumer behaviors relative to it – as they themselves are continually redefining their role in the digital sphere [Mitev – Horváth, 2008]) that is aimed, ultimately, at providing further ground for investigation of the virtual space. As such, during the operationalization of the research questions, we consciously omit formulating prior, concrete expectations as, unlike quantitative studies, the purpose of the present research is not to test hyotheses.

5.2. Research questions

Our main empirical research is part of a work package of the Cre8tv.eu research project supported by a grant of the 7th Framework Programme (FP7) of the European Commission entitled "Consumers & Digital Media: Patterns of Participation in Production & Sharing". Within this work package, our research is aimed at mapping the marketing communications opportunities of consumer-generated content. We wish to contribute to this research direction by answering the following research questions.

RQ1: How can e-WOM appearing in a virtual community (TripAdvisor) can be characterized as a content type?

The main research question is aimed at investigating and characterizing the dimensions of e-WOM related to associated with hotel accommodations found on TripAdvisor. The question was further refined in the second phase of the research, to examine how e-WOM found on hotels' TripAdvisor can become valuable information for these establishments.

Virtual communities are meaningful in both a social and a commercial aspect: they act as a communication platform offering, on one hand, a space for members to interact, and on the other, a commercial and marketing platform for companies to directly interact with their consumers (Tseng et al., 2014). Virtual communities where consumers can share their experiences may be key for companies to building loyalty, while rating systems may be used in a strategic manner to emphasize consumer experiences but may also to be included into corporate communication messages (Pan – Zhang, 2011).

Therefore, gaining a deeper understanding of virtual communities provides multifaceted opportunities to hotels. The interface provided by travel ranking website TripAdvisor can be considered a special virtual community. It is equally the most

commonly researched website in the topic of e-WOM, and therefore can be deemed an appropriate sampling site for the present research.

The effects of e-WOM as well as the attributes of the sender and receiver of e-WOM are well researched areas of the topic. However, as seen in the Introduction, content as a focal topic has been left in the background so far in relevant research projects. Considering that e-WOM is also a communication process, the contents of a message are also to be studied in depth in order for the whole process to become more transparent, and thereby, to be used by organizations as a marketing communication tool. The findings by Pan and Zhang (2011) equally support the emphasized role of content by pointing out that because of the lack of traditional social ties, members in virtual communities are often forced to concentrate exclusively on the contents of a message to evaluate the quality of e-WOM.

RQ2: How can positive and negative e-WOM as distinctive content types appearing in a virtual community (TripAdvisor) can be characterized?
This research question is aimed at investigating the attributes of the contents of positive and negative consumer opinions appearing on TripAdvisor based on the content dimensions revealed in the theoretical part of the dissertation. Testing these dimensions and unveiling new, potential dimensions is equally a related research goal.

It became apparent in the theoretical framework that positive and negative e-WOM have different attributes and effects. It is therefore necessary to examine the two extremes of e-WOM messages separately.
The literature review equally showed that the quantitative dimensions of e-WOM are a well-researched domain, while very little research is reported on the attributes of its qualitative (i.e. content) dimensions. It is therefore appropriate to investigate the dimensions revealed in the theoretical review, such as content, accuracy, format, atemporality, credibility, objectivity, sufficiency, reliability, relevance, consistency, intelligibility, completeness (e.g. Cheung et al., 2009; Senecal – Nantel, 2004, Schindler – Bickart, 2005), or the cognitive and affective dimensions of messages (Yap et al., 2013), or their style and format (Pollach, 2008).

Even though the majority of research on e-WOM focus on textual consumer opinions (e.g. Cheung – Thadani, 2012; Ludwig et al., 2013), we equally deem necessary, in a holistic view, to extend our analysis to the context of consumer opinions, including additional information such as the title of opinions and consumer illustrations (photos) attached to the opinion.

RQ3: What are the expectations about e-WOM of the various stakeholders in terms of content?

   a) **What are companies' fundamental expectations from e-WOM as a content type?**
   b) **What are the most important decision-support contents for consumers?**

The primary aim of this research question is to investigate what the participants in e-WOM who receive a message (be they consumers, readers of an opinion, but also hotels) consider as important information.

Both companies and consumers face a growing mass of e-WOM on the platforms of review sites such as TripAdvisor. In order for us to be able to address the main research question of the dissertation, it is also necessary to study the various sets of information selection criteria used by stakeholders. In this respect, it is not the effect of e-WOM that is put into the focus of the present study but to investigate which content dimensions do appear as expected, elementary requirements and which of them as value-added dimensions. According to our prior assumptions, a comparison of the consumer and organizational sides will outline the differences in expectations between the two stakeholders, thereby providing a value-increasing insight on e-WOM.

RQ4: In what ways do authentic and (supposedly) manipulated positive or negative e-WOM differ?

The theoretical review showed a supplementary possibility for refining the classification of e-WOM, namely the organicity of a message, i.e. whether it was generated by a genuine consumer or by a consumer "hired" as part of an organization's marketing communication activity, or by an individual involved in the organization's activities. In order for organizations to be able to fully exploit e-WOM as a marketing communication tool, it is imperative to be able to tell authentic e-WOM from manipulated e-WOM.

To this end, we deem it necessary to investigate whether stakeholders consider the phenomenon of manipulation appearing on TripAdvisor as a problem, and also to study the strategies along which they manage to filter out messages that they regard as manipulated, and whether these strategies verify the results found in the literature (Banerjee – Chua, 2014; Bambauer-Sachse – Mangold, 2013; Hu et al., 2012). Because of the specificities of the dissertation's research framework, we can only investigate the perception of manipulation, as no reliable information is available about the actual source of opinions included in the sample.

RQ5: How do online rating sites become virtual communities?

The primary aim of this research question is to investigate whether community dimensions can be found in e-WOM appearing on TripAdvisor, and if yes, what are their effects on the perception of the content of that e-WOM.

Factors related to virtual communities that influence content are, among others, related to social roles appearing within the community (Vilpponen et al., 2006). As such, various content producer roles are social dimensions of virtual communities that are assumed to emerge, making the evaluation and classification of content based on general utility possible.

5.3. Research methodology

Qualitative methods were used throughout the dissertation's research process. This methodological approach was selected because of the emphatically exploratory nature of the research, with a goal to observe the effects of actual behaviors in a turbulent environment rather than test stakeholders' perceptions. Moreover, the specific attributes of e-WOM can equally justify a qualitative-oriented study focusing on the social aspects of the phenomenon. Indeed, one can best "unveil the cognitive representations" (Szvetelszky, 2010: 109) of communities using this methodology. It thus contributes to the deeper understanding of consumers' thoughts, opinions, attitudes, and intent, while the researcher is allowed to integrate the given community and environment without disturbing its operation (Hair et al., 2008).

A qualitative methodology is also justified by the fact that, even though studies on traditional e-WOM mainly rely on quantitative questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and diaries (Szvetelszky, 2010), quanitative methods have prevailed in the study of e-WOM so far (Table 9). Moreover, most prior studies in the area of the main research subject of the present dissertation, namely the study of the content of online consumer reviews have equally employed quantitative techniques (Mudambi – Schuff, 2010).

Table 9. Major research methods used in the investigation of e-WOM

qualitative only – one qualitative method used	mixed methods	quantitative only – one quantitative method used	quantitative only – several quantitative methods used
qualitative content analysis (e.g. Yang – Peterson, 2003; Robson et al., 2013; Toder-Alon et al., 2014)	in-depth interview and online survey (e.g. Robinson et al., 2012; Tseng et al., 2014)	online/offline survey (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; East et al., 2007; Cheung et al., 2008; Doh - Hwang, 2009; Chu - Kim, 2011; Cole et al., 2011; Filieri - Mcleay, 2013; Okazaki et al., 2013; Verhagen et al., 2013; Yap et al., 2013; Tseng et al., 2014)	online survey and quantitative content analysis (pl. Lee – Ma, 2012)
case study (Dellarocas, 2003; Pfeffer et al., 2014)	qualitative and quantitative content analysis (e.g. Jansen et al., 2009; Barreda –Bilgihan, 2013)	experiment (e.g. Park – Kim, 2008; Cheung et al., 2009; Hsieh et al., 2012; Kim – Gupta, 2012; Jensen et al., 2013; Kronrod – Danziger, 2013; Xie et al., 2014)	experiment, survey, content analysis (e.g. Schindler – Bickart, 2012)
focus group (e.g. Malbon, 2013)	netnography, in-depth interview, and online survey (e.g. Hung – Li, 2007)	quantitative content analysis (e.g. Chen – Xie, 2008; Mudambi – Schuff, 2010; Baek et al., 2012; Ludwig et al., 2013; Banerjee – Chua,2014)	
	online survey and qualitative content analysis (e.g. Goldsmith – Horowitz, 2006; Munzel – Kunz, 2013)	experiment and survey (e.g. Bambauer-Sachse – Mangold, 2013; Lee – Cranage, 2014; Yin et al., 2014)	
	online survey, in-depth interview (e.g. Meuter et al.,2013)	experiment and quantitative content analysis (pl. Chen – Lurie, 2013)	
	online experiment, focus group (e.g. Lee et al., 2008)		

Source: own elaboration

Quantitative methods are therefore wide-spread in the field of e-WOM research and theoretical saturation can be said to have been achieved with this methodology. It then becomes important to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of e-WOM, which can be facilitated by qualitative methods: they can contribute to understanding the process of consumer meaning creation related to their own social worlds (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Qualitative methods therefore contribute to understanding the world in the context of events and interactions (Maxwell, 2010). As such, this approach enables the researcher to investigate idiosyncratic consumer meanings and to gain a deeper insight into the background of the contents of consumer opinions.

A research using qualitative methods should, however, also take into account that the social phenomena it investigates are dynamic and ever-changing, making it impossible to reproduce the study a given momentum (Fielding, 2012).

Then, in order to ensure the quality of qualitative data, data triangulation will be used in the research process (Denzin, 1989 in. Mitev, 2006). However, it is essential for a

rigorous qualitative study design to integrate various methods (Griggs, 1987). In the same line, methodological triangulation is ensured in the present dissertation by the framework of a netnography, and within, the complementary use of content analysis, in-depth expert interviews and focus groups, which process meets the requirements of a multi-method approach (Brodie et al., 2011; Bell – Bryman, 2007; Kozinets, 2002). The relevance of the chosen methodology in the context of the present dissertation's research questions is detailed in the next part.

5.3.1. Mixed methodology

Traditionally, one refers to a research design as mixed-method when it includes both quantitative and qualitative elements, although, according to Fielding (2012: 125), "there is no logical reason why a study combining purely qualitative or purely quantitative methods could not be regarded as 'mixed methods'". Indeed, the application of mixed methods "provides a rationale for hypotheses/theories/guiding assumptions to compete and provide alternatives" (Niaz, 2008: 64 in. Fielding, 2012: 125), which requirement can also be met by using purely qualitative methods. A mixed-method approach can also be considered as the combined use of a focal, or core research phase and that of a supplementary phase, where "the supplementary component provides explanation or insight within the context of the core component" (Morse, 2010: 484).

According to Morse (2010) a QUAL-qual mixed method design is characterized by a standard qualitative method as a core component, and another qualitative research method as a supplementary component which is aimed at answering minor questions that emerge during the core research. The supplementary research typically consists of a research strategy that separate data from the core component's sample, but at the same time, it is often incomplete as a standalone method (e.g. it may use data that are not saturated). A qualitative mixed method design is supported by the fact that netnography, used here as a principal methodology, can be considered a typically QUAL-qual research methodology (Kozinets, 2002).

Based on the above, the present research can be described as a → qual (content analysis) qual (in-depth and focus group interviews) → QUAL (content analysis) project, with the core component being a content analysis within a netnography, while the supplementary components consist of in-depth interviews and focus groups.

The use of qualitative methods within a mixed method approach makes it possible for the researcher to come closer to the study's subjects, and thereby provide a more in-depth understanding of the meaning of the researched factors of social change. It is also appropriate to use a mixed-method design for it integrates various viewpoints, thus allowing a greater reliability of results (McKim, 2015). Moreover, the research

combines and boosts the strength of each used method while minimizing their individual weaknesses (Creswell – Clark, 2007).

Mixed-research designs can be characterized along three dimensions (Leech – Onwuegbuzie, 2009): (a) level of mixing (partially mixed vs. fully mixed); (b) time orientation (concurrent vs. sequential); (c) emphasis of approaches (equal vs. dominant status). Based on the above, the present research can be characterized as a qualitative-focused mixed research, where sequentially used approaches are emphasized equally. The research design is illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Research structure of the dissertation
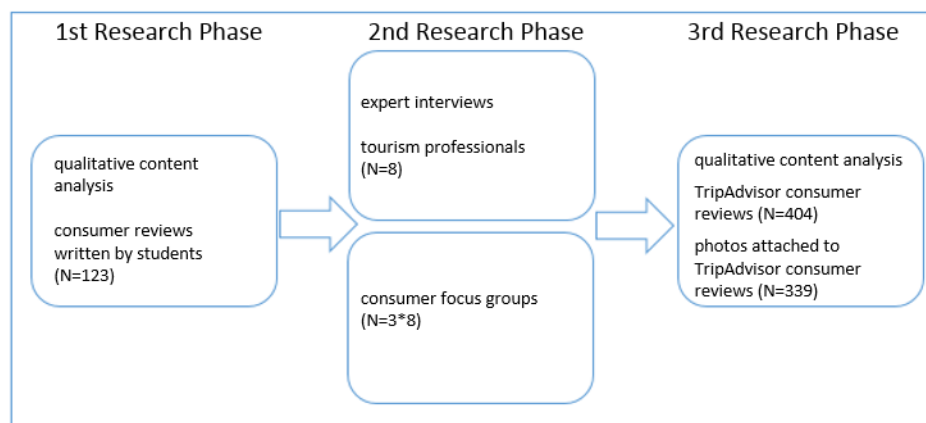
Source: own elaboration

5.3.2. Netnography

The core research of the present dissertation is a netnography (or webethnography, or online, or virtual ethnography [Prior – Miller, 2012]). A netnography is a qualitative method which "adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through computer-mediated communications" (Kozinets, 2006: 130). While according to Langer and Bechman (2005) content analysis is the research method to apply when proceeding to a netnography, Kozinets (2006) argues that netnography "should never be tied too closely with any one particular method", and as such it "encompasses multiple methods, approaches and analytic techniques" (Kozinets, 2006: 132).

Ethnographers are required to keep an open mind during the whole research process (Fetterman, 2010), as this is the only way they can achieve to explore and describe the phenomenon in question. Netnography as a method and philosophy has the advantage of offering a platform where researchers can access consumer discussions without the need to interfere, and a platform with a variety of different kinds of data available (e.g. textual, visual, audiovisual contents). Another advantage is that the available consumer

discussions are genuine, often spontaneous, while the anonymity of participation for users can equally bring about intimate, emotion-rich responses (Puri, 2009).

According to Hesse-Biber and Griffin (2013) and Prior and Miller (2012), using computer-mediated technologies in mixed methods research is beneficial, as
- they allow the identification of and access to special social groups,
- a large number of individuals can be reached,
- more sensitive data can be collected as anonymity brings about more daring consumer manifestations,
- research conducted here can be cost-effective,
- research conducted here can be time-effective,
- greater willingness to participate can be achieved,
- it is a constantly evolving environment,
- expression of the emotions is more and more precise (e.g. emoticons, punctuation, slang etc.)

At the same time, there are also risks associated to these technologies as data sources:
- the identity of respondents is not always identifiable, often dubious (e.g. consumer opinions written by companies),
- gathering information from non-verbal cues is impossible on these platforms, which makes the interpretation of the real intended message harder,
- the phenomena of anonymity and invisibility bring about ethical issues,
- results obtained are hardly generalizable as it is a constantly evolving environment,
- the veracity of data is questionable, results are not representative,
- contextual and cultural factors are unknown leading to the possibility of misinterpretation.

Because of the above risks, a methodological triangulation is necessary to increase the validity of results related to the observation of online spaces (Flick, 2009). This also entails the necessity of involving alternative sources of data. Most often, this alternative source can be interviews with members of the selected community (Prior – Miller, 2012). In this logic, the dissertation's core research is a netnography, and within it, a content analysis. As a supplemental method to provide external validity, interviews were conducted with members of the focal community. However, consumers are not the only stakeholders who can be considered as member of the focal community, so can be tourism professionals.

As mentioned beforehand, online communities are at the focus of netnographic studies. This approach, however, can lead to a certain degree of research myopia, as it can lead to overlook the current extension of the studied community to – for example – external

platforms. Prior and Miller (2012) therefore suggest that the approach of the netnographic study be defined along the peculiar attributes of the focal community (Table 10).

Table 10. Recommended research context and approach for netnography

	recommended netnographic approach		
	offline	**hybrid**	**online** (e.g. virtual world)
functionality of page	simple	medium	complex
social coverage	online and offline	online and offline	online only
richness of publicly available online data	low to medium	medium to rich	very rich
probability of occurrence of genuine emotions	low to medium	moderate	high
likelihood of appearance of genuine personality	high	moderate	low

Source: Prior – Miller (2012: 513)

Based on the above, in the present netnography, the features of TripAdvisor as a focal platform make it necessary to employ a hybrid netnographic approach and to proceed to offline interviews with stakeholders besides monitoring online contents.

Kozinets (2002: 63) defines the process of netnography with the following steps: (1) cultural entrée, (2) gathering and analyzing data, (3) ensuring trustworthy interpretation, (4) conducting ethical research, and (5) providing opportunities for culture member feedback.

(1) Research questions are set in the cultural entrée phase (see Chapter 5.2.).
The identification of relevant communities ensues. Even though "[a]nywhere there is online consumer activity and interaction, there are interesting sources of data for consumer and marketing researchers and the potential for netnography to reveal insights about online communal consumer culture, practices and meanings" (Kozinets, 2006: 131), it is advisable to limit data collection to online spaces best fit to answer the research question. In the present work, online spaces at the focus of the study were reduced to online rating systems, and among them, to online sites dealing with hotels.
Sites aggregating consumer opinions about hotels can be categorized into two larger groups (Levy et al., 2013):
- First, online travel agencies (e.g. Booking.com) aggregate lodging options, provide booking services, but also host user-generated opinions.
- Second, online review specialists (e.g. TripAdvisor) exclusively provide consumer reviews.

This latter category served as the basis of the present research, with special attention to travel ranking website TripAdvisor. Multiple arguments support the choice of this platform. First, members of online review systems can form a virtual community (Pan – Zhang, 2011), and can thus be observed in a netnographic study. Second, such websites play an increasingly important part as information sources for consumers (Pollach, 2008). Third, it offers a large amount of consumer-generated, personal information and feedback. The observation and study of these offers a "way in" for the researcher to the lives of these members and thereby to learn more about them (Kozinets, 2006).

The methods are equally chosen during this stage. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) several methods and techniques ought to be employed: In this view, in this first research phase, we focus on content analysis, and in a second phase, we employ focus group, and in-depth expert interviews with selected members. In a third, and concluding phase, we proceed to another content analysis. (For a review of each employed method, see Chapters 5.3.3. and 5.3.4.)

Finally, the level of researcher participation needs to be determined. For the sake of the present research, an observational netnography was chosen. At this level of involvement, the researcher is an outsider and an insider at once (Dörnyei – Mitev, 2010). The joint management of the subsequent emic and etic considerations make it possible for the researcher to "grasp insider evidence from the outside" (Borsányi:1980: 80 in Dörnyei – Mitev, 2010). We expect that this approach will lead to the possibility to investigate internal, or even tacit attributes such as psychological needs. We equally expect to be able to unveil hidden social networks and structures, such as sense of community at the center of community cohesion, which would otherwise stay partially hidden to outsiders. These latter factors fundamentally affect the possibilities of interpretation of the context of user motivations.

This level of involvement is limited to a minimum level of interactions, including contacting selected members and a low level of researcher participation (e.g. personal interaction during in-depth interviews). This interaction, however, is a necessity for the development of a sufficient level of trust with the interviewees (trust being one of the most important factors to be considered in qualitative research [Szvetelszky, 2010]), and to ensure the efficiency of personal interviews with members. On the other hand, an excessive level of involvement would lead, in the author's opinion, to biased results.

(2) In the next step, data is collected and analyzed. A first step towards this is to determine the relevant virtual community to be studied. In choosing the relevant virtual community, Kozinets (2002: 63) recommends that it (a) be more focused and relevant to the research question, (b) have a noticeable frequency of posted content, (c) have a larger number of discrete message posters, (d) contain more detailed or rich data, and (e) have the most relevant between-member interactions. Based on this system of criteria, the platform and community of TripAdvisor was chosen as a focal source of data. The community meets Kozinets' (2002) criteria, as it carries large amounts of information, and the number of contributors and interactions is growing steadily. Although user-generated reviews offer a varying detail of information, but some of them can also be extremely detailed. Between-member interactions can be categorized as medium.

To narrow down and identify sources, we proceeded to a directed sampling based on the above criteria. Directed sampling is a non-probability sampling technique which can be effective in the case of a relatively focused research framework. It can be used when the role and potential contribution of informants is more important for answering the research question than the representativity of the study(Lincoln – Guba, 1985; Wallendorf – Belk, 1989 in Kozinets, 2002).

The next step is the actual data collection. Based on Kozinets (2006), data collection can have three different sources: communications within the virtual community, the researcher's observations, and interviews with members which, (in the present research, corresponds to the second phase).

Relevant topics for the sake of the present research were defined as follows:
  - First phase: analysis of consumer reviews destined to be published on TripAdvisor written by university students, users of TripAdvisor.
  - Third phase: Within TripAdvisor's platform, sampling was narrowed down to consumer opinions about hotels, further refined to four-star establishments situated in the city of Budapest, Hungary. For policies applied during the systematic sampling process, see the description of research phase no. 3.

Based on the principle of theoretical saturation (Glaser – Strauss, 1967) data collection has to be continued until no new data (here: point of view or opinion) appear.

The systematic collection of relevant data was followed by data processing using the method of content analysis. Coding was performed using QSR NVivo 9 qualitative data analysis software. During coding the coding system is open, flexible, and variable. Considering that information diffusion and consumer

motivations do not reflect a static state and vary in time, context, but also in intensity and orientation (Ryan – Deci, 2000). For this reason, a number of predefined code groups may vary at the effect of an emerging, determining factor. Based on the above, it is important to conduct a comprehensive and iterative study (Babbie, 2003).

(3) The reliability of interpretation was provided by the methodological triangulation, during which several qualitative methods were used. For a detailed description thereof, see Chapters 5.3.3. and 5.3.4.

(4) The next consideration the researcher needs to address is that of research ethics. This phase is essential not only to ensure satisfactory results but also to comply with privacy and data protection requirements (Kozinets, 2010). In this phase, one must determine the extent to which the researcher reveals themselves and their research goals to the focal virtual community, and the manner that users' manifestations and potential personal information will be treated during the research. In terms of research ethics, the present research involves a negligible need for self-revelation.

Although Langer and Bechman (2005: 197) argue that online consumer opinions are comparable to a "letter to the editor" in a newspaper, it is important to note that certain (even public) spaces are considered as private by the community (e.g. personal blogs written in the form of a diary – see e.g. Kozinets, 2006), and at the risk of losing members' trust, the researcher must not misuse thus gathered data. The researcher must therefore ensure full or partial anonymity to their sources (Kozinets, 2006).

(5) In a last stance, people who have been studied ought to be offered the possibility of feedback and, potentially, of raising concern (in either a personal or a written way). Member checks can also serve as a source of additional insights in the quest of answering the research question at best.

To ensure research validity, a triangulation of methods is used, and besides the core qualitative content analysis, the research questions are examined with the help of additional focus group studies and in-depth expert interviews.

5.3.3. Qualitative content analysis

According to Hoffman et al. (2012: 29), content analysis is "a flexible research method for analyzing texts and describing and interpreting the written artifacts of a society". This is supplemented by Babbie (2010: 333) who asserts that "content analysis is the

study of recorded human communications" and it is "particularly well suited to the study of communications and to answering the classic question of communications research". Cole (1988) considers content analysis in a more extended context, stating that beyond written text, verbal and visual communications can equally be analyzed by its means. Based on the above, content analysis was deemed particularly well-suited for the investigation of e-WOM as content, as it can be applied to the texts of consumer reviews as well as to photographs associated to them.

According to Babbie (2010), one of the major advantages of content analysis is related to its time- and cost-effectiveness. It also poses less risk to the researcher than other methods. Finally, it is an unobtrusive method, so the research does not affect the contents examined. Coding and analysis can be repeated any number of times making it relatively easy to increase research reliability. Researchers have a number of methods at their disposition during qualitative content analysis, ranging from impressionistic interpretations to highly systematic analyses of text-based data (Finfgeld – Connett, 2014).

According to Schreier (2012), the process of qualitative content analysis starts by defining the research questions. This step is followed by the selection of the pool of information that the analysis will be based on. The first phase of data analysis is to build a coding scheme. Then, after a phase of trial coding, the coding frame is evaluated and modified. This phase is followed by the main data analysis, and, finally, the interpretation of findings. Coding frames should include codes that are mutually exclusive (Forman – Damschroder, 2008).

The researcher can use either a deductive or an inductive approach during qualitative content analysis (see e.g. Elo – Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh – Shannon, 2005). In the inductive approach, the researcher does not have preconceived coding categories, only perceptions about the research problem at hand. In this case, therefore, data analysis begins with the study of raw data. This first immersion into the data will allow the first set of codes that will be used during later stages of the analysis to emerge. Thus, using this approach, the researcher proceeds from the specific towards the general. In contrast, the deductive approach involves a preexisting coding frame which is tested, refined, and expanded during content analysis. In this approach, the researcher proceeds from the general towards the specific.

The present research incorporates an inductive approach during the first, exploratory phase, and a deductive approach during the third phase. We thus first use an open coding in the research, then proceed to the testing, refining, and extension of the obtained codes.

The units of analysis of our content analysis are consumer opinions about hotels. More precisely, in the first research phase, consumer reviews written by a sample of students are analyzed, while in the third research phase, actual consumer reviews (and accompanying photos) from TripAdvisor about 4-star hotels in Budapest.

5.3.4. Interviews – Expert interviews and focus groups

According to Kozinets (2002), in-depth interviews are an adequate data source for the study of virtual communities. This method is equally supported by Bell and Bryman (2007) who argue that the results of data collection and coding ought to be used to refine theory.

According to King (1994), the goal of in-depth interviews is to make the research problem clear from the interviewee's point of view and thereby to help understand their way of thinking. In-depth interviews vary from informal discussions to more formal interviews, and can be unstructured, semi-structured or structured. The present research questions imply a semi-structured approach, as "interviews are a useful form of data collection because they allow you to explore the perspectives and perceptions of various stakeholders and publics" (Daymon – Holloway, 2002: 166). In-depth interviews are a fairly flexible methodology, as the interview guide can be adjusted according to the informants' responses (Bell, 2005; Wright – Crimp, 2000). Personal interviews equally have the advantage of allowing sensitive information (Daymon – Holloway, 2002) and other issues that would otherwise not be raised during a focus group (Bell, 2005) to surface. The interviews may support the results of the content analysis thereby providing additional validity (Maxwell, 1996) and credibility (Bryaman – Bell, 1997) to a(n otherwise not representative) qualitative research.

In the present research, in-depth expert interviews were employed. These are semi-structured interviews conducted with informants who possess professional expertise in the focal area (Littig – Pöchhacker, 2014). The approach requires that the researcher have an adequate knowledge of the area in question and thereby a role of quasi-expert. Expert interviews can be used for three purposes (Littig – Pöchhacker, 2014):
- Exploratory expert interviews are used to explore an ill-studied area.
- Systematizing expert interviews focus on the systematic discovery of the expert's experiential and professional knowledge, and thereby, on investigating a special target area.
- Theory-generating expert interviews aim to gain specialized knowledge building on the expert's professional activities and tacit knowledge. In other words, these interviews seek a deeper understanding of the structure of expert knowledge.

The present research employs systematizing expert interviews. During these we focus on informants' experience about e-WOM with the aim of providing an analytical foundation to the third research phase.

According to Walford (2007), however, interviews alone are insufficient sources of information to study the life of a community. In this perspective, a supplementary qualitative methodology, namely focus group interviews, was equally used. Focus groups allow participants to expand on each other's responses (Morgan – Spanish, 1984 in McKim, 2015), also allowing the researcher to collect multiple individual reactions simultaneously (Cyr, 2015). Cultural values and norms can equally be collected using this methodology (Kitzinger, 1995) as it allows for the reproduction of a community-like platform (Cyr, 2015). As such, focus groups allow for the deeper understanding of a phenomenon, social dynamic, individual opinion etc.

"Focus groups add a social dimension to verbal data in evaluation" (Ryan et al., 2014: 328) making them a form of group interview, or collective discussion – depending on the degree of control over the flow of ideas.

Ryan et al. (2014) identify three types of focus groups (Table 11), among which, in the present study, we opted for a hybrid approach.

Table 11. Types of focus groups

	Scoping focus group	**Theory-building focus group (Hybrid approach)**	**Narrative focus group**
Theoretical perspective	Individualistic social psychology	Mixed	Social constructionist
Purpose or use	Pretest, hypothesis generating	Build mid-range theory, constructs	Fill in gaps—how and why questions, empowerment
Type of information	Stable personal opinion	Mixed: opinion / experiences	Social and/or tacit knowledge
Role of participant interaction	Stimulate and elaborate personal opinion	Generate mix of personal opinion and collective experiences	Facilitate collective knowledge building
Structure	Standardized, replicable, directive, predetermined	Mixed with semistructured conversation	Nonstandardized, variant, emergent, spontaneous, natural conversation
Data analysis	Content-oriented analysis	May mix or merge interaction with content; grounded theory analysis	Narrative analysis

Source: Ryan et al, 2014: 332.

Focus groups supply information on three levels: the individual, the group, and the interaction (Cyr, 2015). The analysis of data on the individual level can be used during triangulation to supplement other methods. Group-level data can be primarily used to pre-test various measuring tools, support their validity. Finally, data yielded through the interaction of individuals can be used at the exploratory level.

In the present research, the analysis of data on the individual level is aimed at acquiring codes and supplementary results for the first content analysis phase. At the level of interactions, data analysis may contribute to acquiring new codes for the content analysis to be performed in the third research phase.

The scientific community can be said to have a certain aversion to focus groups following the widespread view that they are an easy and quick solution to a deeper investigation of a problem (Liamputtong, 2011 in Cyr, 2015). Another disadvantage of focus group studies is the unknown social context of participants with varying backgrounds, which might downgrade the possible relationships between the participants, and the larger social context and structures, which both essentially affect the dynamics of consumers' opinions and points of view (Hollander, 2004).

The use of a focus group study is supported by the fact that it is important to acquire a deeper understanding of the interactions related to the contents of e-WOM, as well as of relevant consumer experiences (Sweeney et al., 2008).
Identifying which content elements of consumer opinions do actually affect consumer decisions arises as a research problem. Focus groups may help provide insight to this issue, as they provide a direct platform to holistically assess selected consumers' experiences and opinions and thereby to gain a deeper understanding of the context of the research problem (Malbon, 2012).

6. First research phase – Exploratory study: Student opinions

6.1. Cultural entrée

In the first research phase university students were asked to write (in the style of a review destined to be published on TripAdvisor) about their latest satisfying or dissatisfying experience related to accommodations during their travels. Participating students (full-time, and correspondence 2nd-, and 3rd-year students attending Marketing communications, and Media vehicles and advertising classes) received bonus points for their efforts.

Following data cleansing 123 opinions were included into the sample, out of which 67 dealt with a positive and 56 with a negative experience[4]. This ratio of positive vs. negative comments may lead to a bias in the results as the normal rate closer to 8:1 among online user comments (Greenleigh, 2011).
The following table gives an overview of the sample properties:

avg. length of pos. opinions (chars.)	avg. length of pos. opinions (no. of words)	avg. length of neg. opinions (chars.)	avg. length of neg. opinions (no. of words)	male vs. female (%)	avg. age (yrs)
752	105	859	124	27:73	21

The difference in length between positive and negative opinions supports the general experience that negative user reviews tend to be longer than positive ones (East et al., 2008). Participant characteristics, even though a direct result of the sampling procedure, may further bias the validity of results.
The aim of this first research phase was to contribute to shaping the codes to be used during the third research phase, and to test the validity of the study's main research questions.

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[4] During the presentation of the results of the first research phase, responses presenting a satisfying experience are considered positive e-WOM while responses dealing with a dissatisfying experience are considered negative e-WOM.

6.2. Data collection

Code formation during the first research phase was inductive. As the study was aimed to be an exploratory research phase, no prior codes were set. In this perspective, the following, general codes were drawn from the literature review to guide the subsequent first testing of validity and understandability:

(1) Appearance of the dimensions of services marketing, i.e. which service elements are mentioned in the review in connection with the organization's marketing activity. Which factors related to services marketing do appear in the review and in what form?

According to Schindler and Bickart (2012) one can differentiate between product (and service) evaluative, product-descriptive, and reviewer-descriptive statements, which groups can serve as an initial code structure for differentiating between opinions about hospitality establishments included in the sample.

(2) The appearance of concrete, objective information. What kinds of concrete pieces of information do appear in the texts that contribute to their objectivity?

According to Lin et al. (2013) and Robinson et al. (2012) the more rational arguments (in the context of the present study: factual data or details) appear in a review, the more useful, trustworthy, and credible consumers will find it as a piece of e-WOM. Objectivity is a key factor in the perceived quality of e-WOM: the higher the level of objectivity of the present information is, the more a given consumer review can be considered of quality (Chan – Ngai, 2011; Lin et al., 2012). Based on these results, the code is deemed meaningful and fit for further study.

(3) Affective expressions. What types of affective expressions can be identified in the given consumer reviews, and what (element of service etc.) do they pertain to?

According to Berger and Milkman (2012) e-WOM is heavily influenced by emotions. Moreover, consumers of e-WOM are able to identify emotions embedded in online texts which they handle and interpret as sources of social interaction and information (Yin et al., 2014). They thus gather information not only about the community but also about the author of the given opinion, based on which they can evaluate a message's personal utility and credibility. Moreover, consumers tend to better remember e-WOM messages that incorporate emotions, although only those that are free of extremes and/or bias (Yin et al., 2014). Based on this, affective expressions will likely be a determining dimension of consumer opinions.

(4)   Actual advice given to other consumers. Does the author of a review give objective advice which is destined directly to their peer consumers and which can emphasize the author's experience and expertise, thereby augment the quality of the recommendation (Lin et al., 2012)?

(5)   Two-sidedness, i.e. whether the opinion contains both positive and negative arguments about a service element in question.

This dimension can act as a quality increasing factor as two-sidedness is likely to augment a text's persuasiveness (Cheung – Thadani, 2010). Indeed, the richer the text (i.e. presents multiple sides and details), the higher its quality, i.e. the more convincing it is for a consumer (Sweeney et al., 2012). The role of two-sidedness is supported by the fact that the presence of a small amount of negative details in a review that is globally positive was shown to increase a review's credibility (Doh – Hwang, 2009).

(6)   Contrasting with official information. What role does company-issued information play in reviews? In this part, the main focus is on the study of the presence and nature of official information issued by the hospitality establishment, within a consumer review. For instance, visual content was shown to play a growing role in consumers' lives, e.g. by influencing digital messages' efficiency (Lepkowska-White, 2013). Thus, we expect an augmented role of visual information sources within consumer reviews.

(7)   External sources as sources of information. What other types of information do reviewers rely on in their decision-making process?

Mentions of these information sources are likely to increase an opinion's objectivity and trustworthiness (Chan – Ngai, 2011; Lin et al., 2012). They equally bear value for hotels in determining which channels to include in their marketing communications activities.

(8)   Background information pertaining to the sender. How much users give away about themselves when writing an online opinion?

The importance of this code is supported by the fact that personal information can increase consumer trust by strengthening the relationship between the consumers and by giving it a personal touch. Such information can equally be a sign of authenticity of the source, and increase the overall perceived credibility and reliability of the opinion (Schindler – Bickart, 2012).

(9)   Expression of loyalty. Does the consumer opinion express a sign of potential future loyalty from the part of its writer, based on which an organization can build a future relationship with the consumer? Even though positive consumer voice can be considered as a form of loyalty (Csordás, 2015), it is worth examining what other voice strategies (Hirschman, 1970) are employed by active consumers.

(10) Expression of (direct) voice. Even though the posting of a consumer opinion is in itself a manifestation of consumer voice (Hirschman, 1970; Csordás, 2015), it is worthwhile to investigate whether the sender had, prior to writing their online review, availed of the possibility of direct voice, i.e. of signaling a problem directly to the hotel.

(11) Expressions of consumer exit. Does the sender express their discontent by exiting the service (Hirschmann, 1970; Csordás, 2015)?

(12) Problems of interpretability within the opinion
This code can be considered an indicator of quality of sorts (Zhou et al., 2013; Bannerjee – Chua, 2014). The easier it is to read and interpret an opinion, the more useful it is for other consumers. Consumer opinions that are verbose or employ too many technical terms can easily entail consumers' information saturation and confusion. Readers may evaluate a message favorably if they perceive it to be well written (Lin et al., 2012).

(13) Wording. What specifics in wording can be identified that contribute to making the consumer opinion more enjoyable, memorable, and understandable?
The importance of this dimension is highlighted by the fact that style, format, and wording are both recognized influential factors of the consumer evaluation of e-WOM (King et al., 2014; Schellekens et al., 2013; Schindler – Bickart, 2012).

System of reasoning was equally designated as a separate code for data analysis. Patterns of reasoning systems, if examined, can help identify the key affective and objective components of consumer opinions. The code was later rejected for no theoretical support in the literature was found, only practical guidance for analysis in linguistics, which line of analysis is out of the scope of the present dissertation.

After a classification and hierarchization of the adopted codes, the following code structure was used for data analysis:

(1) content elements and forms of manifestation of consumer opinions: presence of service(s marketing) elements, external factors, objective/concrete information, two-sidedness

(2) information related to the reviewer: information about the reviewer, advice given by the reviewer

(3) information sources used by the reviewer: comparison to official information, presence and role of external (third-party) sources of information

(4) wording: interpretability, enjoyability, narrative

(5) presence of affective elements: various levels of satisfaction

(6) reviewer's response strategy to an experience: loyalty, direct voice, exit

6.3. Data analysis[5]: Opinion mining

6.3.1. Content elements of consumer opinions and manifestations thereof

Core and auxiliary service elements were both identifiable in consumer reviews written by students. All services that were related to the basic outcomes related to the selected industry (hotel) were considered as core services, such as: lodging, catering. Service elements that are not a general characteristic of hotels were considered as auxiliary.

All elements of core services were mentioned in both positive and negative reviews. No notable difference was observed in the case of auxiliary services, either, and all service elements appeared in both positive and negative reviews.

The data gave indication as to the **(relationship between core and auxiliary services** (Table 12). This is a key finding of this research phase, the perceived relative importance of various service elements in consumer evaluations being of primordial concern. In view of this, companies can follow different strategies to reach their consumers, and emphasize in their messages the service elements that consumers themselves deemed most important.

(1) In a first category of reviews, consumers only focus on core service elements, while overlook auxiliary service elements. Reviews of this category can be characterized as preferring and focusing on functionality.

(2) A second category of reviews still puts the emphasis on core service elements, but auxiliary services equally appear, on the perceptual level.

(3) Reviews where consumers attribute similar levels of importance to both core and auxiliary service elements can be characterized by a "middle-way" approach. All service elements are considered and reviewed by this group of consumers, who seek functionality as much as hedonic service elements.

(4) An unusual finding of this analysis reveals several groups of consumers who attribute more importance in their reviews to auxiliary service elements than to core services. In one of these atypical categories, core services do appear, but only on the perceptual level, and they still focus on the auxiliary service elements.

In another type of reviews, auxiliary services are dominant, if not prevailing. In these cases, core services are completely overlooked.

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[5] In the following the analysis of the contents of the consumers reviews will be analyzed, followed by an analysis, in the subsequent chapter, of their respective titles.

It is also important to examine whether a reviewer offers a one- or two-sided review of a given service element. One-sidedness can be an indication of a certain bias in the review, both in positive or negative ways. Moreover, such reviews hardly offer sufficient cues for readers in their decision-making, prompting them to read other consumer reviews, or to look for alternative sources of information.

In contrast, two-sided reviews of a service can be considered as a factor enhancing the credibility of a review by being more objective, as they present both the positive and negative perceived aspects of a used service. It is also possible, that the two sided presented within a review concern two different aspects of a same service, or a service group as a whole. Nonetheless, reviews presenting multiple sides can be considered an adequate starting point as they leave a margin of appreciation to the reader, thereby becoming a potential decision support factor (Jensen et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2013).

Two-sided reviews in the sample, however, did not necessarily put the same emphasis on the positive and negative aspects that they highlighted. In an identified state of equilibrium, the positive and negative aspects of a service were mentioned with the same rigor by the reviewer: *"Even though the accommodation had a somewhat 'retro' feeling, with older equipment which, still, radiated joy and cheerfulness." (+ opinion, #37)*

A negative dominance was observed when negative aspects prevailed in the review. This phenomenon might suggest for the reader that the reviewer was altogether dissatisfied with the service, yet still views the issue and the service with objectivity. The reliability and credibility of the review are thus increased, and a fuller picture is presented to the reader, offering them points for consideration (Zhou et al., 2013): *"The interior of the room was clean, but the effect altogether – because of the style of the interior design, and the age of the furniture – was not.*

A positive dominance was observed when positive aspects prevailed in the review, yet the review still could include negative aspects. By presenting factors on the both sides, readers of a review will more likely consider it trustworthy rather than manipulative, or blinded by a negative experience (Doh – Hwang, 2009): *"The equipment of the rooms was o.k., the furniture was rather old, but that didn't harm our vacation" (+ opinion, #11)*

Table 12. Core and auxiliary service elements in consumer reviews

	Type of descr.	**Ex.**
emphasis only on core service	one-sided	*"The neobaroque building is cozy, dining room and the hall have a pleasant atmosphere ... Our room was spacious and bright ... " (+, #35)*
	two-sided	*"Service and catering are not the best, however, the equipment and condition of the rooms is compensation for everything. High-quality, friendly place, which has recently been refurbished."(+;#3)* *"The meals are delicious and plentiful ... the rooms are like new.. The quality of housekeeping is questionable, though. Balls of dust on furniture, curtains, hair remaining from prior guests in the bathroom, dried droplets of chemicals on the toilet seat." (-, #113)*
emphasis on core service, but presence of auxiliary service elements	one-sided	*"the quality of the food... was poor....they ran off of food, at the end of the service, guests could only choose from among one or two dished. The wellness area is very small." (- , #70)* *"the common areas and sports grounds are quite ancient... The showers and toilets are far from the rooms, and their hygiene is questionable... Still, the worst was the food... we weren't once able to eat what was prepared in the 'restaurant', it was so bad." (-, #71)*
	two-sided	*" The three daily buffet meals were outstanding, a Paradise for the gourmand. The hotel bar, the garden, and the pool were all serving guests' wishes. The only problem was with the room's poor insulation: in pre-season, it was not yet warm enough that the air slightly flowing through the balcony door be pleasant." (+, #52)* *"The hotel itself is very well-designed... the buffet breakfast was the same every day, at other places, they tend to change at least half of the selection from one day to another. The pastries were appalling... The wellness area, however, was really well thought through." (-, #90)*
same importance of core and auxiliary service	one-sided	*"The hotel itself has a unique atmosphere, thanks to the far-eastern style. The food was excellent.... The wellness area is really quiet, and there's a choice of various types of pools..." (+ , #39)* *"The rooms are very stylishly furnished, everything is neat. They also made their best during breakfast, the buffet was always plentiful and really delicious. The spa area had a relaxing atmosphere." (+, #34)*
	two-sided	*"The room layout was great ... it was a bit confusing that the entire room was made out of a bed and the closet, the remaining space being occupied by our suitcases, so you could hardly move in the room... but we were the ones to take that many clothes, shoes, so we had only ourselves to blame for that. ☺ ... We had some issues with the Wi-Fi upon arrival, but when we returned from the beach that evening, it had already been fixed." (+, #47)* *"The cleanness of the room left to be desired, the floor was not properly vacuumed, and we found remnants of hair in the shower tray. ... Getting to the spa area was a challenge, directions are not properly given. ... The pools themselves are nicely designed, but since the outdoor part could not be used any more, I felt the 4-stars exaggerated." (-, #105)*
presence of both service element types, greater emphasis on auxiliary service	one-sided	*"I really liked the garden which had an exotic design, it was regularly tended and it was divided into several parts; a place for barbecues, one for the pool and sunbathing, one to chill, and a small ground for playing outside games (badminton, handball)... The room was neat and comfortable." (+, #6)*
	two-sided	*"The huge building was accompanied by a huge parking lot - still, one would have to make several rounds before finding a spot. The rooms in the 3-star hotel are modest, they are simple, but effective... What I think is its biggest advantage, however, is that it's located directly next to lake Balaton, and has its private stretch of beach." (+, #8)*
emphasized role of auxiliary services	one-sided	*"We mainly visited this hotel in Siófok for its spa." (- , #115)*
	two-sided	*"even though we had to fight for the Wi-Fi code (somehow they changed it every day). The equipment of the 8-person apartment was outstanding, and this was reflected in several aspects. The kitchen looked really nice, everything was there that a company of 8 people would need. We were allowed to store our ski equipment in the basement on a dedicated radiator." (+, #28)*

Source: own elaboration

Price equally appears in reviews: these mentions include concrete details, as well as objective data (e.g. price of accommodation, price of catering, price of auxiliary services [e.g. internet access]). These, often public, data can usually be acquired by readers from various other sources.

Value for money, on the other hand, is a subjective perception peculiar to these comments, which equally can assume the role of a summarizing rating. This element can be of great help to readers in their decision-making by providing a benchmark. If a reader has no prior experience concerning the pricing of said services, these information be useful to them.

However, by being subjective, these data are largely relative. Altogether, its supporting role in decision-making can be emphasized when accompanied by concrete information about used services which may serve as arguments for the provided rating (see code 1. – concrete information). The more objective data is provided to support a reviewer's perception of the service, the more a review can be considered credible.

Information about **location** usually appear in consumer reviews of accommodations. Two related specific attributes were revealed by the analysis: reviews tended to include concrete, objective information about the location of the accommodation, and these descriptions of location equally displayed a number of external factors as decisive factors of evaluation.

Related concrete information were the distance of the accommodation from various external elements (e.g. town center, public transport, landmarks, beach). Two tendencies were observable concerning objective data. The first is the use of information available elsewhere by the reviewer to illustrate their description of the service. The second is providing exclusive information, available only to those who already used a service. The first category of concrete information were dominant in the sample of consumer reviews.

Human factor, such as a hotel's staff, by dint of the nature of the service, plays a major role in its evaluation. Consumer reviews reflect this importance, by providing extensive descriptions of the attitudes of the respective staffs of hotels. The most cited dimensions were: kindness, openness, responsiveness, courtesy, helpfulness, expertise, courtesy, friendliness, language proficiency, conscientiousness, (presence or lack of) respect. As can be seen from the above characterization, these dimensions are based on individual perception, and therefore are subjective. Their subjectivity, however, can be decreased by adding concrete elements to support a subjective statement: "... *we wanted to ask a few things about the dinner, as we didn't receive a menu in English, but the waiters spoke only German, so communication was quite challenging.*" (-, #65)

A specific type of concrete information can be to **specify the identity of the staff member in question**, even though only one such mention was made in the sample. "*Our host, Abigail, left a couple of extra towels in the apartment for us. These were quite useful, as we forgot to bring beach towels.*" (+, #40) By mentioning the name of the staff member in question, the reviewer can make their recount of the (positive or negative) experience more illustrative, while the mention of a specific name can equally serve as a piece of advice for the reader. This is equally a direct feedback to the service provider about the performance of their staff, allowing them a base for rewarding or further training their employees.

Criticism about **other guests** surfaced as another facet of the human factor in one review in the sample: *"For those who travel there, be prepared for being constantly disturbed by loud children ceaselessly jumping into the pool, not mentioning the potential unpleasant eye inflammation that can develop after they traveled back home" (-, #98).* The presence of such a dimension is an interesting finding, as, based on the servuction model, other guests are not part of the visible elements of a service, still, here, they appear as an element of a service's evaluation (Kenesei – Kolos, 2007).

Elements of the **physical/material environment** dimension included the evaluation of hotels' actual facilities using the tool of narrative (storytelling). Thanks to these, a virtually complete description of the hotel can be achieved, which can be used, in the lack of attached photos, as visual information of a kind. If the description of the physical/material environment appears in the company of attached photos, then the service is made even more tangible and perceptible to the reader.

Similarly to the physical environment, parts of consumer reviews that deal with the **service process** play a determining role. Indeed, they allow for a virtual reconstruction of the service experience. Mentioned elements included the whole of the service process, starting from an initial establishment of contact, to the flow of information between the staff (*establishment of contact; reservation; check-in; restaurant service; management and execution of breakfast/catering; restaurant seating; queuing; handling of special requests; handling and solving of signaled problems; information on auxiliary services; flow of information between staff; handling of baggages*). Such information may contribute to decreasing the risk of decision by making the elements of a yet unknown service visible and transparent to the reader.

Beyond the elements present in the services marketing literature, **external factors** (that hotels have no influence on) were also identified in consumer reviews as dimensions of evaluation of a service. These factors – as shown beforehand – were linked, in the

vast majority of cases, to the hotel's location. As such, hotels ought to put more emphasis on this information in their marketing communications efforts.

Based on the above, the identified content dimensions are presented in Figure 9, classified based on the categories by Schindler and Bickart (2012).

Figure 9. Identified content dimensions in the first research phase

EVALUATIVE CONTENT	DESCRIPTIVE CONTENT
• delivery gap (compliance with prior promises) • difference between expectations and perceptions (compliance with prior expectations) • value judgment (value for money) • (tapasztalat alapján történő) advice, recommendation or discouragement) • communication gap (compliance with prior information, verification/refutation of official information)	• core and auxiliary service • prices related to hotel • hotel location • human factor related to hotel • material environment related to hotel • hotel processes • communication between consumers • consumers' individual needs • consumers' past experiences • additional information related to the sender of an opinion

Source: own elaboration based on Schindler – Bickart (2012)

6.3.2. Personal information about the sender in consumer opinions

Consumers generally tend to have more confidence in consumer reviews as they perceive them as originating from other consumers similar to themselves. The more similar to themselves a writer of an opinion is perceived by a reader, the more trustworthy and credible they will find the information provided. Sharing personal information is one channel of expressing this similarity and reinforcing the "peer-factor". A consumer may feel closer to the writer of an opinion if provided with more personal information (this phenomenon is referred to as homophily in the literature; its importance highlighted in the research by Steffes and Burgee [2009] – see Chapter 3.7.1.).

Among mentions of **background information related to the sender**, the following categories could be identified: information related to the public, social, personal and intimate zone (Table 13).

Information that is general in nature or impersonal was categorized as belonging to the public zone. This information is available to the reader not only in the text of the review, but in the evaluating system.

More concrete information about an evaluator's prior experience that still do not pertain to the evaluator's person belong to the social zone. These details help assess

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the reviewer, even though by offering a vague picture of them to the reader. The advantage of such information is to introduce a personal aspect, however general, that goes beyond the anonymity and facelessness of an online textual review. An evaluator's prior experience affects their pool of expected services, and can therefore serve as an important benchmark to the reader.

The personal zone includes information that pertain to the evaluator's actual person, yet are still superficial. These information add an additional personal touch to the review. An example to a shared detail pertaining to this category is the expression of a reviewer's own needs (e.g. in the sample, a reviewer expressed their tendency to dry their clothes in the room). This information can help understand and forecast the expected service quality of consumers.

The intimate zone includes sensitive, intimate information about the reviewer. Such information can raise the level of trust in a reviewer and can help the reader determine their level of similarity with the source of an e-WOM.

Table 13. Background information related to the reviewer

Zone	Ex.
public zone	*"We spent 2 nights in the hotel from 2-4 january, 2015." (-, #111)*
social zone	*"The hotel offers several pools. I cannot really tell anything about these, we only went to the beach ." (+, #62)*
personal zone	*"We spent three days there with my girlfriend and her family." (+, #60)*
intimate zone	*"Because I accounted here as a child, it was a bit confusing that the entire room was made out of a bed and the closet, the remaining space being occupied by our suitcases, so you could hardly move in the room... but we were the ones to take that many clothes, shoes, so we had only ourselves to blame for that. ☺"(+, #47)*

Source: own elaboration

Consumer reviews included **specific advice to other consumers** which can be considered, to a certain extent, as an indirect evaluation of the used service or service element. Advice can help readers in reducing their risks and thereby to support them in their decision-making. It equally makes reviews more personal and thus contribute to reducing the perceived distance between the reader and the sender, making the information more reliable.

Advice in the sample can be categorized into three subgroups: pertaining to the individual, to the service, and to the external environment. Individual advice pertains to the prospective consumer: who the reviewer does or does not recommend the specific service to. This can be perceived as a directed message, in order for the reader to be able to decide whether an information is pertinent to them or not.

Service-specific advice offers details about the service process in question. This can be perceived as a general message towards the readers, still it can protect them from potential disappointment, either from using a service that they shouldn't have, or from

missing out a service that they shouldn't have. It is also an exclusive source of information, only available to and from those that already used the specific service. Consumers in possession of such information can decide upon purchasing a service in more confidence.

Advice on the external environment pinpoint elements over which the hotel in the focus of the review has no direct control. Nonetheless, the present of such information in the sample indicates the importance of external factors to consumers, and a subsequent need to explore them.

The wording of advice in the sample was either general or specific. Specific advice (either individual- or service-oriented) supports the understanding and the more efficient processing of a message: by reducing the cognitive effort required from the reader to comprehend the reviewer's message, it can help them in their information processing and filtering.

The specificity of an advice alone, however, is not enough: the more substantiated it is, the more reliable it appears to the reader. To substantiate their message, reviewers in the sample used the following techniques: cause and effect, own experience, assumptions made by the reviewer, and generalization. Cause and effect arguments made a review more objective and reliable, while helped potential readers more clearly understand and thus process the advice. Citing the reviewer's own experience to illustrate an advice was another tool used to make a review more objective.

If an advice is based on a reviewer's assumption then it can originate from their own perceptions or stereotypes. Thus, this technique makes a review more subjective as readers lack information about the reviewer's personality and attitudes that can be at the origin of these perceptions or stereotypes. Generalizations made by reviewers also lack substantiation by their writers and therefore offer information that readers cannot relate to and therefore are unable to use as worthwhile decision support.

Identified aspects related to advice made in reviews in the sample are detailed in Table 14.

Table 14. Advice in consumer reviews

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Ex.
Focus of advice	person	*"Apart from those wanting to party, I can recommend it to everyone"* (+, #47)
	service	*"... it's worth clarifying in which building the room will be located, and also to be prepared that if we want a room that is closer to the beach or the main building, or with a sea-view, than it will be added as a surcharge upon arrival - but you can negotiate this price relatively easily."* (+, #62)
	external environment	*"I recommend everyone to bring diving goggles and a pipe with them, because the wildlife there is like no other!"* (+, #62)
Type of advice	general	*"... it's completely suitable for families."* (+, #4)
	specific	*"Being a ski-in/ski-out lodging, there's a direct connection to the slope. You can buckle your ski boots directly in front of the building and slide to the ski lift."* (+, #33)
Tools used to substantiate the recommendation	cause and effect	*"Dinner is quite expensive, it's more worthwhile to opt for a bed and breakfast only..."* (+, #1)
	own experience	*"The area is safe, even at night."* (+, #16)
	perception, assumption	*"I wouldn't recommend to sightseers..."* (-, #121)
	generalization	*"I can only recommend this guesthouse to everyone seeking a bit of recreation."* (+, #24)

Source: own elaboration

6.3.3. Information sources used by the sender in consumer opinions

Comparisons with **official information issued by the hotel** appear in the reviews. This is evidence that users equally rely on official sources as sources of information in their decision-making. It is therefore important for hotels to pay attention to this channel as a decision support element. Such information that were referred to by reviews not only included textual data issued by the hotel, but also official images published by the hotel. The role of photographs as information sources seems to have grown considerably, based on the sample, they appear as decisive sources of consumer information, and referring to them make a consumer review more realistic and tangible.

If the sender of a piece of e-WOM corroborates in their review pieces of information published on official channels, they also verify the veracity and thereby the credibility of official information channels. This is particularly important for the choice of services such as lodging. Shared information and especially, photos contribute to virtual trialability and to reducing uncertainty and the risk of consumer decision-making.

If, on the contrary, official information is refuted by a user review, it undermines the credibility of the hotel. This may lead to prospective consumers disregarding a given hotel in their further information search. Indeed, e-WOM is regarded by consumers as a more reliable source of information and, in case of conflicting information, they will more likely trust it against official information sources. Reviews in the sample equally

confirm that if a refuted information in a piece of e-WOM is backed by several arguments by the writer, then the credibility of the review is increased.

Such details can equally serve as an important source of information for hotel as they allow the organization to improve their marketing communications' efficiency (e.g. by publishing more appropriate imagery, by modifying the official description of the establishment, etc.).

Even though to a lesser extent, but **third-party information sources** equally appear among the cited sources in the sample's consumer reviews (e.g. information published by a third-party organization, or online or offline WOM). An interesting phenomenon is that official information is attributed a similar, if not more important weight by review writers in the sample than third-party sources.

In the case of these latter, the exact sources of the reviewer are often left hidden. These could help hotels identify the pool of third-party sources that are decisive in consumer decision-making in order to include these into their wider marketing communications efforts.

The role of online and offline WOM equally appears within the sample's reviews, which is a sign that it is worthwhile for hotels to encourage consumers to share their opinions about the service.

Identified information sources used by reviewers in the sample are summarized in Table 15.

Table 15. Information sources used by the reviewer

Source	Ex.
corroborating official information	*"This apartment is simply wonderful: it looked exactly as in the pictures." (+, #50)* *"The description of the hotel is accurate." (+, #15)*
refuting official information	*"The promised air-conditioning and Wi-Fi, of course, didn't work at all." (-, #123)* *"About the bathroom: this was also a great disappointment, it looked a lot better in pictures than what it actually was." (-, #104)*
external source – specific	*"It was clear upon arrival that the accommodation is not quite like in the pictures that were uploaded to booking.com." (-, #81)*
offline and online WOM	*"We spent a summer vacation at this hotel with my family. We heard a lot of good feedback, that's why we chose it." (-. #79).*

Source: own elaboration

6.3.4. Wording aspects in consumer opinions

The first analyzed dimension of wording is **readability**. The easier it is for the reader to comprehend a review, the easier they can embrace and process the information within. The text might contain elements that not only impair its readability but also the

image a reader might make up of the writer of the review. Two such categories were identified in the sample: orthography and problems of interpretability.

Orthography is largely related to typographical errors – the presence and distribution of which was all but negligible in the sample (mainly due to sampling characteristics). However, if there were more of such errors, then it would be more likely that they were more than just typographical errors). This, altogether, would give the reviewer a bad name, hindering their perceived trustworthiness, and expertise (Cheung et al., 2009). Cases of the second identified category of readability-impairing factors, problems of interpretability were more present in the sample. In these cases, reviewers contradicted themselves within their review, leading to probable confusion in the reader's mind. This could equally hinder the reviewer's perceived trustworthiness, and expertise.

Another dimension is the **enjoyable nature of the review**. The more a review is enjoyable, the more it draws the reader in, and the more it stands out from among other reviews and is likely to stick their reader's mind.

One identified instrument for enhancing the enjoyable nature of the text in the sample was the use of linguistic twists (e.g. figurative language – see Chapter 3.7.3.)

Another studied aspect was the presence of **narratives** (storytelling) in consumer reviews as factor of fluency In the support of legibility and memorability. Indeed, as shown in the theoretical review, the style and format of online consumer reviews can influence consumers' perception of e-WOM and the impact thereof (King et al., 2014; Schellekens et al., 2013; Schindler – Bickart, 2012). The narrative can help readers grasp a reviewer's mood, and the big picture of the described experience.

The recount of a specific story can be considered a form of narrative, where a reader can get a full picture of the events that happened to the reviewer. This is an appropriate tool to support a consumer opinion.

Another identified form of narrative is provided by the pictorial description of the events letting the reader visualize the described environment. The role of such narratives is greater in a context where no illustrations are present, by taking the place thereof. If accompanied by photos, the two tool can give a full picture to the reader, making it as if they were equally present on site.

A third form is offered by more objective, guide book-like descriptions, that offer an actual description of the service process. A guide book-like narration can allow diversity to a review.

The last observed form is a narrative focusing on a feeling or state of mind. These narratives were identified to function as illustrating background information related to the sender and thereby to support readers' understanding of the review's context.

Identified aspects related to wording are summarized in Table 16.

Table 16. Wording of consumer reviews

Dimension		Ex.
Readability	orthography	"It was clean, which is a primary matter of consideretion for me about a hotel." (+, #11)
		"The fist day at breakfast service did not go smoothly..." (-, #96)
	interpretability	"The next town is far on foot... but everything can be found within the camping that we should need, and if not, we took a short car ride to the supermarket close by." (+, #45)
Enjoyable nature of the review	figurative language	"The beach is literally a stone's throw away from the terrace." (+, #1)
		"If I can, I will also book there the next time, because they won me and my family." (+, #22)
Narrative	recount of specific story	There were riding programs, too. I chose a one-and-a-half-hour free-riding in a paddock, but unfortunately it started snowing the very day I was supposed to go. In the covered riding hall, there was still a mounted stage from the previous day's concert. So we didn't get to ride a horse that day. The staff, however, was really helpful, and flexible, so we made the program on the last day of our stay." (+, #5)
		"First., they said that there's a problem with water supply in the whole town, that's the reason why there's no water in the bathroom... but when I took a bath elsewhere, there was no problem. It may be that everything wasn't in order because it was so new (they weren't even officially open yet when we were there)." (-, #86)
	pictorial description	"At first, the angular blue building gives a bit harsh and rugged effect. But when they enter, guests are faced with a wonderful scenery." (+, #8)
		"the shower would not drain properly, and because of that, we were bathing in a 30 cm-deep pond each time we took a shower."
	guide book-like description	"The Apartmány Tatranská Lomnica is a great accomodation, in the heart of the town of Tatranská Lomnica. The hotel is next to a park, it offers a great view from the rooms with the peaks towering above the city. The train station is only a few minutes away on foot, there are very good (and not at all expensive) restaurants in the area, and the ski lift to the peak is only a few minutes away by car, but it's not far either on foot." (+, #7)
		"The 'hotel' is next to a very busy road, where a lot of cars pass by even during the night, and we couldn't sleep from the noise coming from the bar downstairs, and we didn't go to bed at 8 p.m." (-, #108)
	narrative focusing on a feeling or state of mind	"Every night, in front of the truck, under the stone pines, we were listening to the leafhoppers' distinctive voice. (+, #45)
		"I ask myself, isn't it their task to start with the rooms that are scheduled to be occupied by guests?" (-, #84)

Source: own elaboration

6.3.5. Affective elements in consumer opinions[6]

Affective elements are a peculiar form of expressing opinions, largely determined by the writer's level of satisfaction. Following Schneider and Bowen's (1999) study, five main subgroups were distinguished: expressions of outrage, discontent, indifference, satisfaction, and delight[7]. These subcategories can help identify the sources and intensity of a given expressed emotion. Based on the results of the subsequent, large-sample study (in the third research stage), practical propositions are expected to be made about the various dimensions that form dissatisfiers (i.e. elementary

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[6] Coding of affective elements involves a high degree of subjectivity and a subsequent potential coder bias, which may appear as a research limitation related to this code.
[7] According to Schneider and Bowen (1999), delight and outrage are more intense emotional charges, and consumers are less ambivalent about their feelings in these stages. In case of outrage, anger and frustration are the prevailing emotions. In companies' point of view, these consumers are likely to become "terrorists" as not only do they exit the market but their negative experiences motivate them to tell others about their feelings. In contrast, delighted consumers are likely to become "apostles" of a kind by preaching the brand's good deeds (Schneider – Bowen, 1999: 36).

requirements), satisfiers (i.e. performance indicators), and delighters[8] according to reviewers.

The presence of the two extremes can imply different repercussions for the reader and for the reviewed organization. For readers, the expression of extreme emotions is a bias of a kind, reducing a text's credibility (see Chapter 3.7.3.). This bias can, however, be resolved once sufficient support is given by the reviewer for their state of delight or outrage. In contrast, outraged reviews can help hotels identify threat factors, while delighted reviews factors that can act as competitive advantage.

Expressions of **outrage** in the sample were limited to negative reviews. This form of expression is presumed to be accompanied by an aggressive, extreme state of mind.

Outrage, in the sample, was expressed in connection with the following service elements: wellness; food quality and price of food; price of beverage; hygiene; behavior of staff; other guests; overall evaluation. The list shows that the feeling of outrage can be provoked not only by core, but also auxiliary service elements, with human factor equally being an important source thereof.

For main strategies were identified in the sample to express outrage (Table 17): (1) moderate wording; (2) angry wording; (3) sarcasm; (4) exaggerated punctuation marks.

(1) Moderate wording implied calmer forms of expression, making their state of outrage more convincing (by reducing the feeling that a review is only written to berate the hotel in anger) and the reviewer seem more objective about and able to fairly evaluate the issue in question.

(2) The opposite is true for the use of angry wording, where rudeness prevails in the reviewer's words. Strong negative feelings are thus transmitted, along with a significant degree of subjectivity and bias.

(3) Sarcasm is a transitional mode of expression, where outrage is expressed in a peculiar way by the reviewer. One related danger is readers' misunderstanding of the message. At the same time this mode of expression stands out of the message and thus its impact may also be greater.

(4) The exaggerated use of punctuation marks is a typical mode of expression in the digital sphere, there to even substitute nonverbal communication. This is a clear indication of the writer's opinion. The exaggerated use of punctuation marks not only emphasizes the part of the text it relates to, but makes it stand out from the rest. Altogether, this can help draw the reader's attention and make the marked part achieve a greater effect than the rest of the opinion.

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[8] Kano's model of customer perception (Kano et al., 1984 in Khalifa, 2004: 648) distinguishes between various functional components of the concept of value. The model examines two dimensions: the presence of characteristics and the level of customer satisfaction.

Tools of expression	Ex.
Moderate, subtle, calm language	*"A selective, reputable, 3-star hotel cannot afford such negligence." (-, #79)*
Strong language	*"The staff were unfriendly, and even genuine jerks." (-, #83)*
Sarcasm	*"The spa area is really small, and it was also challenging to benefit from the nonexistent additional services." (-, #70)*
Exaggerated use of punctuation marks	*"Even if we turn a blind eye to the filthy rooms, I really don't recommend the hotel because of the poor staff!!" -, #95)*

Source: own elaboration

The expression of **discontent** was observable in both negative and positive opinions (Table 18). No major difference was observed between the two groups in terms of the object of discontent, although external factors did appear as an additional element in positive reviews. This result suggests that these have the influence to depreciate a whole service experience. This demonstrates that hotels should also keep track of these external factors.

The tools used by reviewers to express their dissatisfaction differed between negative and positive consumer opinions. The following tools were observed in negative reviews:

(1) Use of stressing and emphasizing adverbs to highlight discontent: "rather", "particularly", "especially", "very", "quite", "absolutely". The use of such terms resembles the stylistic device of exaggerated punctuations.

(2) Expression of one's (own) mental state. The most often expressed mental states were personal frustration and discomfort. This tool helps readers project themselves into the writer's state of mind and comprehend the specific problem. At the same time, the tool equally involves an increased level of subjectivity, as the reflected state of mind can easily be reflected in the given evaluation.

(3) Description of a service experience or the environment. This stylistic tool can be considered as increasing the objectivity and credibility of a review as it can serve as an actual explanation for the expressed dissatisfaction.

(4) Evaluation, through which the dissatisfaction is expressed.

(5) Emphasis on one particular element, providing a light expression of discontent.

The presence of elements of dissatisfaction in positive reviews, as a sign that an actual person is behind the review, can reinforce a review's overall credibility. The expression of dissatisfaction was observed to be more moderate in positive reviews, as

(1) the use of attenuating quantifiers, such as "a bit", "a little" help reduce the bite out of an issue thereby suggesting that positive experiences still prevailed. The presence of this element, however, can increase the reliability of a review by reflecting that the review is able to reasonably evaluate the service.

(2) The emphasis on one particular element against other positive mentions equally appears as an attenuating tool of sorts.

Table 18. Manifestations of discontent

In positive reviews	In negative reviews
attenuating quantifiers *"The only problem was with the room's poor insulation: in pre-season, it was not yet warm enough that the air slightly flowing through the balcony door be pleasant." (#52)* *"The spa and wellness satisfy all needs, but I found the whole a bit expensive." (#11)*	**stressing and emphasizing adverbs** *"The heating was off, which was particularly unpleasant..." (#72)* *"sometimes there was a very strange smell in the room, this was very inconvenient to get home to." (#81)*
emphasis on one particular element against other positive mentions *"The only negative element was the bathroom, which was not as nice in the apartment that we received in the end..." (#4)*	**expression of one's (own) mental state** *"as I wrote, we weren't really impressed by the rooms, and on top of all that, ..." (#97)*
	description of a service experience or the environment *"The staff didn't take their job too seriously... They generally didn't let us eat, and by the end, we were avoiding them because they were too colloquial." (#99)*
	evaluation *"All in all, compared to the price we paid, we found the service disappointing." (#120)*
	emphasis on one particular element *"Service was generally ok, but the lack of hygiene really left its mark on our vacation." (#79)*

Source: own elaboration

The expression of **indifference** can help identify service elements that can be further developed in order for prospective clients to reach a level of satisfaction. No major difference was observed between positive and negative review either in terms of the object of indifference or the tools of its expression.

The mental state related to indifference was expressed in the sample using the following tools (Table 19):

(1) Use of words expressing a state nearing satisfaction. This could also imply that a consumer had actually been satisfied with a service, but failed to express it in their review.

(2) When reviewers expressed an "OK" state, they generally indifference towards the service element in question.

(3) Use of words expressing a state nearing the lower limits of acceptability, which tips the balance towards discontent.

Table 19. Manifestations of indifference

Manifestations of indifference	Ex.
state nearing satisfaction	*"The value for money is quite acceptable." (+, #19)* *"Breakfast was relatively a positive disappointment." (-, #107)*
"OK" state	*"The equipment of the rooms was o.k., the furniture was rather old, but that didn't harm our vacation." (+, #11)* *"Altogether, this is not a bad hotel..." (-, #89)* *"the style of service was quite neutral..." (-, #105)*
state nearing the lower limits of acceptability	*"The quality of food is acceptable ..." (+, #37)* *"Fundamentally, the service was not an issue." (-, #79)*

Source: own elaboration

The next emotional level, **satisfaction**, was observed in both positive and negative reviews. No major difference was observed between the two sides in terms of its object. Mentions of the core service was more markedly present leading to suggest that core service is indeed an elementary requirement, i.e. dissatisfier. The tools to express satisfaction were different in positive and negative reviews (Table 20).

The presence of satisfaction in positive reviews is a rather obvious phenomenon, with rather singular tools of expression:

(1) Words reflecting basic satisfaction (e.g. "good", "liked", "I was satisfied") that fail to inform the reader or to provide them with a benchmark.

(2) Words reflecting full satisfaction were most prominent in the sample. Satisfaction, at this level, was expressed more firmly, while still not reaching a higher level of satisfaction. This level can be considered the entry level of consumer involvement, by providing an opportunity for development and the achievement of delight.

(3) More discreet tools for expressing satisfaction are punctuation marks (with the use of emoticons included).

Affective expressions reflecting satisfaction equally appear within negative consumer reviews. This can help demonstrate that a given review is hardly a consumer outburst, and that the reviewer is able to reasonably evaluate the service.

To express satisfaction in negative reviews, similar tools are used by their authors than in positive reviews:

(1) Words reflecting reason (e.g. "basically", "actually", "on the whole", "anyway") that indicate that the reviewer has given thought to their evaluation of the service, which can increase a review's overall reliability.

(2) Words reflecting basic satisfaction, and

(3) Word reflecting full satisfaction (in the same manner as for positive reviews).

Table 20. Manifestations of satisfaction

In positive reviews	In negative reviews
words reflecting basic satisfaction *"The bed's mattress was of good quality ..." (# 1)* *"Overall, I was satisfied with the services offered by the hotel." (#11)*	**words reflecting reason** *"But the place itself is at a quite good location ..." (# 112)*
word reflecting full satisfaction *"Overall I am very satisfied." (#17)* *"The staff was very friendly, no matter the question, they were keen to help." (#24)*	**words reflecting basic satisfaction** *"The hotel is at a good location, a good value for money..." (#78)*
punctuation marks, emoticons, etc. *"I can safely recommend them to anyone ☺!" (#29)*	**word reflecting full satisfaction** *"The rooms were very nice and clean, the kitchen was well equipped, overall I really liked the accommodation." (# 69)*

Source: own elaboration

The presence of the highest level of emotion, **delight**, in a review is a strategic asset for hotels for representing actual factors of competitive advantage. The object of delight in the sample was primarily related to the core service and the physical environment, but the role of the external environment (such as the view from a room) was even more emphasized.

Delight was observed in negative reviews, too. This result may suggest that there exist a number of service elements that can attenuate, if not overwrite a negative consumer experience. This is supported by the fact that consumers expressing delight did it in one manner, namely by putting the emphasis on a particular experience element that they had found fascinating. While this mentioned element had accounted for a high proportion in the evaluation, it was often unable to compensate for the remaining negative factors.

A variety of expressions of delight were identified in positive reviews:
(1) Cold fascination. In form, these expressions are similar to full satisfaction, yet the used wording suggests stronger emotions. In this case, however, the level of perceived satisfaction will most likely depend on the reader's personal interpretation of the text.
(2) Involved delight, reflecting a high emotional level. This level of delight predicts the willingness of the consumer for the development of a further relationship with the organization. As this form of self-expression reflects emotional involvement, readers can equally perceive these reviews as biased – which impression can be reduced by appropriate argumentation.
(3) Emphasis on one particular service element that overrules everything else,

(4) An increased use of punctuation marks to further emphasize the experience.

The tools used by reviewers for the expression of delight are summarized in Table 21.

Table 21. Manifestations of delight

In positive reviews	In negative reviews
cold fascination *"... local and international dishes are also offered at an excellent quality." (#54)*	**emphasis on one particular service element** *"Although the breakfast was really amazing, no problem with the range and quality, but a delicious breakfast couldn't compensate for the discomfort that preceded it." (#111)*
involved delight *"The view was beautiful, as was the hotel's furniture..." (#65)*	
emphasis on one particular service element that overrules everything else *"The staff's openness, kindness is invaluable." (#14)*	
increased use of punctuation marks to emphasize the experience *"... they even had a telescope which was operational!!" (#65)*	

Source: own elaboration

6.3.6. Response strategy to an experience in consumer opinions

Reviewers are enabled to express their response strategy (voice, exit, loyalty [Hirschmann, 1970]) to a service experience in their evaluations thereof. According to Csordás (2015) the communication outcome of a rejected and reinterpreted brand message is protest, that of a rejected brand message is market exit, while that of an adopted brand message (and subsequent loyalty) is positive voice.

Among the above strategies, as expected, (intended) loyalty appeared in the sample among positive reviews. The expression thereof bears valuable information to other consumers, as it is a clear indication that a service is worth paying for.

Various levels of loyalty were identified in the sample, such as recommendation, or personal loyalty. Recommendations involved the reviewer directly suggesting a given service to other consumers, while there was no indication as to their personal loyalty to the same service. In these cases, a reader can only assume that the reviewer themselves is considering the repeated use of the service. Recommendations can equally be more detailed and more convincing when targeted and/or substantiated. Targeted recommendations in the sample were destined to a specific target group of readers. This information can be used by the reader to assess whether they are concerned by the recommendation. Substantiated recommendations were the most reliable as they provide evidence as to why the reviewer gives a certain recommendation.

Not surprisingly, exit and protest strategies were only present in the sample within negative opinions. Interestingly, negative opinions themselves are a form, even though indirect, of protest. Negative opinions, however, contained expressed, direct forms of protest, which were used by the reviewer to substantiate their review, to prove that it was question of an actual issue rather than retrospectively revalued experience. Mentioning market exit equally gives substance to the review's other details.

A peculiar exit strategy observed in the sample was when a reviewer denied loyalty and gave voice to this choice in writing. This can be considered an express, direct negative voice. The same groups as in the case of delight were identified here, too. Identified response strategies to an experience in consumer opinions are summarized in Table 22.

Table 22. Response strategies to an experience in consumer opinions

strategy		ex.
loyalty	Targeted recommendation	*"I can only recommend this place if you would like to get to know the canals-and-cyclying-ambience of the city of Amsterdam at a lively, yet homely part of the city." (+, #66)*
	Substantiated recommendation	*"These two days were a pure relaxation for the whole family, so I'm sure that we will return soon!" (+, #31)*
	Personal loyalty	*"If I can, I will also book there the next time, because they won me and my family." (+, #22)*
direct voice (protest)		*"it happened at 4:30 pm, we couldn't occupy our room, even though on their homepage, and also on the booking confirmation, the indicated arrival time is 2 pm. When we confronted them with this..." (-, #106)*
exit		*"Needless to say that we left the guesthouse and went looking for a better accommodation in town with the family." (-, #84)*
negative voice	Targeted discouragement	*"One can survive a night here, but if you are planning a family vacation of several days, I do not recommend this hotel." (-, # 87)*
	Substantiated discouragement	*"In summary, I wouldn't recommend to choose this guesthouse to anybody, because it's completely unfit for relaxation, and the personnel is unfit to communicate with people." (-, #84)*
	Personal voice	*"Next time, I will definitely not choose this hotel, because, apart from its location, I had no good experience about it." (-, #117)*

Source: own elaboration

6.3.7. Analysis of the titles of consumer opinions

TripAdvisor offers reviewers the possibility to add titles to their reviews in order to introduce their service experience. The literature so far has paid little attention to titles of consumer reviews. Only one study was identified (Kronrod – Danziger, 2013) where the authors equally put titles under the microscope in the context of the use of figurative language.

For the analysis of review titles, the same codes were used as in the study of the texts, in order to test their applicability in this context. All codes turned out to be applicable

to review titles. The analysis thereof is therefore presented in the same structure as before.

(1) content elements of consumer opinions and manifestations thereof:
The major service elements that were mentioned in titles of positive reviews were the hotel room, catering, and external factors. Among the titles of negative reviews, mentions of a specific service element were most abundant, such as hygiene, wellness (as an auxiliary service), hotel staff, location, and external factors (e.g. view from room). Factors that account for full satisfaction or delight are thus more likely emphasized in positive reviews' titles. In contrast, negative reviews' titles more likely emphasized factors in connection with the object of outrage (or, in another stance, key positive experience factors that were remembered albeit the overall negative experience). In summary, service elements appearing in review titles can transform into consumer expectations to find more details about them in the review.

The only element pertaining to the category of objective information appearing in review titles in the sample was the mention of hotel names. No example to two-sidedness was not found in titles.

The sample therefore contained a very limited amount of descriptive titles.

(2) information related to the reviewer:
Reviewer-specific information in both positive and negative review titles focused on prior experience and belonged exclusively to the social zone. Review titles thus did not feature any genuinely personal details about the reviewer.

At the same time, a few examples of reviewer recommendations were observed, which the reviewer supported by arguments or own experience. Such titles can function as guidelines to other consumers to determine whether they are the target group of a review or not.

(3) information sources used by the reviewer:
Among cited information sources, only titles of a few negative reviews featured a comparison to official information, and more specifically, to official photos published by the hotel. These titles bring about the growing importance of photos in consumer reviews. This is also a validation that it is worthwhile to extend the scope of the study to visual elements.

(4) wording:
In terms of readability, the above-observed results were repeated in the context of titles, that is, few typographical errors and contradicting information were noticed. Since titles can act as a forecasting tool for a review's quality, if no interpretability

issues arise in the title, it is more likely that readers will keep on reading a given review.

In terms of enjoyability, a noticeable presence of narratives, and as such, a compacted storytelling technique were observed. Such titles could stand out from among a majority of descriptive titles and also play the role of an actual summary. This helps readers decide whether the review is pertinent to them or not.

Figurative language use equally appeared as a dimension of enjoyability, thanks to which titles in which this element of style was used could actually stand out from among other reviews.

    (5) affective elements:

Review titles could mostly be characterized by their use of affective terms. In positive reviews, only satisfaction and delight was observable, indifferently of the fact that the actual reviews did contain all identified affective levels but outrage. The two sub-categories of satisfaction were verified in titles. Only by reading these titles, the reader can immediately draw a general conclusion about how satisfied the reviewer was about the given service. Most positive reviews in the sample had titles of this sort. Titles featuring delight were characterized by vocabulary related to involved delight. These can be considered as a potential bias, and thus, as elements that might discourage the reader from carrying on with the review.

All levels of satisfaction were observed among titles of negative consumer opinions. Titles of negative reviews featured a noticeably stronger use of punctuation marks.

In some cases, delight was used in titles in conjunction with terms expressing dissatisfaction making them unusual, surprising, and thus standing out. This was also true for the level of satisfaction. This "strategy" therefore seems suitable to raise readers' attention and to emphasize objectivity.

Words signaling indifference transmit no information about a reviewer's opinion. Most titles of negative reviews expressed dissent, in a variety of ways. Very often without stating specifics.

In the case of outrage, restrained and strong language use were both observed, typically accompanied by a stronger use of punctuation marks. Such wording makes the title cross readers' thresholds. At the same time, if other reviews do not corroborate this content, it will more likely influence negatively the perception of the given review by readers making them ignore it in their decision-making.

    (6) response strategy to an experience:

Elements of a response strategy in titles could only be observed among negative reviews through refusal to recommend and threat of market exit.

6.4. Conclusions of the first research phase

The first research phase was aimed at establishing the content dimensions as a framework for the subsequent research phases. An inductive approach was used to set up research codes. They were then tested based on the framework provided by the theoretical review, then used to conduct a preliminary study of a sample of consumer reviews written by university students. In conclusion to this research phase it can be stated that all established codes turned out to be meaningful during coding of the sample and therefore provide an appropriate framework for the subsequent phases of the study. The identified subcodes, their characteristics and main results are summarized in Table 23.

Table 23. Results of the first research phase

Topic (code)	Results of the first research phase	Conclusions for the next research phases
Service elements	all service elements were identified unusual items: staff member's identity specified, other guests mentioned, external environment (dimensions independent from hotels)	little novelty in the analysis of service elements need for study of unusual items
information related to the reviewer	background information related to the reviewer (public, social, personal, intimate zone) recommendation to users (focus, form, tool for substantiation)	importance of homophily: prominent role of related elements, further study necessary
Used source of information	official information source external information source role of description and photos	it is worthwhile to extend the scope of the study to visual elements
Characteristic elements of wording	enjoyability of review (figurative language) readability (orthography, interpretability) narrative (specific story, pictorial description, guide book-like narration, narrative focusing on feeling or state of mind)	exploring further dimensions of enjoyability it is worthwhile to extend the scope of the study to contradictions within reviews testing the types of narratives
Affective expressions	outrage, discontent, indifference, satisfaction, delight	testing the attributes of affective manifestations (numerous identified elements) study of wording in terms of reliability and credibility
Response strategy to experience	loyalty, direct protest, negative voice	study of wording of response strategies in terms of credibility
Titles of reviews	codes identified for review text applicable affective manifestations most characteristic	focus on the analysis of highlighted titles

Source: own elaboration

7. Second research phase – Expert interviews and consumer focus groups

Based on the methodological considerations of qualitative mixed methods, two supplementary qualitative methods were employed, namely expert interviews and consumer focus groups. The employed methodologies offer a two-sided approach of the focal topic.

7.1. Expert interviews with tourism professionals

As seen in the review of the methodology, semi-structured systematizing expert interviews were employed in this research phase. The interview guide is included in Annex 1.

Seven interviews were conducted. Expert subjects were selected with the filter condition that they be acquainted with the TripAdvisor website and that they have experience in dealing with online consumer opinions about hotels. Our goal was to add a different system of criteria in the study of the evaluation of e-WOM as content about hospitality services.

The interviews were conducted at the interviewees' workplace. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, a sufficient time span to understand the interviewee's way of thinking and to offer them time to develop their thoughts on the topic. While the interviews were recorded, sensitive information addressing the current operations of the hotels in question were also discussed. For this reason, results are presented in an anonymous way. All interviews were assigned a letter which will serve as an indication to indicate the source of an information during a quote. Information about the interviews are presented in Table 24.

Table 24. Subjects of the expert interviews

Designation of interviewee in analysis	Date of interview	Profession of interviewee	Characterization of the interviewee
A	May 2015	tourism professional; teacher-researcher	researching tourism trends
B	August 2015	hotel director – 4-star hotel in Budapest, Hungary	among the first in the hotel chain to pay special attention to consumer opinions on TripAdvisor; he responds to the opinions concerning the hotel himself
C	October 2015	hotel director – 4-star hotel in a county seat, Hungary	director of a hotel in a regional center – topicality of the subject in case of a smaller hotel
D	October 2015	marketing manager, regional middle manager	study of online consumer opinions in a marketing point of view
E	November 2015	director of communications – 5-star hotel in Budapest, Hungary	pay special attention to both positive and negative online consumer reviews; reviews included in marketing communications activities; integrated approach
F	November 2015	tourism professional; former middle manager in a hotel; teacher-researcher	complex approach: study and verification of both theoretical and practical significance of the topic
G	December 2015	tourism strategy consultant	development of online review sites; advice on the use of reviews on a strategic level

Source: own elaboration

The in-depth interviews were used to examine the topicality of the subject, to confirm the choice of the example of the TripAdvisor travel review website, and to examine, refine and supplement the code structure revealed during the first research phase.

7.1.1. Results of the expert interviews

Although the present dissertation is not aimed at examining the effects of e-WOM, it should be noted that the role of e-WOM in hotel selection was attributed a great role in the interviews. Following the theoretical frameworks (see Chapter 3.6.) this result allows for a two-sided approach, namely a consumer- and an organization-focused.

According to the informants unanimous opinion, e-WOM has become an unavoidable part of the hotel business, as "*we need the reviews… this is a consumer demand*" (B). The interviews confirm the results of the literature according to which consumers put more trust in e-WOM (Jalilvand et al., 2011): according to the interviewees, prospective guests consider reviews as a dominant source of information. The interviewees thus confirm that e-WOM is a dominant source of consumer information, besides criteria such as location and price. "*… guest feedback has lined up as a third, equally important factor. Guests will definitely view consumer reviews, others' opinions about that hotel.*" (B)

Online consumer reviews can equally be a direct tool for consumer decision support, a phenomenon that typically occurs in the context of negative reviews, when a consumer can be "dissuaded" by other consumers' opinions, and *"there are people ... who can indeed be discouraged"*. (C) Being in possession of such information can improve a consumer's decision power, and thereby reduce the previously existing state of information asymmetry (Varadarajan – Yadav, 2002).

The corporate impact of e-WOM are clearly noticeable according to the interviewees' opinion. At the same time they expressed mitigated opinions about the phenomenon: on one hand, they perceived it as a necessary tool and a competition factor, but on the other hand, the majority were reflecting concern over it, as their attention was primarily focused towards the negative reviews in connection with their respective establishments.

"I told my colleagues that this is a cost, I would have been glad not to see any of those one-star ratings, and that I can purchase it before – and I don't care if there are no positive comments, but I'd prefer that they don't leave any negative ones."

The reservation towards the phenomenon shows that practitioners can see both the opportunities and the threats related to e-WOM.

One clear opportunity that was outlined in the interviews was that of the apparition of a kind of network of influence (De Bruyn – Lilien, 2008), as satisfied, or, potentially, engaged, consumers were observed to sometimes protect the hotel from dissatisfied reviewers, which represents a more persuasive force in establishing a hotel's image.

"I was once confronted to a guest who had read other guests' opinions, which had turned out to be terrible, and told me that they then thought that they wouldn't even leave home, but decided to come nonetheless – and they had a damn' good time, and told me that they will also post that" (C).

Moreover, consumer reviews can contribute, even though indirectly, to affect consumers until the very last moment of their decision journey, as they enjoy a privileged position on popular lodging reservations sites.

"... these sites are made up in a way that when a client enters the site, and asks for an offer, opinions are constantly flashing next to it. Let me say, that on these sites, these are the most important [piece of information]." (D)

Another major opportunity mentioned by the interviewees is the catalytic role of reviews in terms of company performance. One of the related aspects that surfaced was the possibility of service development (Dellarocas, 2003) based on consumer recommendations, or by the gathering of new ideas through reviews.

"Sometimes, they are quite useful, because they reveal things about the service, that would stay hidden otherwise; they can also serve as hints on how to improve negative aspects, and how to resolve problems." (D)

Reviews can equally be considered as a factor of quality control (Dellarocas, 2003), by offering an outsider's point of view about the service elements offered by the hotel.

"I know that when I'm there at the restaurant, everybody does their work perfectly. The question is whether they do the same thing during the 365 days of the year as they did during those 24 hours. We've received feedback on that from clients on many occasions." (D).

This feedback can also be considered as verification or evidence, and used as internal PR tools to increase employee engagement (even though the following example is a unique case from the interviews): *"There is always a quotation that we take out from a client's review. I always try to choose that pertains to a concrete area of activity, because this can help inspire colleagues. Not all of our employees are active followers of information about us on Facebook, Booking, or TripAdvisor, so they are pleased when they receive a positive feedback, and can think back 'hey, you know, it should have been that guest, who..', even if they really can't ever be sure who the review actually came from. But the review could have been made by anybody, because the employee was kind to each guest. And all employees enjoy the recognition and affirmation helps them to continue their work." (E)*

Another opportunity (mentioned once during the interviews) is to connect this form of earned media with the hotel's owned media spaces in order to increase the credibility of the organization's communications.
"Yes, this is some broad sort of reference that we also cite on our website. […] We put it there because we know that many people get information from there, too. They consider is as a kind of credible source. We create an immediate connection." (E)

At the same time, interviewees equally see the dark side, and the risks related to consumer opinions. The impact on the effectiveness of the hotel (Cheung-Thadani, 2012), and more precisely, a decline in demand, was the most commonly mentioned threat of consumer opinions: "*altogether, we need a large number of reviews, because if there's no new review for a long time, we will lose consumers just because we didn't get any new reviews.*" (B).

A more concrete and emphasized effect that the interviewees mentioned was the damage that negative reviews can cause. According to them, this factor is the greatest threat associated to e-WOM: consumer reviews are uncontrollable, spread quickly, and have a long-term effect, and a subsequent effect on demand. This line of reasoning is altogether is in agreement with the findings of the literature (see Chapter 3.8). These opinions equally confirm the previously mention fact that practitioners focus mainly on negative online reviews.
"*Even before I took over this hotel on January 3, 2011, there was a mold problem, sometime during the summer of 2010, and it is still an issue [because of the reviews]:*

there was a group who wanted to cancel their booking because they read that our rooms are moldy!" (B)

Consumer opinions about hotels can appear on a number of platforms. According to our informants, besides reservation sites, consumer review sites (and especially, TripAdvisor) are the most influential, and can even be considered as opinion leaders.

"This TripAdvisor, we need to pay attention to it. We see that whatever platform the German, or the Austrian, or any other guests use to make their reservation, ... they are largely influenced by it. And I think that everybody checks it out before making a reservation. Even when somebody will make the reservation through Booking.com, they will first read through the opinions about the hotel [on TripAdvisor]." (D)

Informants were altogether fundamentally skeptical towards review sites in general, and towards TripAdvisor, as the focal platform for the present dissertation. They considered the site as primarily consumer-oriented, and preferred to pay more attention their own corporate systems. However, in comparison to reservation sites (e.g. Booking.com) (being in direct competition to their proprietary online reservation and ranking systems), they still preferred TripAdvisor and consumer review sites in general. In conclusion, based on the opinions of our informants, hotels feel a certain external pressure to follow review sites: *"there's a need to deal with it, but otherwise we wouldn't do it by ourselves."* (D)

Interviewees, aware of the working mechanisms behind them, showed optimism, to a lesser extent, and skepticism, to a greater extent, towards consumer opinions appearing on TripAdvisor. Their main arguments were that anybody can rate the hotel independently of whether they actually spent time there – thereby the basic working mechanism of these sites introducing a potential source of bias.

"I must also add that they improved their algorithm a great deal, they can filter a lot of things now, ... though, it will never be perfect, ... because, for TripAdvisor, nobody even needs to stay at the place [to post a review]" (B)

These results highlight the fact that consumer opinions from proprietary rating systems are considered as more valuable and more useful by interviewed professionals (Figure 10). These closed systems, however, offer a considerably more limited number of available reviews than public rating sites. This result requires particular attention considering the degree of impact of consumer reviews that interviewees equally recognized. In order, however, for practitioners to take full advantage of the positive effects of online rating sites, a change of mindset is required. A research problem induced by the above results is to examine how consumer opinions appearing on TripAdvisor can be used as valuable and useful sources of information for hotels. One solution to the problem is consumer education, which involves, for example, the improvement of the quality (information value) of the opinions "generated" by them.

In order to achieve this it is necessary to investigate which elements of consumer opinions can be considered as nonfunctional.

Figure 10. Place and role of review sites in the hotel reservation process based on the in-depth interviews
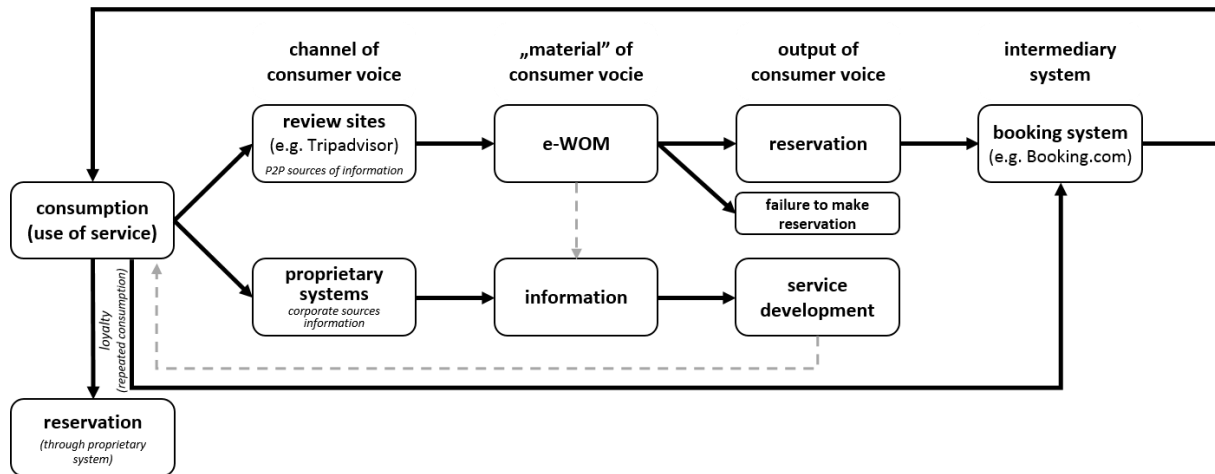
Source: own elaboration

According to the interviewee's general experience, users process information on sites like TripAdvisor in a conventional way, that is, they only read posts on the first page, and from among those, only the ones with interesting, catchy titles. In the interviewees' experience, users also evaluate the ratio of satisfied vs. dissatisfied opinions among the first displayed ones, and if they don't find enough negative opinions, they also specifically look for dissatisfied opinions (those having a one- or two-star rating out of five).   A consumer-specific filter criterion was equally mentioned, namely the search for English-language opinions, which constitute a major part of TripAdvisor's reviews.

"That's right, only like a tenth, or a maximum of one person out of ten goes on to the second page, and almost no one to the third or fourth." (B)

Based on the interviewee's perception, information search on these platforms can be conceptualized as a multi-step process. TripAdvisor offers an ever growing number of available consumer opinions, where titles can serve as a kind of pre-screening tools. Titles, according to the interviewees, ought to offer a summary of the opinion's message, thereby supporting information selection. But also, in their opinion, a title is better when it is more interesting, and draws attention – still staying in line with the message of the text. Our informants believed that most titles as of today do not fill this role.

"Yes, I believe that titling is the essence of everything. Even if I don't read through the whole lot…" (E)
"Oh yeah, and [the title] is very important, because they sometimes can be misleading." (F)

As shown beforehand, interviewees focused primarily on negative consumer opinions, while putting less emphasis on positive ones. This can be the effect of the fact that their activities mainly involve dealing with negative comments, while positive ones do not contain valuable information to them, and therefore only consider these as a quantitative component, rather than an actual opportunity (for marketing communications). This is supported by the responses that the interviewees provided when asked to characterize positive opinions: they considered them as superficial containing mostly general information. Descriptions found in consumer opinions were perceived by them as one-sided and pointing out one detail upon which the whole of the opinion is then constructed. This detail, in their opinion, can be a person's own experience, one element of service quality (e.g. the staff's attitude), but might even be directed at outside factors (e.g. touristic sights or outside restaurants). As a consequence, opinions were perceived as one-dimensional, as they don't offer a big picture of the service and thus don't provide a virtual trialability of it – thereby lacking any real information contents to either them as practitioners or to prospective clients. Interviewees equally perceived positive opinions as generally shorter, and contain a number of abbreviations, and "modern" wording, that often impede understanding. Based on the above, our informants seem to consider the mass of positive consumer reviews as rather identical pieces of content.

"Not to mention that most comments are like 'everything was cool, we had lots of fun'." (C)
"… Positive [comments] were mostly in connection with the quality of the service, saying that we exceeded expectations… The history of the hotel, the conference room, the ballroom, how many people it can hold at the same time, the opportunity. So, on one hand, the service, the food, but these are kind of general things…"(F)

Altogether, our informants had a quite negative image of positive consumer reviews. Two perceived value dimensions of positive reviews emerged however (which, at the same time, were mentioned to pertain to a minority of these reviews). The first is when a consumer expresses gratitude in a (satisfied) positive review, thereby providing a credible affirmation of the service element in question. The second is the reviewer giving advice, thanks to which the hotel is able to effectively develop the service provided. These reviews act as more than simple feedback as they offer valuable information, reflecting actual consumer needs.

"Well [thanks to these] we see, we hear what the guest would have liked to see, what they were satisfied of in a given case, and what are the areas that we should develop, or what are the directions that we might have already embarked upon, but still need to put effort into." (C)

Our informants put a larger emphasis on the role on negative reviews (corresponding to the phenomenon identified in the literature as the negativity bias [Chang – Wu, 2014; Chen – Lurie, 2013]), as they consider that these opinions have a larger and longer lasting effect than positive reviews. In their view, dissatisfied reviews are longer, and can be characterized by a more detailed reasoning. They are said to be most often anonymous, which our informants judge as another reason behind their relative length. Two poles of dissatisfied reviews emerged during the interviews: (1) One pole is made up by opinions written under the effect of anger and frustration. These can be characterized by strong emotional expressions (shown also in the first phase of the present study). (2) The other pole is composed of opinions that contain objective discontent, and are structured around the information supporting this stance.

(1) The primary aim of anger-driven reviews is for the reviewer to "vent" their negative feelings. They characteristically seize on one detail of the service experience that the writer often does not support by any argument. In the background of these experiences may lie a personal grudge that is reflected in the opinion, making bias and strong exaggeration a characteristic rhetoric feature of these reviews.

This characterization of negative reviews is in line with the results of the first research phase, where outrage was expressed in similar ways by respondents.

"Just like there were guest complaints that reached us, out of which a good 10% may have been true. They may only have ordered a single coffee, but a whole story was constructed around it; if I weren't working that particular evening, and hadn't seen the case, I wouldn't even believe that someone could make up and write down things like that." (F)

(2) At the other extreme are objective reviews, which are longer and give a more detailed, often even multilateral description of the service experience. Here, the consumer not only expresses their discontent but they are also able to discern the positive side of the service experience, making the whole review more credible and objective. The information found in this type of reviews can offer cues to hotels to be used to implement actual service development. The value of these reviews is enhanced when multiple reviews get to highlight the same issue.

Multilateral reviews contain a complex argumentation that, according to Doh and Hwang (2009) enhance the credibility of the opinion. This dimension equally appeared in the first research phase where a description was not focusing on one service element but on the service as a whole.

"And if ever a complaint comes in, fortunately very rarely, they write down what the problem is. There are even people who really objectively write down what they did like, what they really liked, what they think could be improved, and what was unacceptable. Some can even really be well-nuanced." (E)

In-between the two extremes are the opinions which hotels have reservations about. One such category that emerged during the interviews was that of reviews based on unrealistic expectations: while they are not characterized by any extreme sentiment, and even though they may characterize the service experience from multiple points of view, they are far from objective. The discontent in these negative service experiences might result from a communication gap (e.g. a criticism in the review about the immutable characteristics of the hotel). Factors influencing consumer expectations might equally be at the origin of these unrealistic reviews: that is, consumers not being aware of the specifics of an expected service – another factor that raises the issue of consumer education.

"There are things here that they could've expected in advance… Obviously, people tend to write down things like these when they weren't satisfied with one or two particular things, and they try to push these with other arguments." (E).

Another specific category of reviews that emerged is those that relate alleged crimes committed while consuming the service (e.g. a theft at the hotel). Interviewees treated these consumer opinions with reservation, and found it necessary that the cases mentioned within be thoroughly investigated. Even though the consumers in these cases seem to employ the strategy of indirect voice, the fact that the problem couldn't be resolved on site (i.e. the consumer complaining directly at the occurrence of the mentioned event – direct voice) can be considered a sort of managerial failure. Such consumer opinions bear corporate value in case they provide a multilateral recount of the events, presenting the full story through a thorough narrative – and at the same time gives voice to the consumer's direct objection, thus making the opinion look less like an empty accusation and more credible. The emergence of this category supports the value and significance of narratives in consumer opinions.

"Then he asks for an official opinion from the department in question… checks whether everything that is said in the opinion is all true. We should know that, that's very important, … with all this anonymity comes that not everything is true that's said there." (D)

The previous part presented a practitioner's perception of consumer opinions in general. Interviewee's, however, emphasized certain content elements that they believed are determining in the evaluation of consumer opinions. According to their experience, there is no substantial difference among positive or negative opinions as far as these determining factors are concerned. These factors were: (1) The title of the opinion: Informative, precise, and specific titles were said to draw attention.

"When he writes, that… it's calm. This is very informative, what he experienced. The others all said that quality was the most important, this one here… puts the emphasis on another factor, that he personally found most important." (E)

(2) Cleanness, human factor, location are crucial factors according to the experts: that is, whether basic requirements, but also the visible elements of the service are met is a crucial factor. These findings are in line with the results of the first research phase, where we showed a frequent occurrence of service elements in consumer reviews.

"There's a variety of services that they consume. That's a kind of evidence for the importance of location: even within the hotel, there are indeed products, a balcony, a panorama view from the room that they are willing to pay a surcharge for." (F)

They equally find it important that the opinions contain information about the external environment: services in the area, landmarks, transport. This is a sort of "out-of-context" content, as it pertains to elements outside of the scope of the service, that is, the hotel does not have influence on them. At the same time, prospective consumers may indeed be influenced by the presence, or not, of such information. The importance of this dimension was equally revealed in the first research phase.

"… that bear information to prospective guests, such as a tobacco shop at 10 meters from the hotel, a grocery store at 20 meters, or the ways to access the venue, what to visit in the area, calm, or busy area. That is, everything that pertains to the immediate environment. Is it dangerous, safe, who you can meet here…" (F)

Practitioners also find the presence of concrete, specific information in the review determining, about what the reviewer missed, or on the contrary, enjoyed when experiencing the service. Advice or suggestions related to this service experience given to prospective guests are an important element of this dimension, by offering to the interested users exclusive information and reducing uncertainty related to the service. The more multifaceted the description of the service experience is, and the more the narrative stands out, the more complete a review will be, according to the interviewees. These results are, once again, in line with the first research phase, where we assumed that narratives allowed for a better understanding and a greater picture for the reader.

"These reviews I like – when they write down where the hotel and everything else is located. They write about the service, criticize a bit, that the breakfast could be better, but at least they really write down their opinion." (F)

The above content elements also have a decision support role, as they are determining for the readers. These elements highlighted by the reviewers equally give an outline of a few factors that could contribute to improve the quality, and thereby the credibility and value of the review (both for hotels and consumers). These dimensions can therefore be considered as "indicators" of quality:

Does the review contain specific, unique information that is exclusive, concrete and practical. Does this information provide evidence to the reader that the reviewer was indeed a guest at the given hotel, used the services in question.

A multifaceted review of the consumer experience that contain more detail and explanation. (In case of positive reviews, e.g. recommendations for improvement, in

case of negative reviews, e.g. taking into account the positive elements of the service – all in favor of the objectivity of the review.)

A recommendation or advice in the review can equally increase its quality. Advice can not only be given to other consumers about specific service elements or the service as a whole, but also to hotels for further development. This dimension can appear in both positive and negative reviews.

Information pertaining to the sender, e.g. destination, experience, education, prior experiences, lifestyle, etc. can make reviews more personal and credible. A signature can equally be a specific and peculiar information pertaining to the sender.

In terms of wording, avoiding extremes can increase a review's wording. This can refer to the overall execution of the review – e.g. orthography –, but also to the formulation – e.g. a "normal" level of emotions in the review –, both of which contribute to making the review personal, yet immersive. These dimensions surfaced in the first research phase as codes, the use of which is therefore supported by the results of the expert interviews.

Coherence with other reviews is another dimension of a review's persuasiveness – thereby making it worthwhile to include such elements in a review.

Photos attached to reviews are also tools to enhance credibility, working as a form of evidence, by showing reality. In the case of negative reviews, they can equally increase the review's objectivity, while in the case of positive reviews, they can help emphasize one or more arguments of the review.

"No wonder that Instagram is the fastest developing platform, they were the ones to notice that nothing beyond pictures are seen – not even on Facebook, people no longer read anything that's written there." (B)

In terms of the credibility of consumer opinions, manipulated reviews (i.e. reviews created by an organization or a "hired" individual as part of a marketing communication activity) are equally worth mentioning. Even though the topic emerged only in a directed manner, respondent's opinions show that this is an actual, existing phenomenon in the hotel industry. Even though it might not be a favored "topic of conversation", responses about informants' own experiences made it possible to identify multiple levels of manipulation:

A phenomenon identified as natural manipulation (that corresponds to the categories of amplified [Armelini – Villanueva, 2010], or consequential [Bughin et al., 2010] e-WOM in the literature) occurs when consumers or opinion leaders are encouraged, through external motivation, to write opinions. The result will be a sort of manipulated/authentic review, that is, written by an actual consumer, even though under certain external control.

"Indeed, lots are drawn among guests. And then the guest might consider, by the way, quite justly, that a good review is an expectation, because that's the way that they will receive some gift." (D)

Another identified practice is that of accepted manipulation, when the goal is to make reviews "disappear" from the first page of the review site. That is, in its own defense, the hotel posts reviews about itself. In these cases, quantity is a primary factor. It is also important that this activity is only to be pursued until negative reviews are removed from the critical places (i.e. those that are viewed by most users).

"Sometimes reviews are published, I don't know, about hotels, which are really dirty and smear. And then, employees were asked to, you know, in the name of a James Smith, or David Jones, to book a room for this night on Booking.com – making Booking's commission disappear for that night, as the reservation was quickly canceled after. But until then, they could write an evaluation after the booking itself. And when the new evaluations came in, the old ones were no longer in plain sight. And sooner or later they will disappear permanently at page 20, or so." (D)

Two types of classic manipulation were identified from the interviewee's responses: paid commenters employed in large numbers to raise the quantity of user comments, or the use of paid commenters to slander competitors. These forms were lest accepted among interviewed experts, and deemed unfruitful as a long-term strategy.

"I heard about such things. There are also hotels in Budapest that have hundreds of comments – that's easier to mess with." (E)
"They were vicious enough to decimate each other, no one can really do anything about it." (G)

The presence of manipulated reviews is therefore presumably a reality. Interviewees, however, believed that a user's prior experience can help in filtering these out, and the rating site's credibility is also determining in this matter.

"They rely on their own intuitions, they really try here to identify and classify which one's relevant, and which one's less…" (F)

Even though the social factor was only secondary in the case of TripAdvisor, data from the expert interviews allowed for the identification of perceived, specific roles related to content generation. Identifying and characterizing such roles can assist the aforementioned process of consumer education.

- Raging individuals, who tend to use negative e-WOM as a sort of self-expression. Their primary goal is to express a (perceived or real) grievance, and thereby to vent their frustration. The expression of rage is associated with extremes, e.g. by the use of strong language, or words reflecting an extreme emotional state. These consumer opinions are too subjective to bear actual "value" for readers.
- Blackmailers can be considered as a special category of raging opinions. These posters expressly expect compensation for being subjected to a (perceived or real) detriment. These reviews are characterized by excessive bias, and therefore bear no actual "value".

- Unrealistic reviewers can be identified among negative consumer reviews. They are characterized by the criticism of things that cannot be changed, such as the location of a hotel. These reviews were said to often include elements, in the form of criticism that can otherwise be found on the hotel's own information channels, making the reviewer guilty of being "unprepared". These reviews bear little novelty, and therefore little information value. Unrealistic reviewers are a category in the spotlight of consumer education, as an increased level of "preparedness" could effectively decrease the number of such negative reviews.
- Impartial reviewers express their satisfaction, yet give a thorough, multifaceted narration of their experience. They characteristically use accurate wording, and not only they explain, but they also support the object of their satisfaction or discontent. They equally enumerate the positive and negative features of the service they are reviewing, thus ensuring objectivity.

   This type of reviewers produce actual "value" with their reviews, and their texts can be used as a form of guidance in further consumer education.
- Focusing reviewers can appear in both positive and negative reviews. Their primary characteristic is the emphasis on one specific attribute (service element or external factor). Even though restricted in nature, these reviews can offer much information about the specific element that they highlight.

   A sub-category of focused reviewers is that of delighted reviewers, characterized by positive bias and extreme positive emotions. Superlatives also characterize their mode of expression. Factors at the origin of their delight are at the center of their (focused) review.

   Such consumer opinions hardly offer a big picture about the service, and supplementary sources of information still are needed.
- Projecting reviews characteristically project one positive or negative experience about a specific service element to the experience as a whole, making the whole review describe everything as negative or positive. These reviews are to be treated with reservation, as they are biased, yet still can offer a thorough description of the service experience.
- Pretense reviewers generate very brief reviews with very moderate information value. These reviews only account for the quantitative evaluation of an establishment. Characteristic expressions found in such reviews: "I liked it very much", "I did not enjoy it", etc.
- Trolls, like in other virtual communities, are also present here. Trolls here are reviewers who offer no useful information at all. They characteristically write down trivialities, often with poor spelling and bad manners. Because of the lack of veracity, actual paid commenters can also be classified into this category. As the reviews left by trolls are the least valuable, even counterproductive, consumers need to be educated in order to be able to identify such comments.

7.1.2. Conclusions of the expert interviews

In conclusion, our informants seemed to agree on the fact that consumers during their decision-making about the choice of a hotel do use online consumer reviews as an important source of information. It can also be said that interviewed experts do see the potential in e-WOM, even though they primarily approach the phenomenon from the side of negative consumer opinions, thereby leaving the opportunities (e.g. to connect this form of earned media with other, owned or paid corporate communication tools) related to positive reviews in the background.

The results of the interviews confirm that e-WOM has a significant role, even more in the hotel industry. It is therefore important to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon for hotels to realize the tool's potential. The results also confirm the topicality of the dissertation's core subject.

Interviewee's acknowledged TripAdvisor as a major source of information for consumers, and admitted paying attention to here posted consumer reviews. Informants therefore confirmed that TripAdvisor is an appropriate choice for sampling and data collection, as it is a well-known and recognized platform in the topic. The quality of opinions to be found on the platform was, however, mentioned by none of the interviewed experts. In the same way, the perceived marketing communication potential of the platform was biased by their apparent mental focus on negative reviews. While TripAdvisor can indeed be considered a virtual community, only one informant highlighted this aspect.

These limitations from the part of practitioners also shed light on the existing marketing communication potential of such platforms in case a deeper understanding of the dynamics of consumer reviews is offered.

According to our informants' experience, the titles given to consumer reviews equally have an important role and therefore are worthwhile to integrate into the study. The first research phase made it clear that consumer titling, overall, was straightforward. Focus, therefore, ought to be on outlying cases. According to the interviews, the following factors determine the quality of review titles: they raise awareness / cross consumers' threshold, and at the same time, sum up the review's essence. Accordingly, consumer opinions whose title expressed extreme positive emotions, either through wording, or through punctuation and context, were included in the sample of the third research phase. Reviews with titles expressing opposition (i.e. including both positive and negative factors) were also included. Titles with catchy, or strange wording, and punctuation were also included into the sample.

Experts considered positive reviews as a rather quantitative factor, with less actual value. As they put it, one major consideration criterion for consumers is the ratio of positive reviews to negative ones, while their actual content is only secondary. Conversely, negative opinions were perceived to have longer term and more considerable effects, therefore they asserted directing their attention to these. At the same time, it has been noted that even among negative reviews, only a few actually bear value for them.

Based on the above, it is worthwhile to examine the characteristics of satisfied and dissatisfied consumer opinions on TripAdvisor, a platform that is relevant to both potential consumers and to professionals. The results of a such study could contribute to identifying value dimensions of consumer reviews and thereby to offering recommendations on improving the quality and therefore consumer value thereof. By means of this increased quality, consumer reviews could be able to fill the role of "sales assistant" and thereby fill an actual place within the marketing communications toolbox.

Interviewees equally expressed their expectations in connection with quality reviews, be they positive or negative. These expressed dimensions confirmed the legitimacy of the codes established in the first research phase: concrete information, two-sidedness, response strategy to an experience – loyalty, information about the sender, difficulties of interpretation and wording, manifestations of emotions. It is therefore worthwhile to study consumer reviews and their quality under these themes, as well as the presence thereof in practice, and the potential need for further development and consumer education.

Photos were mentioned and highlighted as quality increasing factors. This is confirmed by current trends marked by consumers' evolving information process capabilities and the growing importance of visual information. Photos, within this line of thought, help draw users' attention and process information. *"If they see a picture, they stop, and look at the article next to it – it anchors the eye." (B)*

It is therefore worthwhile to extend the scope of the study, besides review titles and core body, to user-generated pictures.

Coherence between reviews was equally mentioned by our informants as an important decision factor, thereby providing a new research dimension: is a given consumer opinion in line with the majority?

When asked about the issue of manipulation, our informants did not mention any content elements that could serve as a basis for the investigation of the topic in the third research phase. Therefore this element will not be put to the fore in the last research phase.

The perceived roles of review writers confirm that the study of the social dimension is equally justified: does the social character actually appear in consumer reviews, and if yes, what are its characteristics? If a social character can be shown among reviews, that would mean that their emphasis could further increase the level of confidence in consumer opinions.

7.2. Consumer focus group interviews

In order to supplement the results of expert interviews, we proceeded to hybrid consumer focus groups. Participants were selected with the filter question of whether they were aware of and active users of consumer review site TripAdvisor during their search for hotels. The interview guide is included in Annex 1.

Three focus group sessions were conducted with a professional moderator in a designated focus group lab with a one-way mirror. All focus groups were composed of eight participants. This group size fall into to the recommended size of 4 to 10 people per focus group (Stake, 2006 in McKim, 2015). When determining the constitutions of the focus groups, previous results of the literature were taken into account, namely that a majority of online users are passive lurkers, and only a smaller part (ideally, 10 to 20 %) are actual content creators (see e.g. Ridings et al., 2006). Accordingly, two focus groups were conducted with people who only read others' opinions on TripAdvisor when is search of a hotel, while one focus group was conducted with participants who were active creators of reviews on the platform. Information about the interviews are presented in Table 25.

Table 25. Focus group interviews

Designation of focus group in analysis	Time of the focus group interview	Characterization of the interviewees	Number of participants (total; male:female)	average age (yrs)
H	November 2015	Are familiar with the TripAdvisor site, do read consumer opinions related to hospitality establishments published on the site when making a decision; Have contributed to the opinions on the site.	8 (4:4)	35
I	December 2015	Are familiar with the TripAdvisor site, do read consumer opinions related to hospitality establishments published on the site when making a decision;.	8 (4:4)	36
J	December 2015	Are familiar with the TripAdvisor site, do read consumer opinions related to hospitality establishments published on the site when making a decision;.	8 (4:4)	35

Source: own elaboration

This research phase can be considered as a supplementary phase of expert interviews. As can be seen from the results of the in-depth interviews, user-generated photos and manipulated opinions were given less emphasis in the analysis. This supplementary phase was aimed at offering a deeper understanding of these dimensions from the consumers' point of view, thereby completing the study's scope.

7.2.1. Results of the consumer focus groups[9]

The significant role of e-WOM in the hotel industry was equally confirmed by the results of the focus group interviews. Participants unanimously reported that they trusted online consumer opinions: "*I trust such comments more, than, for instance, if they were posted by the hotel itself, saying how wonderful it is to stay with them.*" (H)

They also consider them as a decision factor (see also: Park – Lee, 2009; Racherla – Friske, 2012), and more precisely, as a tool to reduce insecurity, by providing them with information.
"Opinions from different people are important, the feedback, because we don't really know what to expect." (H)

Online consumer reviews also help in the evaluation of alternatives thereby reducing search costs.
"It already happened to me that I changed my reservation because of them. Not abroad, but here, in Hungary. A spa hotel, in Hajdúszoboszló, a four-star one; they had such abominable comments that I cancelled." (I).

In case of consumer uncertainty, they can also serve as final decision support: *"Why I chose that hotel? Because I read good reviews about it." (I)*

The focus group discussions confirm the results of the expert interviews: participants stated that consumer review sites, such as TripAdvisor, represent a key role in their information search and decision process when having to choose a hotel. *"Moreover, TripAdvisor has real experiences, the description of the hotel reflects reality. For me, TripAdvisor is very important." (I)*
Based on the interviews, two distinct categories of users could be identified with respect to information search strategies on TripAdvisor: (1) determined and (2) averaging. Determined users read through the whole pool of available information

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[9] Because of the considerable match between the results of the three interviews, in the following, no distinction will be made along the type of the interview.

on TripAdvisor, both the negative and positive reviews. Participants declared having used this strategy when they were faced to a high-value, consideration-intensive decision. An averaging strategy was followed by participants who read consumer reviews appearing only on the first page of several similar websites, which they then compared to come to a decision.

Both positive and negative reviews were said by participants to be treated with reservation, which result can also be the effect of focus group bias related to assumed right answers.[10]

After the interviews, it became clear that positive opinions seem to matter less for participants. Participants had their reservation concerning positive reviews, with the general opinion that they are more likely shorter, more superficial, and underexpressed. They considered reviews that contain detailed description and reasoning to be rare, even though these could provide real cues for consumer decisions.

"I always feel a bit like, when the guy posts a review on how cool the hotel was during their vacation, I have to take that with suspicion. We know human nature, let's read it, but…" (I)

Participants perceived negative reviews to be longer, and to contain more detailed descriptions than positive reviews. At the same time, they reckoned that extremes are frequent, which made them have reservations about this category of consumer opinions when alone, while trust them when present in larger numbers.

"… one negative opinion is not a negative opinion, I think. But if it keeps repeating and the same problem is mentioned by many people, now that can be alarming." (H)

Beyond participants' general impressions about online consumer opinions, a few concrete elements stand out as determining. In terms of the determining elements, no difference was observed between positive and negative reviews. The results of the expert interviews were equally confirmed, as, according to the focus group participants, a basic requirement is that they contain information about the basic services, the human factor, and the location of the venue.

A difference between the results of the expert interviews and the consumer focus groups is that our consumer informants not only mentioned cleanness, but also catering services offered by the hotel as determining decision factors.

"[I expect them] to write down, about a hotel, how the breakfast was, how the lunch was, how the dinner was, how the room was. To describe in detail how the waiters behaved. All this is important to me. (I)

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[10] However, when, in a later part of the focus groups, participants were asked to perform a kind of simulation game, having to evaluate a hotel based on received consumer reviews they seemed to put unquestioned confidence in them, on multiple occasions, by providing clear verdicts based on them about the fictional hotel in question.

They also estimated that information about external elements, such as the external environment of the hotel, sights, and services in the surroundings as important.

"Many places can be reached on foot. It's in the center. If they don't want a full breakfast, they can order a coffee, because there's a café nearby." (I)

Exclusivity and specificity of information was also highlighted by participants. These can lead to multi-sided reviews of the service experience, and assure a complex decision.

"There were some opinions about our hotel which said that you are safe to eat everything, and that they were satisfied a 100% with it, because everything was made using bottled water. This was a very useful feedback to us, which made us immediately choose this one over other hotels, even those that were in the same area, because they did not have this kind of feedback." (H)

Quality dimensions identified during the expert interviews were confirmed by the focus group study (Table 26).

Table 26. Quality dimensions related to reviews

Quality dimension	As described by consumers
Specific, exclusive information	*"Somebody writes down their own opinions But if they write down how wonderful walks they had on the beach, that will say nothing to me about the hotel. But if they write down, specifically, that the bathroom was clean, or that the bedroom and the living room are not separate, than that's a fact, and then I know." (I)*
Multifaceted description	*"If there are positive and negative opinions within one review. Everybody has a positive opinion, or maybe they have a somewhat worse opinion, or anything, but if that's within the comment, than that seems more credible." (J)*
Recommendation	*"Easy to access, or maybe some info about a transfer offer, or public transportation, to see how far it is from the airport, from the metro station." (H)*
Background information related to the reviewer	*"... let that review be personal. What do I mean? When they write that they have two kids, they went with the family, or alone, on a business trip." (H)* *"Let them assume their name. Details. I believe that..." (I)*
Characteristic elements of wording	*"Reviews should be free of linguistic errors, I really don't take those reviews into account that are hastily made and too short." (H)*
Coherence with other reviews	*"I see two identical from two completely different people, than that starts to make me think." (I)*
Photo attached to the review	*"Let it imitate with pictures." (I)*

Source: own elaboration

Consumer-generated photos equally surfaced during the focus groups as quality dimensions. They supplement the contents of the review and give a full picture about the service experience, thereby supporting consumer decision-making. *"Pictures are important. But not as important as content, but this way, they form a whole. A picture also tell a lot." (J)*

The focus groups provided hints about dimensions of potential consumer expectations about photos. A primary requirement is that the photos give indications about the

cleanness, catering, and the room itself, that is, about the core service elements. These overall make the related service elements perceptible and tangible.

"You can see it at the bathroom. There's a relative cleanness there. The towels are set properly, they are clean. The bathroom is large enough. You can see luggage in the room, but you can also see that it is spacious, clean, it's kept in order." (J)

Another quality dimension is the comprehensiveness (i.e. whether they provide a complete overview of the general conditions and equipment) of the uploaded images in connection with the room and the bathroom. Negative opinions are an exception, where participants agreed on being tolerant about photos focusing on the details that are criticized in the text of the review. This result contradicts that of the expert interviews, where practitioners clearly referred to focusing as a potential tool for bias, and therefore, manipulation. This contradiction confirms that a special emphasis is to be put the third research phase on the study of whether images about details are there to support the written reviews, or, on the contrary, to manipulate readers.

"I like pictures where you can see that it's well taken, where you can see how you enter the room, where is the bathroom, etc. and where you can also see the majority of the room. I'm saying, I prefer one well-made photo to 5 bad ones." (J)
"There, you can clearly see that the bathtub is rusty – if they only write that in the review, I might not believe it, but if they attach a photo, then I see it." (I)

According to the interviewees, it is equally important that one could easily identify the goal of the picture, thus assuring rapid information processing.

"I'm not sure here, I suppose they made a picture to show… what they ate, or to show what the offer is." (I)
Personal information was also said to be important as much in the case of pictures than in that of the text. A personal touch can fill an otherwise sterile picture with life. At the same time, pictures that are too intimate were ruled out by participants. As such, on the "sterility – privacy" continuum, the average was agreed as a kind of ideal value.

"Upload a picture to an overall positive review where you can clearly see a bra or even a purse, that too personal. I wonder why there's not somebody lying on the bed, while they're at it. Or why isn't there somebody sitting on the toilet – that's also lifelike." (J)
Besides the above dimensions, a few core expectation about photos in general were also mentioned. One of these was the execution, i.e. the right quality and tone of the picture, at the fact that the information it bears be clearly distinguishable and meaningful. Another expectation is that text and pictures form a unified whole, i.e. the contents, style, and mood of the pictures reflect that of the written opinion.

Even though we could establish the basic types of manipulated reviews thanks to the expert interviews, no detail was identified as to the specific contents thereof.

According to the results of the focus groups, content elements related to consumer opinions perceived as manipulated could be identified[11].

Participants reported having come across such consumer opinions. An interesting finding is that they mentioned having encountered seemingly manipulated opinions in both positive and negative reviews. *"But there are a lot of comments that come from the competition, or they are own comments."* (J). This can be one cause of the aforementioned reservations of participants about both positive and negative comments.

One identified dimension of reviews perceived as manipulated is the fact that they contain extreme manifestations of emotion, either in a positive or in a negative way, with one-sided arguments. Extreme manifestations of emotion correspond to elements of delight, or outrage, which emotional involvement is projected to every detail in the review.

"That was surely a paid comment, it didn't stop talking in superlatives… everything is awesome, … everything is perfect. I don't think that even exists." (J)
"because everything here is crap, from the moment they entered the hotel. That's way too one-sided. It seems a lot like some competitor laid a loaf here." (J)

Another identified dimension is the lack of concreteness, i.e. a too general description of events, with little or no information value about the actual services offered by the hotel.

"Its tone, its style don't contain any specifics, nothing objective is written in it. It's like they were never there." (I)

Style and wording were mentioned as another dimension that can help identify manipulated reviews: whether an unconventional, or artificial style is used to write the consume review.

"The last sentence is really strange, we don't usually put it that way, saying things like 'Whether we plan to come back? You can bet on that.'" (H)

Moreover, short, or even extremely short (one-, two-word-long) reviews are another indication. A limited scope, and lack of concreteness are another cue that make these reviews stand out from the rest.

"Short messages, like 'everything was cool', or 'everything was bad', I'm really not satisfied with those. I usually don't read those." (H)

Providing no personal information is another factor of perceived manipulation.

"So, you can filter out those that write personal things in their review. Those, I think, are not really manipulated anymore." (H)

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[11] Hereafter, we will refer to such consumer reviews as "opinions perceived as manipulated" rather than "manipulated opinions", as the true sources of such opinions are impossible to identify.

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Among the perceived roles of review writers identified during the expert interview, the following were confirmed by the focus groups (Table 27).

Table 27. Roles related to content generation

Role related to content generation	Description		Specific identification marks
	Based on in-depth expert interviews	**Based on focus groups**	
raging	*"in these negative reviews, you can see the personal prejudice, and they choose this way of self-expression. Now, I'll show you!" (B)*	*"... the text is quite long, it's quite berating also, there are only negative things in it..." (J)*	raging
blackmailing	*"Yes, and at the same time, he contradicts himself - he writes that they were respectful, and tried to reach him. So there, on location, they made everything, they tried to reach him. They tried to solve the problem on the spot and went looking for him. Both in manners and professionalism, they acted properly. Yet still, he expected something more." (F)*	✕	blackmailing
unrealistic	*"There are things here that they could've expected in advance… They say that the room is not big enough. Room sizes are generally on the website. Obviously, people tend to write down things like these when they weren't satisfied with one or two particular things, and they try to push these with other arguments." (E).*	*"... and they go on, and on, and on... And maybe not even half of it is true, because they fall into exaggerating." (J)*	unrealistic
objective	*"they emphasize that they saw the positive thing in it, they try to be positive about it, so it also has its advantages..." (G)*	*"... because it's very precise, and exact, trustworthy..." (I)*	objective
focusing	*"I think, in most cases, if somebody has a positive experience, and they benefit from a really special kind of service, then they will write and mention that he or she was really thoughtful, they did not forget, they brought the candle for the birthday, they brought me my suitcase..." (F)*	*"... here, for example, they specificall mention the staff, that they were very friendly." (I)*	focusing
projecting	*„that's typically a case where I feel that they only talk about the negative - that there was one negative experience, and they build everything around that. And if something was not o.k., then nothing's going to be after that." (F)*	*"...they had a negative experience, and from then on, even the positive things became bad. There are some people who, when something bad comes up, they close up and no longer are open to positive things, and then, they are inclined to... they are suppressed by their negative experiences..." (J)*	projecting
pretense-member	*"there are some people who really just write that 'it was o.k.', 'it was bad', because, what do I know, the floor creaked - and that's it for the comment..." (G)*	*"And exactly because they write down, with one-worders, that it was o.k., it was beautiful." (H)*	pretense-member
troll	*"Guests are not stupid by default, if somebody is banal, and writes complete nonsense, then they completely lose their credibility." (B)*	*"There were those trolls. They are capable of everything." (I)*	troll

Source: own elaboration

7.2.2. Conclusions of the focus group study

Participants in the focus groups were active users of e-WOM in their decision-making about hotels, and they actively seek consumer opinions on consumer review sites. The platform of TripAdvisor is a distinguished part of their information search process, which validates that it is an appropriate data source for sampling in the third research phase.

No common information search strategies could be identified among participants in the context of TripAdvisor. However, they all stated that they read through the first page in all cases, and that they were determined to get acquainted with negative opinions about the hotels of their choice. This intelligence ought to be used when determining sampling strategy for the third research phase.

As can be seen from the results of the expert interviews, positive consumer reviews were given less regard by the informants. This result was verified by the focus groups, participants stating having reservations about this type of opinions. Reservations, however, were also reported in the context of negative opinions. At the same time, these concerns disappeared when negative opinions were corroborated by others, thereby putting coherence a focal factor to study in consumer decision making.

We therefore deem it necessary to investigate, in the third research phase, the content dimensions of consumer opinions on TripAdvisor, in a general aim of increasing their overall quality and thus reliability, and value.

The determining content dimensions identified during the focus groups were in overlap with the results of the expert interviews. It was therefore justified that it is worthwhile to investigate the core service elements and external factors more in depth during the next research phase, as these were those that were mentioned as most determining.

Quality dimensions of the perception of consumer-generated photos were equally identified. This result confirms that the sample of the third research phase should equally be extended to user-generated pictures. The identified quality dimensions are to serve as starting codes for this part of the study.

The focus group study equally allowed us to identify a number of dimensions related to the perception of manipulated opinions (Table 28). Most of these dimensions, however, can be identified as the opposite pairs of the dimensions revealed as quality-

increasing, such as: specificity vs. general description, personal information vs. impersonality. This raises the question whether participants conceptualize manipulated reviews as necessarily low-quality reviews. The study of this question extends beyond the frame of the third research phase of the present dissertation, and can therefore be considered as a potential future research direction.

Table 28. Manipulated opinions according to the literature and the results of the focus group study

	Manipulated e-WOM in the literature (based on Banerjee – Chua, 2014; Bambauer-Sachse – Mangold, 2013; Hu et al. , 2012)	(Supposedly) manipulated e-WOM (based on the focus group study)
based on	fictional situations	unrealistic /nonsensical situation [3 mentions]
length	medium-length or wordy	extreme (short or extremely short; excessively wordy) [4 mentions]
legibility, interpretability	more readable	-
level of information	noninformative (ambiguous; relating a situation that never happened)	general description; lack of specifics; one-sided description lack of personal nature
writing style	possibility of same style among various sources	overmannered style; offbeat vocabulary; exaggerations and strong emphases in the text; superlatives
grammar	more frequent recourse to past and future tenses use of multiple exclamation points	-
type of evaluation	contains both a score and a textual evaluation	-
balance of opinion	extreme parts more likely (but presence also of normal level)	unequivocally extreme
affective components	emphasized recourse to emotions	use of extreme emotions

Source: own elaboration

The expert interviews allowed for the identification of specific roles related to content generation that were further validated by the results of the focus groups. Altogether, this result allows for the testing and further refinement of the identified categories during the third research phase.

7.3. Conclusions of the second research phase

The primary aim of the second research phase was to investigate the relevance, and importance for stakeholders, of the content dimensions identified during the first research phase. Supplemental dimensions equally emerged, adding new scope for the study of the last research phase.

Table 29 gives a summary of the main results of the second research phase, themed according to the main identified dimensions during the various interviews. The summarizing overview offers a comparison of the respective views of the interviewed experts and consumers, thereby offering a dual approach to the evaluation of the

identified content dimensions. In the last column are included the mains conclusions derived from the second research phase that will be used as a framework for the content analysis of the last research phase.

Table 29. Summary of the results of the second research phase

Topic	main results of in-depth interviews	main results of focus groups	Conclusions for the third research phase
role of e-WOM in hotel choice	corporate aspect: to create a network of influence; affects corporate performance consumer aspect: decisive information source and decision support tool	decisive information source and decision support tool	contents of e-WOM need to be further studied; research topic is topical
TripAdvisor as a consumer review site	primary information source for consumers identifiable search mechanism: first page; corporate use questionable	primary information source	adequate data source for research; it is worthwhile to extend the scope of the study to review titles; sampling strategy: first page and negative opinions
contents of positive reviews	majority shorter; superficial description	majority shorter; superficial, lack of detail	further study of quality increasing factors among positive reviews (goal: consumer education)
contents of negative reviews	majority longer; more detailed; variety of types (raging, objective, unrealistic)	extended range, extremes	explore, in case of negative opinions, factors that enable the distinction between the various types of information
emphasized content elements (content *requirements*)	title of review; cleanness, human factor, location; external elements; specific information	cleanness, human factor, location, *catering*, external elements, specific information	the presence of these dimensions is crucial – recommendation for quality increasing content factors
quality increasing factors (*value magnifiers*)	specific, exclusive information; multifaceted description; background information related to the reviewer; characteristic elements of wording; coherence with other opinions; photo attached to the review	specific, exclusive information; multifaceted description; background information related to the reviewer; characteristic elements of wording; coherence with other opinions; photo attached to the review	verify existing codes new codes: recommendation, external elements, outlying service elements
consumer-generated photos	key role to corroborate review text	requirement related to the contents and execution of photos	extend the study to consumer-generated photos mentioned requirements as codes
manipulated reviews	general presence of manipulated consumer opinions prior consumer experience primordial in ability to filter several kinds of manipulation	content dimensions (extremes; one-sided description; lack of specifics; artificial style; short; general; lack of personal touch)	topical research problem, however, cannot be assessed by solely qualitative methods – the research problem cannot be handled within the framework of the present research: future research direction
roles related to content generation	raging, unrealistic, blackmailing, objective, focusing, projecting, pretense-member, troll	corroborate results of in-depth interviews	the study of social dimensions on TripAdvisor is possible and justified social dimensions as new code

Source: own elaboration

8. Third phase of the research – Analysis of TripAdvisor opinions

8.1. Cultural entrée

In the third phase of the research, sample was taken from the TripAdvisor platform to carry out netnography and content analysis.

The platform of TripAdvisor is created by an independent third party, that is why it is perceived by the consumers as a reliable opinion (see the results of the focus group analysis). Primary aim of the platform is to gather together consumer opinions of accommodations, restaurants, and other entertaining services. This platform serves only for giving opinions, direct booking of accommodations cannot be done on it.

Basic characteristic of the evaluation system on TripAdvisor platform is that practically anyone can give opinions of the given hotel, so it is not necessary to book on the given accommodation. This mechanism of actions given opportunities of certain bias – that already occurred during the analysis of the in-depth interviews –, because of these bias, experts have some doubts about that platform. At the same time, different algorithms operate on the TripAdvisor platform to filter non-independent consumer opinions. Then, the evaluator has to make a declaration at the end of the evaluation that he or she gives an independent opinion and notes that TripAdvisor can delete his or her opinions if needed. Nevertheless, consumers are less aware of this opportunity, because this option was not mentioned in any form by the participants during the consumer focus groups. At the same time, this option was known – and used if needed – by in-depth interview subjects, because, based on their stories, the non-independent nature of consumer opinions has to be proven, the opinion can be deleted only in this case. This procedure also underpins the in-depth interview results. Based on these results, this platform is perceived as consumer-focused by expert participants. However, the public procedure can exist for nothing. Because, if a consumer opinion is deleted, it receives great response.

The person who gives opinions has the option to give evaluation by points or textual evaluation in the evaluation system. The consumer can use a five-point scale during the scoring to express his or her satisfaction. Besides, he or she can give a title to his or her textual opinion, then he or she has to formulate a minimum 200-character long textual opinion. Moreover, the evaluator has a possibility to upload photos and videos, too.

TripAdvisor elaborated a motivation system, where evaluators receive points based on their contribution. These points clearly represent their role and place in the given community.

It is possible for the readers to evaluate opinions based on their usefulness. However, they cannot communicate directly with the writer of the opinions. TripAdvisor created a separate forum platform, where consumers can communicate in one-to-one or one-to-many ways, in synchronous and asynchronous forms, too. As it can be seen, TripAdvisor's platform can be perceived as a social platform, only where weaker social structure is typical. The characterization of TripAdvisor as a community and platform is summarized in the following table (Table 30).

Table 30. Characteristics of TripAdvisor

Characteristics of TripAdvisor	
foundation	created by independent third party
origin of community (online-offline)	mixed
organization of community (network-based small-group-based)	mixed
community structure (weak-strong)	weaker
focus (exchange of information-social interaction)	primary focus on exchange of information
types of information	numerous, textual reviews, photos, videos
degree of cooperation	varied
interactivity	moderate: marking reviews as useful; message board discussions
synchronicity	varied
appearance of consumer reviews	sorting by preference
characteristics of consumer reviews	title, review (min 200 characters)
information about the sender – degree of credibility	nickname, travel habits, previous evaluations, badges received for evaluations, uploaded reviews, total useful reviews, people who found the given review useful – varied
condition for writing an opinion	filling a registration form

Source: own elaboration

8.2. Data collection[12]

In the third research phase, the total population contained consumer opinions and the related photos of four-star hotels in Budapest (on the platform of TripAdvisor). Systematic sampling was taken on the total population between January 4-5, 2016[13] . The following procedure and filtering criteria were applied, related to the textual opinions:

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[12] In the third research phase, a database was built based on opinions and photos. Opinions received an ordinal number, photos received a unique code (in case it was part of the opinion already in the database it received a number, and in other cases it received the abbreviation of the hotel). The unique identifier codes are indicated in the analysis.

[13] TripAdvisor continually ranks hotels according to incoming consumer opinions. Rankings can therefore change on even a daily basis. The following rankings and evaluations represent the actual situation between January 4-5, 2016.

- The hotel has to possess at least 30 opinions, so the reader can turn[14] on the next page while reading the opinions. Moreover, the hotel must have weak and terrible evaluations.[15]
- From every group of ten hotels – based on the rank order created by TripAdvisor – one (already mentioned) four-star hotel should be present.
- Opinions should be in English, because it became visible in the second research phase that these opinions constitute the majority of the opinions, and their effect is stronger for the reason of the usage of the international language.
- The evaluator should write about his or her private journey (traveled with family, love mate, or acquaintances), because consumers evaluate based on different aspects in case of business trips, since the first is a hedonic, the second is a utilitarian viewpoint. Moreover, the evaluator (presumably) pays his or her own holiday fees and chooses the hotel by his or her own in case of a private journey. However, in case of a business trip, the journey is generally prepaid and prearranged, where the influence of the consumer in minimal.
- According to the in-depth interview results, opinions present on the first page were included into the sample during the sampling process. Besides, in the second round, the terrible and weak consumer evaluations were selected. However, in case of the opinions per hotel, special care was concentrated on dissatisfied opinions not to over represent positive opinions, because consumers come across much more positive opinions in practice (as it was illustrated in chapter 3.8.2. too).
- Concerning the date of creation of the opinions it was concluded that – based on the in-depth interview results –, consumers tend not to look at the creation date of opinions. At the same time, these problems were only present in case of terrible and weak evaluations, since the most recent opinions were present on the first pages. The date of 2010 was settled for handling the problem. This covers a quite long time frame.

Based on these principles the 200th place evaluator was reached, but the system attained its saturation point: it could not recommend more hotels, and in case of these hotels, opinions from 2009 were often present on the first page. Therefore, a second round of sampling was applied among the first 50 hotels, using the above mentioned principles.

The theoretical saturation was reached at this point during the sampling process, because similar types of opinions were replicated, so a third round of sampling was not proven to be necessary. As a result of the sampling made in two rounds, altogether

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[14] 10 consumer opinions are shown on one page at the same time on the TripAdvisor platform.
[15] Consumers can evaluate the hotel numerically, on a five-point scale in TripAdvisor's evaluation platform, where five is the highest score level.

404 consumer opinions constitute the sample. Sample composition is shown in Table 31.

But the research covers – according to the interview results – visual elements, so as photos uploaded to consumer opinions. In case of these photos, the following principles were applied: the photos connected to the textual opinions were included into the sample. Moreover, a second round of selection was applied, where only the photos presented in chronological order by the system were followed from all off the photos. Then those were selected that met the following criteria: the photo is part of an opinion written in English, and the opinion should be connected to the evaluator's private journey. As a result of this two round sampling process, 339 consumer photos constitute the sample (see Table 31), while theoretical saturation was achieved, so further extension of the sample was not considered necessary.

Table 31. Sample of the third research phase

	opinion (text)	photo related to the opinion
filter criteria	hotel with at least 30 opinions rank of the hotel in the site's listing English-language opinion related to a personal trip opinions appearing on first page and worst-rated opinions selected	first round: photos related to opinion already in the sample second round: filtering according to the order provided by the website related to an English-language opinion related to a personal trip
Terrible (1-point rating)	75	27
Poor (2-point rating)	113	14
Average (3-point rating)	31	57
Very good (4-point rating)	88	101
Excellent (5-point rating)	97	140
Total	404	339

Source: own elaboration

In the development of the codes in the third research phase deductive and inductive method was applied, since the codes from the first phase were used, which were confirmed in the first and second research phases, too. At the same time, the pool of codes was complemented in an inductive way. As a result of this, the following codes were applied:

(1) highlighted service element: emphasized service element by the evaluator in his or her opinion

(2) external factor: every external factor or service independent from the hotel

(3) subjective conclusion: repercussion highlighted in the opinion that is present in the opinion without justification (mostly unrealistic)

Based on these, the following table (Table 11) shows the applied codes and groupings in the third phase.

Figure 11. Classification of the codes of the third research phase

Confidence increasing factor	Factors affecting the quality of reviews
background information about the reviewer	wording: affective elements, contradiction, problems of interpretability, wording
multifaceted description	specific, exclusive information: specific information, advice, highlighted service elements, external environment, information source, response strategy to experience
allusion to community	background information about the reviewer
reviewer's information sources	factors influencing objectivity: affective elements, specific information, multifaceted description, subjective conclusions
response strategy to experience	photo attached to review

Source: own elaboration

8.3. Analysis[16]

8.3.1. Titles of the reviews

Based on the in-depth interview results, good opinion titles are characterized as follows: give factual summary of the review, and at the same time, it is coherent with the text, too. It became visible during the analysis of the opinions in the sample that opinion titles are in majority harmonized with the score given by the reviewer, and with the textual part of the review, in case of the positive and negative opinions, too. Differences typically occur in case of very good and very bad evaluations, where lower satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels were reflected by the titles than by the certain scores. However, the textual opinions were harmonized with the given score values. In these cases, more general or meaningless (one word or not understandable) titles were used by the reviewers, although the proportion of these titles was lower both in case of positive (12 %) and negative (16 %) reviews.

Nevertheless, it can be concluded that in case of both positive and negative opinions, more than half of the titles served as the practical summary of the textual parts, where reviewers applied narrative tools. Notwithstanding that, in one third of the opinions reviewers concentrated on so special service elements that experiences were decisive to them. This information already serves as a guideline related to the content of the reviewer's opinion, namely: information to which service elements have higher weights.

At the same time, reviewers used titles to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the sample, in a very similar way. Those titles emerged from the average in the sample that did not contain any casual words, are characterized by a high level of punctuation marks, and reviewers expressed the title as a whole sentence.

As it was presented in the second research phase – based on the experience of the in-depth interview participants –, titles of the opinions were present as content-related expectations. However, it became visible at the analysis of the titles that the majority meets the quality criteria, but these are basically characterized by the same wording. But the analysis of what raises awareness inside the same wording is not possible in the frame of the present research. However, it is advisable in the future to explore the significance of the titles during the information search related to hotels with experimental methodology.

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[16] The illustrative examples from the sample revealed and illustrated for the sub-dimensions from the first research phase are shown in Annex 2. Examples are directly shown only for the new sub-dimensions in the analysis.

8.3.2. (Possible) target group the reviews

As it was shown, primary aim of the research is to reveal how consumer reviews on TripAdvisor platform can be perceived as valuable information. As the first step of this it was considered as necessary to give a global review of the target group of opinions in the sample to test whether opinions in the sample are relevant for further analysis or not. Nevertheless, opinions are basically present on review sites, but several main target groups were identifiable (see Figure 12): the similar (peer) consumer, the other consumers who read the opinion, the hotel, and the reviewer himself or herself.

Figure 12. Relationship between the primary and secondary target groups of review
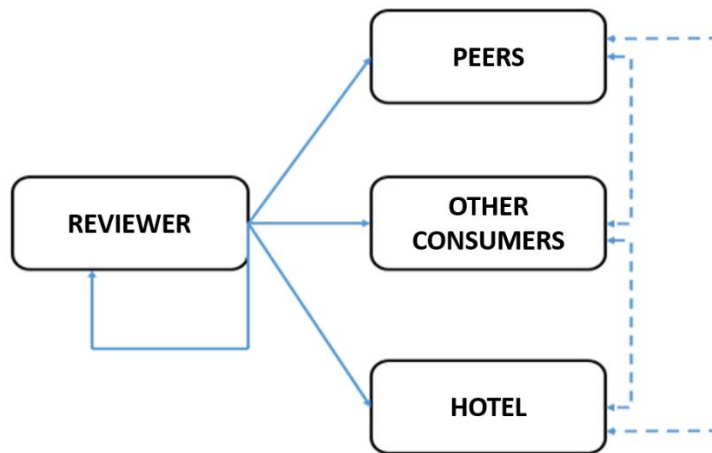
Source: own elaboration

Valuable opinions – based on the in-depth interview and focus group results –are those that possess two target groups, so as these opinions contain (useful) information for both the consumers and the hotel. Moreover, it became visible that if the reviewer is frustrated, the opinion is perceived with reservations, and considered as useless by experts in the in-depth interview. Based on these results, frustrated opinions are characterized by egocentric wording, taking into account that the primary aim is to express anger and frustration, thus a significant subjectivity can be present in the information content related to the opinion. Conversely, based on our expectations, extroverted opinions possibly provide more objective information, so if the target group of the opinion are the consumers, or the hotel, it can be interpreted as a quality factor.

It emerged during the in-depth interviews that experts have expectations basically related to the main target groups of the opinions, because according to one of the experts, "*positive [reviews] are more directed toward guests than towards the staff,*

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while negative [reviews] are directed towards the service provider, because reviewers expect a solution from them" (interview F).

It also became visible in the in-depth interviews that – in case of the negative consumer reviews – the two extreme opinions are characterized by angry (presumably a review that gets a score of 1) and objective (presumably a review that gets a score of 2) opinions. Based on these results it could be expected that in case of the most negative (score 1) evaluation the target group is the consumer himself or herself, in case of objective evaluation the target group is more likely to be the hotel. Analyzing the target group of negative opinions (score 1-2), the tendency became visible that in most of the cases the hotel was represented as the target group of the opinion, although the ego appeared also as the target group. This basically contradicts the expectation that opinions having certain evaluations only represent the anger of the reviewer. At the same time, the simultaneous representation of the ego and the hotel as target groups is underpinned by the act that consumer reviews are viewed as a symbol of negative opinions, or objection.

According to East et al. (2007) and Verhagen et al. (2013), these consumers represent a typical group of negative e-WOM creators, since they are usually the consumers who want to complain to the content creators, and they look for a communication platform for that. Several reasons can occur behind the creation of negative opinions. It can happen that the consumer did not find other direct communication possibility with the company (that is he or she did not avail of the possibility of objection on the spot), or he or she feels that it is needed to emphasize their problems on more than one platforms (that is he or she availed of the possibility of objection on the spot), or maybe this is the most convenient communication platform for them. Both groups appeared in the sample, although the opinions of those consumers who availed of the possibility of direct objection have a higher level of objectivity, because this act alone underpins the rightness of their negative opinions, and it does not seem that they reconsidered and reinterpreted the experiences afterwards.

However, it was a visible tendency that while the numerical score of opinions increased, consumers appeared simultaneously more frequently and strongly as target groups. Besides, by the increase of opinion scores, similar consumers represented more likely the target group. It would be a basic expectation that the opinions were about the consumers, concerning that these opinions are to be found on a reviewer/evaluator site, and a characteristic of this platform is that it possesses primarily a consumer focus. In case of satisfied opinions (score 3, 4, and 5), based on in-depth interview results, predominantly consumers are to be expected as target groups. Results contradict this finding, since certain opinions appeared in a greater proportion where the hotel was present (similar consumers in a greater proportion) as target group besides consumers. Based on these results it can be seen that positive opinions in the sample satisfy the

basic conditions of objectivity. Besides, this result contradicts the presumption that – according to experts – positive opinion is less valuable for them, because it is visible that these opinions are targeted at them also. These contents primarily formulate confirmation, comment, or suggestion for the hotels.

What was not present among the presumptions related to the target groups of positive opinions that the reviewer can be a target group, too. In some cases, this situation was also present in the sample, but together with the other two target groups, typically as a secondary target group. The case of the reviewer as a target group primarily appeared in the form of background information concerning the reviewer. This background information can be aimed at both consumers and the hotel (e.g. data about the use of the reviewer service, individual interests and style, etc.). These data can help consumers to characterize the writer of the review, based on the level of similarity. This data provides background information for the hotel, concerning the evaluation of the service.

The most important target groups of the opinions are summarized in Table 32.

Table 32. Main target groups of consumer reviews

Target group of review	Ex.
ego	*"Why I don't believe in previous reviews? I arrived in Bristol with the allowances paid and there were no rooms available to us. We were transferred to the mercure museum." (#129)* *"we were like this trip very much, people, museums - national gallery, we saw Elgrco , Rafael, Clod Money , sculpture of Rodin. I like very much Opera theater, and Hungarian national music , also we like much old and new brigs , parliament biding , president castle".(#136)*
hotel	*"Overall good value hotel. Disappointed that the pool was unable to use, this is why we booked this hotel. This should be advertised on hotels website if out for a long time. Food average. Room tidy, in need of modernized" (#303)*
ego/hotel	*"The staff were pleasant, and the food decent but the room wasn't fantastic. On arrival we had to shepherd a weird beetle out of the window so the room obviously hadnt been cleaned well before we checked in. Speaking of the window, there was a notice on it saying it couldnt be opened fully (to prevent you flinging yourself from the 11th floor) but that turned out to be a lie as it swung right open. This turned out to be a plus though, as the air conditioning unit was broken and despite 10 degree temperatures outside, the room was a sweltering 28 degrees, which only dropped a degree with the window open. Overall, i wouldnt say my stay was unpleasant, but the staff looking after the rooms definitely need to go on a training course!" (#234)*
consumer/hotel	*"The hotel is very well located on main street near Deak station, parks and shopping area. Breakfast is as good as a Sofitel brand with plenty of sweet and savoury to start your day. However the standard rooms are in poor state (beds & pillows are warnout, the base of the bed 'cheap wood' is so low and sharp that you often hurt your legs. Bathroom is rather small, clean, but simply wornout taps lost the chrome etc." (#181)* *"Very nice hotel, excellent position and central. Clean and kind staff, however I would suggest to renew the bistro room for breakfast. Food was good, most european type...coffe it's better to take it outside." (#281)*

Source: own elaboration

8.3.3. Content elements that provide specific, unique information

Reviewer's information source

In the first research phase, information sources used by the reviewers became identifiable in the opinions. These results were confirmed in the third research phase, too. However, only the used information sources could be identified only in a small part (in around 17 %) of the opinions. These information sources can appear in the positive and negative opinions as factors that increase trust, because the consumer can evaluate the perceived similarity by that also, that is do they belong to the same virtual community with the reviewer, are they similar regarding their searching mechanisms. Furthermore, these sources can provide valuable information for the hotel, because they can check with the help of these whether they applied the right platforms into their marketing communications activity, and extension-related information can be obtained if needed. However, this information can really play its respective role if they contain definite identification of sources.

Two main types of information sources could be identified in the sample: the formal, hotel-related, and the independent, external information sources. Considerations of the in-depth interview were confirmed at this part, that is consumers primarily use external sources, since reference to these sources was the most typical both in case of positive and negative opinions. Among the references to external sources, the reference to TripAdvisor opinions represented the majority. This result implies that consumers constitute a kind of community. The significance of this element is that it became visible from the theoretical framework, opinion is considered as more reliable by the consumer if these reviews were written by similar people from the same community (even if the community is built on basically weak relationships – Sweeney et al., 2014; Wagenheim – Bayón, 2004). Referring back to certain opinions was – only slightly – more typical in case of negative reviews (55 %), where the writers of the reviews referred back to the positive opinions concerning the hotel. In this case it became visible that the certain opinion – that has highlighted significance – is not consistent with the other opinions. Since according to the results of Cheung et al. (2009), in this case consumers evaluate the opinion as of low credibility, and the problem will be attributed to the reviewer and not to the hotel (Laczniak et al., 2001; Lee-Cranage, 2012).

On the contrary, two sub-categories emerged in the positive reviews, in case of the other TripAdvisor references: the reviewer used the other opinions as decision factors, and he or she verifies or falsifies the other opinions. The use as a decision factor repeatedly underpins the important role of this platform in case of hotel selection. While the confirmation of the opinions underpins the credibility and reliability, and by

that, the value of positive reviews, in case of the opposition to the reviews, the consumer protects the hotel, since the hotel can get to know a "valuable" consumer. However, reviewers typically did not give any specific information – concerning which platform the data come from – when they mentioned formal sources, they only referred back that "it was not like how it was advertised". These cases typically occurred in the negative opinions.

The applied information sources from the sample and their connections are shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Reviewers' information sources in the sample
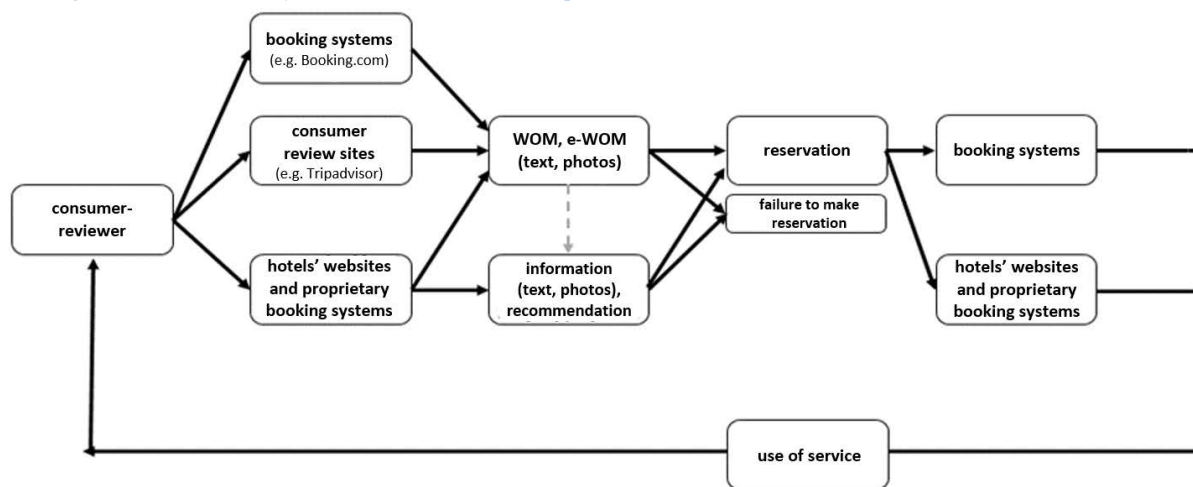
Source: own elaboration

Highlighted service element

As it became visible from the results of the first research phase, the different service elements appear in the reviews, and the analysis of their presence does not give many news. However, it was a typical that the consumers named, and especially highlighted a service element that were different from what they were used to, and/or these were determinants. The presence of these information can be perceived as the increasing factor of quality, since these contain specific and unique information that can indicate exclusive information. Besides, it can be a potential for the hotel that the opportunities (competitive advantages) or threats in their services can be revealed, and a positioning strategy can be developed by the exploration of more special consumer needs and factors that represent competitive advantage.

Based on the place of highlighted service elements in the review, the following sub-cases were present (see Table 33): the reviewer highlighted one or more than one

elements, and in what proportion these highlights appeared in the review (in an emphasized or secondary role).

In case of positive opinions, it was more likely to emphasize one factor, and the highlighted factors played primarily a secondary role in the relative proportion to the whole opinion. On the contrary, in case of the negative opinions, it was typical to emphasize one factor, but these factors typically played an important role in consumer reviews. This drives to the conclusion that the increased focus is more typical during the description of the service experience in negative opinions.

Among the highlighted service elements, the following sub-cases (by content) appeared in the sample:
- highlighting of the staff: naming of the group; reefing to the person, but without a name; referring to someone with a name
- basic or highlighted service leaving deep influence: not usual service; free service
- highlighting physical evidence, tools: not usual elements
- highlighting the guests

Based on the first and second research phases it can be concluded that the highlighted service elements can only provide real value if these contain specific information and/or if the reviewer can describe the highlighted service element (relatively) impartially.

The highlighting of the staff had a significant role in case of the negative opinions. By that, the results of the second research phase became confirmed, that is the presence of this element appears as expectation concerning the content. In this case, specific information means that the reviewer specifies more who is/are the staff member(s) with he or she had an imperishable experience. However, it can be concluded that the most specific wording is perceived if the member of the staff is mentioned by name, by the reviewer. From an aspect of information, this can be perceived as the most valuable review, since this provides exclusive data that is not obtainable from any other sources. And it enables quality control for the hotel. At the same time, this very specific wording appeared only in a low proportion of the cases (10 %), and this low proportion characterized both positive and negative opinions.

In case of the factor of objectivity it was identifiable whether extreme sentiments appeared or not in connection with the highlighted service element, because – as we saw it in the second research phase, too – extremities are handled with reservations by both consumers and experts. Related to highlighted service elements it was found that in positive opinions, the expression of delight was significant (around 60 %) concerning the staff. But these expressions typically used the style of cool delight, and by this, the reviewers could express the high level of their satisfaction, without extremities, and so the highlighting became more credible. The expression of outrage

was not so typical in the negative reviews (around 25 %), but reviewers used more modest words in this case. So it emerges again that in this case we cannot mention any emotional outburst, more rather a high level of dissatisfaction.

At the same time is worth to emphasize that delight connected to the highlighted staff was found in the negative reviews, too (10 %). In these cases, even if the staff could not overwrite the negative review, but they definitely softened it.

In case of services that affected deeply the consumer, primarily those elements appeared that consumers have not met before by their past experiences, and those that the hotel provided for free. By these highlighted elements it becomes visible which elements can mean competitive advantage for the hotel, compared to the other hotels. The highlighted elements can also provide exclusive information, as in case of staff-related information, which can function as a decision-supporting tool. This element appeared in the positive opinions in a greater proportion.

In case of physical evidences such elements appeared in the sample that can help to reveal personal wants and needs. Furthermore, these highlighted elements can serve as supplements to photos, because these raise attentions to such elements that do not surely have a place on the photos. But in case of these content-related elements it is needed to have a specific wording to receive quality information. It was experienced that the content-related element that was formulated in a specific form by the reviewers was primarily typical for the positive opinions, so it can provide quality content.

The highlighting of the staff in a low proportion (altogether it was present in 5 cases) enforces the presumption that the evaluation of the reviewers is influenced by every human factor, not only by the staff. This information can be valuable for the hotel from the aspect that these can mean positioning opportunities. But it is needed for this factor to be present in a greater proportion in the evaluation. But if the highlighted element of the guests is not underpinned with specific data, then basically it can be perceived as a subjective element.

Table 33. Manifestations of emphasized service elements

Number and position of emphasized elements	*Ex.*
more elements, focal	*"We stayed 4 nights here in early December, visiting the excellent value xmas markets. It's the first hotel we've stayed in with a 'selfie point' - with the parliament building in the background. We didn't have a room with a view of the river & parliament (30 euro more), but still a nice room - separate toilet & bathroom…. nicely furnished, plenty of power sockets, very clean, with a small minibar/fridge, & very thoughtfully a corkscrew. … .The free Wi-Fi worked very well…" (#99)*
one element, focal	*"Hotel was very cleans and room average size. Some of the staff need to learn how to be more helpful especially at the reception point. The staff member wjo helped us with the luggages was very nice and ready to help with the changing of the room as we had booked a top floor and were given a first floor. My overall experience was very good." (#171)*

Source: own elaboration

A possible representation of specific, unique information in the opinions is the advice. In the first research phase, only advices to consumers could be identified, but in the second research phase it occurred in the in-depth interviews that the advices to the hotels mean valuable information in the opinions. In this research phase both consumer-targeted and hotel-targeted advices could be identified. This result confirms the results from the earlier phases.

Advices to the consumers represented around two third of the advices in the reviews, and who formulated positive opinions gave more advices (more than half of the advices) to the consumers than reviewers who gave negative opinions.

In the first phase, the dimensions that came to the fore – like the form and underpinning of the advice focus – could be confirmed, because every code was understandable.

The person focus could be identified at the advice focus, but it became visible that not only formulated and targeted messages are present, but in case of the service and the external factor focus, the addressed person of the advice was formulated indirectly. Furthermore, person-focused advices characterized more the positive opinions. This result falsifies again the general picture of the positive opinions formulated in the second research phase.

Two sub-categories could be typically identified in the sample, in case of the service focus: the one when the reader is warned by the reviewer, when his or her aim is to prepare the reader, or to suggest avoidance of the service. The other is when the reviewer suggests the reader to use a service element. Information connected to warning can provide value to the hotels, too. Since it raises attention to deficiencies if the reviewer formulates the advice in a precise way. This group of reviewers interprets well the group of negative e-WOM creators who are actual consumers, but are disappointed with the certain brand and their primary purpose is to deter other consumers from using the service element (East et al., 2007; Verhagen et al., 2013).

Among the advices directed to the consumers, service has the most emphasis (both in positive and negative opinions). That result signals that writers of the analyzed reviews are able to concentrate on the service, that is to provide relevant data.

In case of the external environmental focus it was discovered that it characterized more the positive reviews. However, considering that it was one of the result of the second research phase that this content element is expected, it can be said that it meets the requirements, but does not summarily suppress information concerning the service, rather complement this information.[17]

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[17] Value of external environmental-focused advices are to be presented in the analysis of content elements on external factors.

In case of the analysis based on the form of the advice it was concluded that while negative opinions are characterized more by a general formulation of the reviews, in case of positive reviews, specific and general formulation are present on approximately the same level.

A special form of the representation of advices is when the reviewer builds in the advice in his or her experience-response strategy, that is in the expression of his or her loyalty or in the expression of negative opinion-giving.

Approximately one third of the advices applied cause-effect relation as a tool of underpinning. This increases the objectivity of the advice, and in case of the other advices, the arguments were represented by consumer experience.

Advices aimed at consumers – based on the first and second research phase – represent more valuable and useful information, as they are more specific, trivial, and objective. As it became visible in case of the specific wordings, especially negative information is needed to be improved. Only a negligible amount of contradiction can be found in the advices, and subjective conclusions appear rarely, too. Therefore, advices present in both positive and negative advices are trivially formulated, not giving a reason for any misunderstanding. At the same time, in case of the objectivity factor, it is worth analyzing how impartially reviewers express themselves (do they use extreme emotions), because the advice can only be taken seriously in that case. In case of positive opinions, although the proportions were low, but reviewers used extremities more likely (in approximately 20 % of the advices). On the contrary, it was not typical in negative reviews. But it is considered to be important that a more moderate level of delight was present through the expression of the advices, in case of positive reviews. This result raises the question whether it meant any real emotional reaction, or the higher level in case of satisfaction is only present because of the wording. (The more detailed analysis of this question is presented at the analysis of affective elements). In sum, it can be found that reviewers formulate their advices in a basically objective way. However, the representation of specific information is incomplete, but an insight to the marketing communications activity of the hotel can definitely be provided.

The advice for the hotels – as it became visible from the in-depth interviews – evidently represents value for the hotels, but they meet these advices relatively rarely. Basically the result contradicts to this, namely that approximately one third of every advice is addressed to the hotel. Two main forms of the advices addressed to the hotel could be identified: formulated and indirect. While the majority of advices to the consumers were formulated, in this case, direct and indirect advices were present in the same rate. This raises the attention to the idea that hotels need to understand reviews more deeply, especially in case of the positive ones that are considered to be one-dimensional (approximately more than 60 % of indirect reviews were like that in the sample), because valuable advices can be received in an indirect form, too (see Table 34).

In case of both formulated and indirect advices, the following sub-cases could be identified: advice for improving a service element, developing a service element and expressing acknowledgement, so advice concerning confirmation.

Advices concerning reparation covered around two third of both direct and indirect advices. In this case, the reparation of fixed assets was typically in focus, and that was present not only in negative, but in positive opinions, too. These reparations were considered to be indispensable by the reviewers to reach the needed level of satisfaction. But these are typically such advices that are known by the hotel (e.g. the carpet is spotted, the wall is needed to be painted, etc.), so these can rather express pressure, especially I several consumers mention these reparation needs.

Advices for development that represent the actual value for the hotels – but took only 10 % of the advices altogether –, took approximately 15 % of advices concerning service elements. Opposed to the preconceptions in the in-depth interviews, advices for development appeared in the same proportion both in positive and negative opinions. However, advices in negative reviews represent a different type of value, according to East et al. (2007), and Verhagen et al. (2013), because these authors believe that the further development of the hotel is meant to be supported by negative opinions, and these types of consumers represent high value for the company. Advices concerning the improvement of service were typically connected to physical evidences and to the people (and e.g. to their smile). It became more and more visible in the sample that this information – especially non-formulated advices –can basically be connected to the reviewer-related background information, because these were typically present in connection with information related to the private sphere[18] in the sample. This result highlights the conclusion that the advice becomes more objective by the recognition of background information, because it is represented as an argument. And in case of direct formulation, reviewers typically underpinned the description with specific data in the sample, and this also appears as a factor that increases objectivity.

The third group is a specific form that is the confirmation of the consumer, directed to the hotel, in a formulated or indirect form of acknowledgement. But this information only becomes valuable if it is confirmed, and if it is present in e.g. narratives, with expressed thoughts.

Advices were characterized by subjective conclusion, contradiction, and problem of interpretation only sporadically. Based on this it can be concluded that reviewers express their advices typically definitely in the sample. Extreme emotional manifestations were present in the formulation of advices, although not in majority. Extreme emotions characterized negative opinions in a greater extent, but became

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[18] See the more detailed description in the sub-chapter concerning the reviewer-oriented background information.

identifiable in positive opinions, too (this is 20 % in case of advices expressed in positive reviews, around 30 % in case of negative reviews). In these cases, the manifestation of real emotions became visible.

Table 34.Manifestations of recommendations to hotels

Recommendation to hotel	Ex.
thank-you	*"We could not ask for a better stay. Thanks Novotel Budapest Danube." (#94)*
related to service element	*"What can be improved: - cleanliness (the cleaning staff does a terrible job) - room furnishings need a bit of loving care (worn out beds, broken reading lamps, chipped furniture) - better heating in winter (although set to 26 degrees the room is cold)" (#229)*
warning	*"...the breakfasts very healthy and substantial, but really why wouldn't the hotel want to take better care of a customer staying for a lengthy stay."(#28)*

Source: own elaboration

In sum, reviewers formulate both the direct and indirect forms of advices aimed at the hotels in great majority in an objective way in the sample, so valuable information and insight can be given to the hotels.

External factors

As it became visible in the first research phase that besides service elements, such factors appeared in the opinions that are independent from the hotel, so these are not part of the servuction model. At the same time, it became visible in the second research phase that the existence of these factors appears as a content-related expectation (both from the side of the consumers and experts). However, the problem comes to the surface, namely when can this content-related factor can become a valuable element, connected to the service provided by the hotel. Opposed to its out-of-context" nature of this factor, the importance of this factor can be explained by that: location appeared in the second research phase as a decision-making factor. Different aspects of this factor become ready to be analyzed by external factors described in the opinions. The presence of this factor enables a multi-level decision criterion for the consumers with the location, and by that, directly connected to the hotel. And it can reveal those factors for the hotel that are important from the external factors for its guests, so it can build its positioning strategy on that, and it can highlight the right external elements in its marketing communications activities.

In the opinions that are in the sample, the proportion of external factors (concerning the whole text of the opinions) is around 20 %. This rate represents that information about the service is not repressed, and it mostly appears as a supplementary, content-related element (as it became visible in case of the external-focused advices, too). This result also underpins the general value of consumer opinions, because the writers of

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reviews are typically able to keep the focus in their opinions, they do not troll the reviews. At the same time, external factors are present in negative opinions at a low proportion (approximately in 1 %). This result confirms the formerly described results, namely that negative opinions are rather characterized by their focusing nature. At the same time, it falsifies the image that positive reviews are shallow and one-dimensional.

In the consumer reviews that got into the sample, the following sub-cases became identifiable, connected to the external factors:
- external service: reference, comparison, description
- attraction
- other external factors: transport, external direct environment, town/city districts

In case of an external service, positive reviews were characterized by more references and descriptions, comparisons were rather present in negative opinions. Even though, in case of external services, reference and comparison can be perceived as subjective because of personal experience and interpretation, but it can be present as a factor increasing objectivity if it contains specific data. In case of comparisons, reviewers mostly built on their past experiences, so on the social zone of the background information related to the reviewer. But it became visible in the first research phase that there are only a few specific formulations in the social zone, and that effect is visible here, too. Since reviewers typically and generally compared the actual service with past experience, not naming the formerly used service. Only a few specific formulations were found in the sample, that related to competitor hotels or another member (typically located in a foreign country) of the hotel chain.

Around one third of the descriptions were references at the same time. In these references, reviewers typically attached emotional words into the description, directly referring the given hotel by that. These references typically apply expressions connected to the medium, or high level of satisfaction, and that is harmonized with the results at the part connected to the consumer-targeted advices. The specific naming of the external service unit was present only in low numbers – in accordance with the results shown at the part connected to advices –, but a kind of tendency became visible that reviewers circumscribed where the certain unit was to be found, and with the help of this circumscription, this service unit became identifiable to a certain level. By this information it becomes visible which external service units are used. It makes easier for consumers to define the earlier mentioned rate of similarity, and this information can even explore potential partner relationships.

In case of other external factors transport was the most frequently occurred element. This underpins again the importance of location as a decision-making or -supporting factor. And reviewers typically described the location of transport possibilities and

tools with specific data, and it gives excusive information in connection with the location of the hotel, because if "*a guests says that it's in the center, than that's what counts, because they were the ones who really walked the distance and looked for themselves. I can also look it up on a map, but…*" (interview E). This again provides basically positioning opportunity again for the hotels. The indication of spectacles appeared mostly as a part of the narratives, in the form of a kind of guidebook and reference for the consumer to know what to look for. The presence of spectacles can be perceived as a stimulant factor.

Response strategy to lived experience

In the first research phase the consumers' response strategies to experience became visible like loyalty, direct objection, leave, and the expression of negative opinions. These results are also confirmed by the results of this actual research phase.

As it will be presented, it became visible in case of the narratives that tell a specific story that direct objection is typically expressed by reviewers in the form of narratives, and the majority gives full description. At the same time, these descriptions are typically formulated evidently by the reviewers, because a low level of interpretation problem characterizes the sample.

In case of the identification of cancellation strategy, three sub-cases became visible: effective, verbal, and conditional leave. In case of effective leave, the consumer effectively left the service that materialized only rarely, because it represented only hardly more than 10 % of all cancellations. But what is not a common phenomenon is that it appeared in a positive review, too: "*I stayed at this hotel last December with my boyfriend. The location was perfect, a few minutes walk to Vorosmarty where the Christmas Markets were and plenty of shops and restaurant around. The Danube was also nearby. Staff were friendly and breakfast was decent, the only negative is the room wasn't that comfortable. Good value for money though, would have used this hotel when we return to Budapest in a few weeks but found a cheaper alternative*" (#172). However, only one case appeared, but these cases need more attention, because the cancellation of the service – despite satisfaction – does not harmonize with theoretical presumptions. From these opinions it can be possible to identify such decision factors that are significant through the decision-making, e.g. the question of price in this case. This factor underpins the results of in-depth interviews, where experts indicated location besides price as significant decision factors. Reviewers who choose the real cancellation strategy are those who perceive the service as a real problem. According to East et al. (2007) and Verhagen et al. (2013), those are the reviewers who are past consumers, and wrote their negative opinions because the other hotel surpasses the left hotel in great extent. At the same time, these reviewers formulated their response

strategies in relation with the hotel typically moderately. However, the opinions do not contain any information related to services used after the leave of the given service.

In cases of verbal cancellation, reviewer only talks about the (typically future) leave of the service, and that is to be considered as a personal form of expression of negative opinions. Verbal cancellation represented the majority (around 80 %) of reviewers who expressed their cancellation strategies. In case of reviews containing cancellation, the expression of outrage at the end of the reviews was typical, so the conclusion can be drawn that it can be considered as a sign expressing real outrage. So with the help of this factor, the appropriate identification of satisfaction level is possible.

Conditional cancellation appeared rarely in the sample (altogether 10 % of all cancellations), and was present only in positive reviews. But in this case, the consumer only conditionally cancelled the service, because he or she tends to return under certain conditions. These conditions can act as good initiatives, because these can be taken typically as unformulated advices in favor of the improvement of the service.

In case of negative opinions, the sub-cases explored in the first research phase also became visible: addressed, reasoned, and personal non-references. As it was presented before, the expression of opinions personally is equivalent with verbal cancellation. At the same time, the significance of it was indicated as it was the most frequently present sub-case in the sample (it represented approximately the half of every negative opinions). In case of non-reference underpinned with arguments, the reviewer gives a kind of summarizing non-reference. However, dissatisfaction and outrage appeared among satisfaction levels, so this tool does not seem capable of appropriately identifying the level of satisfaction. The addressed non-reference was only scarcely present in the sample. Nearly half (43 %) of the opinions containing non-references consisted of subjective conclusions (60 % referred to the classification of the hotel, 40 % to the mischievous presumptions) that decrease the objectivity of opinions, and the credibility of non-references.

In case of the expression of loyalty, the sub-cases explored in the first phase were confirmed: addressed, reasoned, and personal loyalty. Besides, the following sub-case became visible: conditional loyalty, when the reviewer imposes conditions whether he or she uses the service again or not.

This content element has an emphasized role, because, based on the opinion of an in-depth interview participant, "*if they mention that they recommend it, than they are fully behind that*" (interview E). The sub-cases of reasoned advice and personal loyalty had the most (around the same) rate inside the expression of loyalty. Based on the in-depth interview results, the most persuasive references are considered to be those that contain reasoned and personal loyalty, too. But this was present only in a low rate (altogether 3 % of the whole elements that expressed loyalty). In case of personal loyalty, planned,

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that is intended return represented the majority. Materialized loyalty appeared exclusively, conditional loyalty appeared mostly in negative opinions. The presence of conditional loyalty highlights the conclusion that the opinion of the reviewer is not so negative. And it reveals which factors are needed to be changed to change the dissatisfaction level of the reviewer to satisfaction level. These information show overlap with the indirectly formulated reparation advices addressed to the hotels. In case of these reviewers, a possibility still occurs to use the service again.

The case of materialized loyalty in negative reviews can be perceived as a factor of credibility, because it refers to the experience of the reviewer, so these opinions receive more importance, and their handling deserves extraordinary attention. In the reviews that express any form of loyalty, the expression of delight was present in most of the cases. Even though extreme emotions appear as factors that decrease objectivity, but it seems to be an exception in the sample if it occurs together with the expression of loyalty. Here, loyalty has the function of summarizing the extreme level of satisfaction, and can act as confirmation. Based on these results it seems that the identification of the level of delight is enabled in the sample by loyalty.

The explored new cases are presented in Table 35.

Table 35. New sub-cases for response strategies to experience

Response strategy to experience	Ex.
actual exit	*"I had to book another hotel for a part of my stay because I couldn`t imagine sleeping on such a bed for a couple of nights in a row." (#15)*
verbal exit	*"I will return for sure in Boedapest but never to this hotel..." (#326)*
conditional exit	*"Overall - SAD SAD hotel , needs serious face lift. Hope it gets better until then will not be returning" (#223)*
conditional loyalty	*"There are excellent things about the Gellert, and I would recommend it, but with reservations." (#187)*

Source: own elaboration

8.3.4. Wording peculiarities in the opinions

The three sub-cases of review wording peculiarities (enjoyable nature of the review, narrative, interpretative nature of the review) that were presented in the first research phase were confirmed in the third research phase.

In case of the enjoyable nature of the review, more tools could be identified than in the first research phase, because remarks, figures of speech, and abbreviations (see Table 36) became visible besides figurative language.

Figurative language characterized more positive opinions (around 60 %), and that contradicts the belief achieved in the second phase, namely that positive opinions are one-dimensional. At the same time, the results of Kronrod and Danzinger (2013) was

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verified. According to that, the figurative language described in the reviews that describes hedonistic consumption are used by reviewers to express their emotions more diversely. Since in the sample, the majority of reviewers expressed their emotions with this tool. This results can give an aspect to identify the exact level of emotions that represent satisfaction. Because, what became visible earlier – e.g. in the analysis of service elements –, even if the reviewer uses a word that reflects a higher emotional level, it becomes visible from the context that the review is characterized by only exaggerated wording, and not by real emotional content. The role of figurative language is especially high in case of extremities, because it could be found in the sample that thoughts expressing extreme emotions by figurative language reflected real emotions. The value of this tool can be underpinned by the result that interpretation problem in case of the usage of figurative language was only scarcely present in the sample.

Besides figurative language, such elements of diverse wording became visible yet as remarks to the consumer/hotel, figures of speech, and abbreviations. In case of remarks and figures of speech, more emphasis was put on the expression of emotions again both in positive (around 70 %), and in negative opinions (more than 50 %). Moreover, interpretation problems were only scarcely present during the use of these tools, so remarks and figures of speech also support the appropriate identification of satisfaction levels.

Abbreviations occurred, too (e.g. TA – TripAdvisor, TLC: Tender Loving Care – "needs to be taken care of"), but not in such high numbers so as to identify the community language characterizing TripAdvisor. Their occurrence has a rather stimulant character than a really substantive factor, and it did not influence the understanding of the review. Nevertheless, the causal words like that can increase the lexical complexity of the review (Jensen et al. 2013), and this can refer to the expertise of the reviewer (Pollach, 2008). So the presence of these words can give a guideline about the reviewer like what kind of community membership he or she possesses, and it can make possible for the hotel to identify the target group.

Related to the interpretation of the opinions, results of the first research phase were confirmed, because the following sub-categories could be identified in the sample: spelling problem, text interpretation problem (ambiguity), and contradiction.

Spelling problems were found altogether in a small proportion of all opinions (around 10 %), which did not cause any interpretation problem. This result falsifies the image drawn in the in-depth interview. According to these results, the majority of reviewers *"express themselves very grossly, and with full of typos"* (interview C). Spelling problems occurred approximately in the same rate in positive and negative opinions, so it can be said in general that the reviewers in the sample gave enough attention during the creation of their reviews.

The general value of the reviews is underpinned by the result that both in positive and negative reviews, spelling problems meant the higher rate inside interpretation problems. At the same time, in case of ambiguity (that represented 40 % of all interpretation problems), two sub-cases could be identified in the sample: when the reviewer committed composition-related inattention, and when he or she committed contradiction. But both in positive and negative reviews, primarily difficulties of interpretation could be identified, what comes from the fact that the reviewer did not write the opinion in his or her mother tongue.

Contradiction can be found only scarcely in the sample among the reviews (around 10 %). It support again the general value of the reviews. At the same time, in case of contradiction (that represented positive reviews more – 70 %), three sub-cases became identifiable: real contradiction, ambiguity, and the unspoken problem. The real contradiction is the element that considerably decreases the quality of the review, because of the lack of coherence in the content. The unspoken problem can mean real value that occurred in the positive reviews in a greater extent. In this case the consumer gets into contradiction with himself or herself in the review, because he or she excels a problem, then he or she indicates that it did not cause him or her any problem. This contradiction implies that the certain factor caused problem for the reviewer that already reflects a low level of satisfaction. However, in positive reviews, other factors could counterweight this initial level of dissatisfaction in the sample, so the evaluation did not move to a negative direction.

Summarily, contradictions did not get an important role in the reviews that proves that the writers of the opinions in the sample did not compose their reviews in a rash way.

The third element of the peculiarities of review formulation is narratives that characterized negative opinions more than the positive ones (32 % of negative reviews' textual data, and 15 % of positive ones were narratives).

Four different forms of narratives became visible in the first research phase that became confirmed in this phase, too.

Sub-cases that describe specific stories appeared the most often (more than half of the narrative tool was represented by this sub-case), and these sub-cases characterized negative reviews in a greater extent (72 %). This underpins the results of the second research phase, that is negative reviews are longer and are better explained.

Nevertheless, it also became visible that story description can be basically perceived as a subjective attribute and a tool that decreases credibility, because the subjective and personal manner of the felt experience comes to the surface opposed to objective evaluation, and by that, the given opinion can become a useless source of information. As it became visible, especially negative reviews are characterized by narratives. In these cases, the process of becoming discredited is present in a greater extent, because

an experience that causes revulsion – and negative critiques by that – is identified in several cases. In that, the affective nature becomes visible, too.

The specific story sub-case could be divided into further types: story inside and outside the hotel. Although stories outside the hotel in the reviews are only indirectly connected to the hotel, these are not independent in the sense that were only scarcely present in the sample. This result also underpins the earlier raised result that opinions in the sample are mostly characterized by a service-focused nature.

Specific stories that were connected to the hotel were presented by reviewers comprehensively. These stories characterized both positive and negative reviews in the same proportion. In case of detailed descriptions, information needed to completely see through and evaluate the situation were missing, so these could not represent any objective and reliable source. But inside total descriptions, a case was identifiable where the total process was described by the reviewer, so the signal of request or complaint (direct complaint), and the response from the hotel, too. These descriptions were present as specific information that cannot be obtained from any other source, so signify factors that raise objectivity and credibility. Although this type characterized only a smaller part of all narratives (represented around 15 %), but it signified more than two third of the complete story descriptions. A comprehensive, typically objective image can be obtained with this tool for the reader, and it can be present as a decision-supporting tool. And for the hotel, these descriptions can give a kind of quality control possibility, related to the complaint management.

The pictorial appearance and guide-book of general descriptions are more objective elements of the reviews because these contain descriptions. Until pictorial description of the environment and processes of the hotel characterized more negative opinions, while the guide book containing the description of external factors characterized positive opinions. This latter result underpins again what was already visible in case of the appearance of external environmental factors, that positive reviews are not one-dimensional. By pictorial descriptions it becomes understandable how reviewers perceive and see the environment, which are those elements that attracts their attention from the internal environment. With the help of these descriptions, the quality of the photo made by the hotel can be improved, for instance reviewers can suggest a new angle to make a second photo of the hotel room. Besides, a new point of reference can be obtained to make photos of new topics, as these descriptions can raise attention to such elements that come into sight for the consumers, and by that, these can act as decision-supporting tools (e.g. free bathroom cosmetics, internal decoration elements of the building, etc.). With the help of this information, photos made by the hotel can be turned into more unique, less "sterile" and manipulated, and much more "concentrated on the consumer-aspect". The value of this information can be underpinned by that although independently taken, but professional photos by TripAdvisor are already available on the platform and typically contain those elements,

but not every hotel make photos by TripAdvisor available yet. However, with the information that can be obtained from the narratives, the photos of the hotels can be made similar to this independent source. By that, their persuasive nature can be increased.

Concerning the guide book description, in case of external factors, the analyzed factors were confirmed basically in the sample. Decisive external factors – that can represent a decision-supporting factor for the consumers, and hotels can build their positioning strategy on this – became visible for the reviewers.

The last type of the narratives is when the reviewer illustrates his or her emotion or actual state with the help of a narrative. A more accurate identification of satisfaction level is possible by this type of expression. This can have especially great significance in case of extreme emotions. As it became visible in several content factors that the review did not always reflect any real emotion, it only seemed like an exaggerated expression. But with the help of the context, a more accurate interpretation is possible. Table 36 summarizes new sub-cases in the manifestation of narratives.

Table 36. Manifestations of narratives – new sub-cases

Narrative	Ex.
story inside the hotel – partial description	*"Gave the room on a floor for smokers, old furniture, an unpleasant smell in the room, the price doesn't correspond a room rate"* (#50)
story inside the hotel – full description	*"The beds are absolutely terrible, have springs sticking out of every part of the bed. When i called the reception, they told me that all the beds are the same so there was nothing they could do for me. They brought up an extra blanket which they offered me to sleep on."* (#184)
story outside the hotel	*"We stayed here 'unexpectedly' due to flooding on the Danube we had to be bused across from Serbia."* (#110)

Source: own elaboration

8.3.5. Content-related factors that influence objectivity

Multifaceted description

As it became visible in the first research phase, the multilateral characterization of the service adumbrates objectivity, and by that it can be perceived as a factor that increases reliability. Furthermore, based on interview results it can be said that multilateral characterization means also a factor that increases quality, because it gives the opportunity for the reader of the review to consider carefully, and by that it can become a decision-supporting factor (Jensen et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2013). At the same time, results of the in-depth interview showed that – according to experts' experiences – consumers do not use this element of objectivity in their opinions, rather subjectivity and partiality.

Results contradict with in-depth interview results, because it was found that in nearly half of the opinions in the sample, the multilateral assessment of the service could be identified. This implies that these opinions are not totally partial, so can be taken seriously. This result highly falsifies the perceptual dimension from the in-depth interviews. Based on this dimension it can be possible that hotels are too critical in connection with consumer descriptions, whereas it can be seen from the sample that reviewers mostly are trying to give factual description in their own way.

The following two sub-cases of multilateral characterization appeared in the sample: descriptions related to only one service element or to the whole service were experienced, and these types were present around in the same proportion. Statement to one service element enables a deeper information, but the reader of the review can have broader access to information related to the whole service element.

However, based on the first and second research phases, multilateral characterizations can only be perceived as definite quality-increasing factors if these include valuable information, so if this information is impartial, do not contain extremely affective expressions, and do not contain any interpretation problem, but include specific information or advice.

In case of negative opinions, outrage was present significantly in lower rate (altogether in 20 % of the multifaceted descriptions). In this case, reviewers typically used modest words. This result falsifies those interview results that negative opinions are partial. Based on these results it can be concluded that objective negative reviews represent the majority in the sample, so these provide really valuable information in an objective way. What was a surprising result is that the tool of outrage was present in positive opinions, too. In contrast with the results of the first research phase, notwithstanding that altogether three cases were found. In these cases no real outrage was found, rather an exaggerated use of words that represents a level of dissatisfaction, but the upper level of that[19].

In case of positive reviews, delight appeared in a significantly lower rate (in around 15 % of multifaceted descriptions). In the course of this, cold delight was manifested by reviewers. In case of negative opinions three examples were found that applied delight, but these related to only one service element, and was equivalent with the results of the first research phase. Based on these it can be concluded that the lower level of delight was used that does not reflect real emotional level, it is rather closer to the level of satisfaction.

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[19] The manifestation and characteristics of emotional levels are detailed at the interpretation of affective elements.

Based on these results the conclusion can be made that emotional bias is rarely present in the reviews, so the bilateral descriptions in the sample represent tools that increase trust and quality.

Specific information in multifaceted descriptions was found in positive reviews in a greater extent than in negative reviews (in case of positive reviews it represented around 40 %, and around 15 % in case of the negative ones). This information referred to primarily the circumstances of the reviewer's stay, the price of the service, the equipment of the hotel, and the factors of transport. The conclusion can be drawn that although in case of multilateral opinions, specific information can be found, but their proportion can be increased.

In case of advices it was found that among multifaceted descriptions in positive opinions, there were far more advices. In this case, advices aimed at the consumer and the hotel appeared in the same proportion.

In sum it can be said that the results of the second research phase were falsified here, because while a shallow and non-detailed characteristic of positive opinions was revealed according to the interviews, meanwhile it was underpinned that positive opinions contain bilateral review descriptions that are factors that increase quality.

Concerning negative opinions, a more shaded image came to the surface, but the fact that these opinions are extreme and partial became falsified. Since it became visible that these opinions contain valuable information and an objective matter of formulation characterizes them, too. However, it also became visible that basically these descriptions contain specific information or advice in a significantly lower proportion.

Subjective conclusions

While multilateral characterization enforces objectivity, the presence of subjective conclusions decreases what became visible from the in-depth interviews. However, in the opinions in the sample, this factor was present in a low proportion, in around 5 % of negative opinions, and in only 1.5 % of positive opinions altogether. This results also underpins the substantial value of opinions.

In case of subjective conclusions three sub-cases became visible: conclusion concerning the ranking of the hotel, assumption (mischievous and well-intentioned), and generalization (see Table 37). Wrong conclusions referred to rankings in the greatest proportion (50 %). The presence of these conclusions characterized negative opinions in a far greater extent (more than 80 %). The low rate of subjectivity factors contradicts the assumption of one in-depth interview participant, that is: "guest evaluations… I don't say that they are never true, but they are often unrealistic, that's for sure" (interview C). At the same time, the rate of this factor could be decreased in

a great extent by consumer education, because the essential of these conclusions in the sample is typically that the reviewer "*declares, because of a negative experience, that this is not even a 4-star hotel. They are the experts, and they declare that this is not worth 4 stars.*" (interview F).

In case of the presumption, service-related conclusions without evidence appeared, and the majority of those (more than 70 %) characterized negative opinions, and that were primarily spoken accusations. However, the rate of these accusations is low – that also confirms in-depth interview results – but these contain more significant accusations related to theft, and these must be handled by the hotel as in-depth interview participants pointed it out, too. At the meantime, well-intended assumptions can be experienced, too. In these assumptions, reviewers can express their dissatisfaction, but it can be softened by their assumption. This sub-case enforces the result found in the first research phase, namely that a matter of expressing dissatisfaction is the use of words that soften the problem.

The last type is generalization, where consumers draw their wrong conclusions based on their past experience, and build up expectations. This was typical in case of positive and negative reviewers, too.

Table 37. Types of subjective conclusions

Type	Ex.
well-intentioned assumption	"*It doesn't appear that not many others have had a similar experience so we assume it was probably limited to our room, unfortunately.*" (#351)
spoken accusations	"*All the meals were buffet style. Choice minimal, low quality and several items clearly recycled from one meal session to the next. eg chips from evening meal re-appeared at breakfast as did unused vegetables.*" (#264)
mischievous assumption - allusion	"*Their security guard claims he watches the parking lot, but I doubt it, because each time we came to the hotel he was always inside sitting hanging out and makes us suspicious of him.*" (#246)
pertaining to hotel's ranking	"*we entered the room which was okay at a first sight. But suddenly we noticed that the bathroom door was broken and there was a spot on the sheets. This spot remained there until the morning of the forth day when we asked the room keepers to change them. In the guest information paper it was said that the sheets would be changed every two nights but none of this happened. And here we come: I don't have to ask to get my sheets changed in a 4 stars hotel!!!*"(#67)
genealization, projection	"*Certainly as the experienced travellers we are, we have come to expect the service we deserve and this hotel has failed ...*" (#148)

Source: own elaboration

Affective element

As it became visible – based on the results of the earlier research phases –, emotional manifestations in the opinions have significant role, because it appears as a factor that influences the review's hypothetical objectivity. The emotional richness of the review can decrease the distance between the sender and the receiver, and make the message

more credible by that. At the same time, the appearance of extreme emotions in e-WOM decreases the rationality, information value, and reliability of the message (Sim – Gupta, 2012; Chang – Wu, 2014), that were confirmed by in-depth interview results, too.

According to the study of Schneider and Bowen (1999), the most consumers' satisfaction level is between moderately satisfied and moderately dissatisfied. This was also confirmed by sample results, because the expression of satisfied and dissatisfied emotional states represented the majority of affective expressions in the reviews. At the same time the results of the research of Schneider et al. (2014) – by that negative opinions are characterized by richer emotional content – were falsified by the reviews in the sample, because affective expressions were present in approximately the same rate in positive and negative opinions. This results underpins again that positive opinions are not one-dimensional, and in sum, these can also mean valuable information source.

Tools to express dissatisfaction – that were revealed in the first research phase – became confirmed in this sample, too. At the same time, the revealed tools are harmonized with the former results of this research phase.

The most frequently used tool in case of negative opinions to express dissatisfaction was to give descriptions, what is basically dissatisfaction expressed in the form of narratives. This result confirms that reviewers used narratives to express their feelings, and with the help of this it can be determined which level of emotions is in question.

Evaluation was again a typical form of dissatisfaction. This factor appeared in the analysis of Pollach (2008) as a frequent expression form in e-WOM. This result confirms that the expression of discouragement (that is a form of evaluation) is typically form of expressing dissatisfaction.

However, in a lower extent than before, but the highlight of one service element is an expression tool that confirms that the appearance of highlighted service elements in negative opinions is typically the expression form of dissatisfaction.

The tool of emphasis is present in similar proportion, when the reviewer uses verbal tools to express his or her dissatisfaction (e.g. writes words with capital letters, repeats words, or uses punctuation marks that raise attention. However, in case of the use of punctuation marks is was found that the exaggerated use of these tools (e.g. several exclamation marks one after another) characterizes the level of outrage, and not dissatisfaction.

The expression of dissatisfaction was also present in positive opinions. The tools of that – that were revealed in the first phase – were the softening and the highlight of the problem that were present approximately in the same proportion in the sample. At the same time, it also became visible that in this case the expression of dissatisfaction was typically present in the form of the advice addressed to the hotel concerning indirect

reparation, or in the form of multilateral characterization. Satisfaction that appears in positive reviews increases the objectivity of the review at the same time.

In case of the expression of indifference, the following sub-cases became visible in the first research phase: expressions that hardly reached the required, OK level, and that referred to a level around satisfaction. These results became confirmed in this research phase, too. In case of the expression of indifference, the majority (around 70 %) of options was the OK state both in positive and negative opinions. The level that was close to satisfaction characterized rather positive opinions, the level that hardly enough and indicated indifference characterized rather negative opinions. The fact that the different satisfaction levels could be identified in the sample in case of the expression of indifference has a great role, because in the ranking the appearance of the score three does not provide a guideline of the real satisfaction of the reviewer. However, expressions that express indifference give a guideline regarding the reviewer directs towards rather satisfaction or dissatisfaction. At the same time, these results surely need further, quantitative confirmation, so correlation analysis is suggested to unambiguously identify the different levels.

In case of the mode of the expression of satisfaction, the results of the first research phase were underpinned both in case of positive and negative opinions.
In positive reviews it was clearly identifiable that the consumer was partly or totally satisfied. At the same time, the use of expressions that reflect basic and total satisfaction was present in approximately the same proportion. The significant use of punctuation marks was present in a lower rate than in case of the expression of dissatisfaction.
In case of the satisfaction in negative opinions, the expression of basic satisfaction was more typical in case of one highlighted service element. This factor appeared in negative opinions in the form of multifaceted description, what increases the objectivity level of the review.
A typical form of the expression of satisfaction was the narrative, that was already present in the sample in case of the expression of dissatisfaction, too. And this result also underpins the significant role of the narrative in the identification of satisfaction level.

As it became visible in the analysis of content elements it appeared in several cases that although in the given content element the reviewer used words that express extreme emotional manifestations, but real emotional manifestation could not be experienced. This occurred typically when words that express outrage or delight were present. This highlighted that it is not enough to identify the more extreme levels based on words that express the level of satisfaction. It is worth to search for such

supportive content elements as figurative language, narrative, the appearance of the response strategy to the experience (loyalty), and advice.

In case of delight, the sub-cases found in the first research phase were confirmed. At the same time it was found that in case of positive opinions two sub-cases of the focus of delight were present: only one service element, or the whole service. In case of the expression type related to one service element, typically the colder delight level appeared that reflected a rather higher level of satisfaction in the sample. At the same time, in those cases where the expression of delight related to more than one elements in the review – although the expression tools of delight appeared in a mixed way –, the affective elements refer to real delight and emotion.

In case of the positive opinions that were related to delight, loyalty was typically present. This is a kind of confirmation and summary of the level of delight as it was visible before, too. And figurative language highly characterized the appearance of delight. This confirms that it can identify the case of really high emotional involvement.

Whereas it became visible in positive opinions, but an element of delight was identifiable only in approximately one third of the opinions that confirms that – in the sample – reviewers express themselves without extreme emotions, in an objective manner.

Delight appeared also in negative opinions, and that indicates a contradiction, because the reviewer evaluated the given hotel very unfavorably, but there was an element that he or she appreciates. In this case (that was approximately one fifth of every element that signal delight), the majority of reviewers highlighted one experience element that was typically the location of the hotel or the view. These elements – based on their wording – had great effect on the reviewers, but could not overwrite negative experiences. Typically, cold delight characterized the delight in the negative opinions. In these cases, the level of delight appeared because of the wording, so these expressions do not represent real partiality from the side of the reviewer. At the same time, these expressions increase the reliability of the negative opinion, because this content element can be perceived as a multilateral characterization so as to guarantee that the reviewer did not write their opinion in anger.

In case of outrage, the sub-cases that were found in the first phase became confirmed like the use of moderate and angry wording, the sarcastic matter of expression, and the exaggerated punctuation marks. Then, two sub-cases became visible here similarly to delight: partial (related to only one service element) and total outrage that have similar characteristics as in case of delight.

In modest expressions, reviewers used narratives that helped to identify that despite wording, no real emotion was present. Angry and ironic expressions visualized

emotions obviously, so real outrage can be mentioned in case of the appearance of these expressions. The extraordinary use of punctuation marks is again an obvious signal of the manifestation of real emotions. At the same time, figurative language was typically present in opinions that contain outrage. Negative opinions or leave was also present as a response strategy, so this result confirms the former results, that is the appearance of the presented content elements can act as the identifier of real outrage. Outrage was present in positive opinions, too, although in a smaller extent than delight appeared in negative opinions. In these cases, reviewers used more modest words in a great extent to express their outrage that –as it was presented before, too – do not reflect any real outrage, only the highest level of dissatisfaction. At the same time, these factors only involved dissatisfaction, but could not change the evaluation in sum, so did not have a very important role in the decision of the reviewer.

8.3.6. Background information related to the reviewer

As it became visible in the second research phase, the other factor in the review that can be an influencer of trust and a factor that increases quality is the background information concerning the reviewer. Trust factor, because with the help of this "peer factor" can be evaluated, that is how similar consumer wrote the opinion, thus the reader can evaluate how much the reviewer is similar to him/her. As it became visible also in the theoretical framework, the individual seeks such consumers whom have similar attributes with. The more similar the reader feels the reviewer, the more he/she feels that they are in one community, and by that trusts their opinions more than the opinions of reviewers that are not similar with him/her (Sweeney et al., 2014; Wagenheim – Bayón, 2004). And it represents a factor that signals quality, because their opinion can be understood better by the information concerning the reviewer, and because their thoughts seem to be more underpinned and explained. Moreover, reviewer can tell information about himself/herself that can help the hotel in the supervision of its positioning strategy.

Although according to the research of Sweeney et al. (2012), the content of negative e-WOM is formulated by reviewers as more personal information can be found in the opinion about the sender of the message. Nonetheless it was found in the sample that information concerning the reviewer appeared in positive and negative opinions in approximately the same extent. Based on this result it can be concluded that the results of the interviews that claim that consumer reviews are mostly impersonal were falsified.

In the first research phase the background information concerning the reviewer was revealed. This information could be put into the following groups: public zone – social zone – personal zone – intimate zone.

Results of the third research phase could confirm the presence of these groups. Based on the results it can be said that information related to the public and social zone could be identified the most, concerning all opinions. At the same time, information concerning public, social, and intimate zone were present in approximately the same extent in both positive and negative opinions. Information concerning personal zone were more likely to be identifiable in positive opinions.

These results confirm that reviews of TripAdvisor that are in the sample meet the quality requirements from this aspect. Furthermore, those results of the interviews that say that positive reviews are typically shallow contradicts again the latter results, because it seems that deeper, reviewer-related information characterize these (positive) reviews.

Information content of the different zones were not very diverse in case of positive and negative opinions, so the following information was inside each zone:
- public: time, location, and general purpose of the travel, general demographic information concerning the reviewer
- social: past experience of the consumer, information source used in the selection of the service, service-related information (which element was used, reason of use, happenings during the service, room number), travelling information of the consumer, preliminary expectations of the consumer
- personal: personal needs (e.g. the importance of wi-fi or coffee), personal needs concerning the services (e.g. smiling of the employees), point of interest of the consumer (e.g. history, F1, or cooking)
- intimate: information related to the sickness of travelers (e.g. the child has asthma, the travel partner has allergy), information concerning the financial state, fear of the traveler, first name and surname, or first name of the traveler

In public zone such data can be basically found in the sample that can be known on the platform of TripAdvisor from the user profile, and from the tag that details the travel. So this information can only give very shallow image of the reviewer, but their information value can be increased if these contain such specific information that the statistics do not necessarily show. For example, how many days the reviewer spent at the quarters, because the more time he/she spent there, the more definite experience he/she has concerning the services of the hotel. Analyzing the reviews based on this dimension it was found that the rate of specific data among data in the public zone is high. These data concerned typically the time and duration of the travel, but do not represent any exclusive information. But this information has a basic value because of

the manifestation of specifics, and their presence provides the basics and frame of reviewer-related information.

In case of information in the social zone, basically more specific information can be found. Because with the help of the past experience and traveling habits of the reviewer the expertise of the reviewer can be evaluated. Based on this data, the hotel better understands the preliminary expectations of the consumer that affects the perception of service by the reviewer. Information concerning the service provides valuable information for the consumer, because it enables an opportunity to virtually try the service. During the analysis of the sample it was found that while in service-related information reviewers gave quite specific description, but their preliminary expectations are typically not expressed, and their past experience can also be typically found only figuratively.
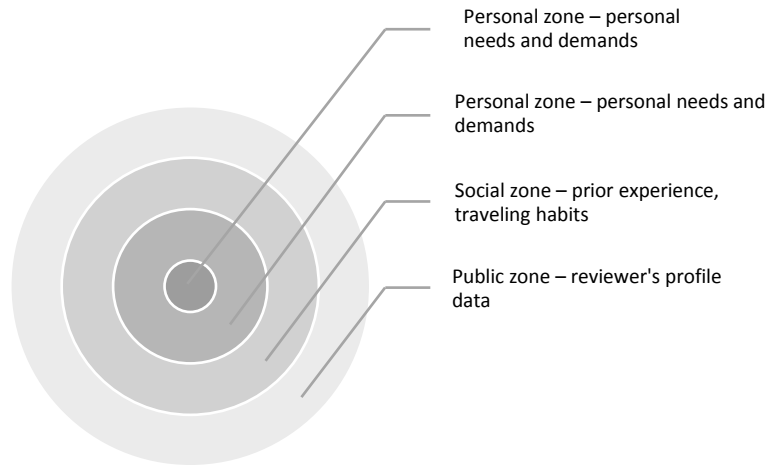
Furthermore, based on the earlier presented results, the extent how objectively this data is formulated affects the value of these data. Subjective conclusions appeared in a small extent (approximately in 10 %) that were used mostly by reviewers to express their preliminary expectations. This result also highlights that the writers of opinions in the sample are basically able to formulate their thoughts objectively.

The most valuable information can be obtained from the information related to the person and personality of the consumer. This information can provide special information for the consumers and the hotels, too. For the consumers, this information can provide an accurate evaluation opportunity in the sense of the decision whether they are similar to the reviewer or not. For the hotel, this information enables the recognition of consumer needs, the launch of possible new services, and positioning, especially the information related to the intimate zone. This type of information is typically specifically formulated, trivial, and exclusive, so cannot be obtained from anywhere else, and these attributes underpin their value. Information related to the social zone characterized rather positive opinions in the sample, underpinning the value of positive opinions by that, too.

Reviewer-related information is typically present in the form of narratives. In these narratives, only a reference is present to this information, so it is required to understand the text of longer narratives.

Connection and value of reviewer-related background information is summarized in Figure 14.

Personal zone – personal needs and demands

Personal zone – personal needs and demands

Social zone – prior experience, traveling habits

Public zone – reviewer's profile data

Source: own elaboration

8.3.7. Photos attached to the review[20]

As it became visible in the second research phase, it is more and more role of visual stimuli on the TripAdvisor platform. As it became visible in the presentation of the research phase, altogether 339 photos were involved into the sample for analysis. Related to the photos uploaded by consumers, expectations appeared in the second research phase that represented the framework of analysis.

(1) Content of the photos

Based on the content of the photos in the sample, the following sub-cases became visible: private space (room and bathroom), public internal space (lobby – dining room and supplementary service), and external environment (view from the hotel, view to the hotel, spectacle independent from the hotel[21]). These content elements meet the requirement that the basic service (catering, room, bathroom) should definitely be present.

At the same time, external environment also appears on the photos, which was present as a content-related expectation in the consumer opinions. Photos meet this expectation. The majority of the photos (two third) visualizes the internal space, so it can be concluded that photos that present the external environment do not suppress the photos of the service elements. Whilst photos that are independent from the hotel are totally out of context. Based on this, their proportion is considered high. This can cause problem in the sense that while in a textual opinion service elements and external

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[20] Examples to the dimensions can be found in Annex 3.
[21] Taking into account the fact that these photos are totally independent from the service, thus these are handled out of the context, and are not characterized further.

environment appears simultaneously, the photo of the external environment provides useless information in itself.

The distribution of certain sub-cases in the sample is the following:

Private sphere [n (%)]		Public sphere [n (%)]		External environment [n (%)]			Total [n (%)]
room	bathroom	lobby, restaurant	auxiliary service	view from hotel	view of hotel	independent landmark	
104 (30%)	49 (15%)	72 (21%)	9 (3%)	39 (12%)	26 (8%)	40 (11%)	339 (100%)

Source: own elaboration

Photos related to positive opinions were in majority in the sample. Photos related to negative opinions typically represented private space, thus the internal part of the room and/or bathroom. This indicates basically well the outlined service-focused characteristic, by analyzing the texts of negative opinions in the sample. Photo is for underpinning textual opinions in these cases. Reviewers used photos in case of positive opinions typically as interpretation, as stimulant factor, and as supplement.

(2) Focus of the photos

Related to photos made by consumers, it was an expectation to assure total insight for the reader.

Based on the focus of the photos, the following three sub-cases became visible in the sample: large picture, close-up, and detail. Large picture can be characterized by wide focus to the object of the photo, in case of close-up, a slight level of focusing can be mentioned, in case of detail, the photo has macro mode, that is a high level of focus.

Photos that present public spaces are characterized – even not much – more by total focus. At the same time it can be said that these photos imply that the central element of the photo is such a service element that the reviewer is basically more interested in. So these photos can help in identifying the defining factors in public space, and it is worth putting more effort on the review parts concerning these factors.

In case of photos concerning private space, typically close-up and detail appeared. Whilst total focus would be ideal for the participants of the focus groups, but photos that reflect the aspect of close-up appropriately satisfy the need for enough focus. Because there are feasibility limitations of making an appropriate photo about a smaller space. Applying the macro mode was typically present concerning negative opinions.

Reviewers applied large pictures or close-up focus in case of external environment. Photos made with close-up focus have more significant role, because these highlight

again one element that is to be indicated with greater care in its description. In public space and external environment, the revealed elements during the use of close-up focus can have more significant role in marketing communications activity, too.

(3) Aim of the photos

Furthermore, related to consumer photos, the aim of the photo was expected to be identifiable, so the verification or illustration of the opinion.

From the content-related sub-cases, the high majority of the photos related to internal space had an obvious aim. This indicates that photos typically act as underpinning of textual opinions in the sample, and make the content obviously perceptible.

However, in case of the view from the hotel, and the to the hotel, it was not obvious in the photos that for what purpose and to whom are these (the reviewer made the photo about sunset view for himself/herself, or he/she wants to show it to the consumer). This underpins that photos focused on external environmental factors cannot be taken into account alone as appropriate illustration tools beside the textual review.

Concerning the focus of the photos it became visible that photos related to negative opinions are highly characterized by the application of macro mode (strong focusing). Related to focusing the question arose in the second research phase whether the aim is underpinning or manipulation in case of macro mode. In case of negative opinions, in the majority of macro photos the aim was obvious, that is the reviewer would like to underpin their review. Thus it was visible that people who made the photos used focus in a well-proportioned way. But this involves another opportunity of identification to reveal manipulated opinions, namely that how strong macro mode the reviewer applies for their photo. The analysis of these issues is not possible in the frame of the present study, so it is suggested as future research direction. According to the aforementioned thoughts it can be said that the preconception in the in-depth interview is not generalizable to the photos in negative comments.

(4) Presence of background information concerning the reviewer

Based on focus group results it can be concluded that the presence of reviewer-related information on the photos is considered as important, but embarrassing intimate information[22] was perceived as appalling. In case of photos in the sample, too intimate information was present only in one case. Nevertheless, different levels became visible, namely how much the photo "tells" about the maker of the photo. Five sub-cases were identifiable that were based on the analogy – revealed already in the first phase – of the background information levels related to the reviewer:
- sterile photo that could even be made by the hotel

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[22] It is a too intimate element on the photos for example if the underwear of the maker of the photo is visible, or the articles for personal use in the bathroom are visible on the picture.

- Photo that illustrates "open" information level: there is no information that refers to the maker of the photo, but the photo is made from a unique aspect, or the other guests are present
- Photo that illustrates "social" information: minimal reference to the maker of the photo, typically by some of their articles for personal use
- Photo that illustrates "personal" information: several articles for personal use appear at the same time on the photo
- Photo that illustrates "intimate" information: people who travel with the reviewer, or the reviewer is on the photo

In case of textual opinions, the higher level was present, the more valuable the certain opinion was. This cannot be said in case of the photos, because if these contained intimate information, then it was harder to find out the aim of the photo, thus it appeared rather as a disturbing factor. But the majority of photos represented a sterile or open level, that harmonizes with the result that the majority of photos has a trivially identifiable purpose. At the same time, the disadvantage of these photos is that these do not possess high added value. Personal and moderately intimate information was present in the highest proportion in case of the internal space of the room, where these photos were rather present as selfies. However, it can be seen that the medium level was missing, which can be perceived as ideal in the sense that it has an easily identifiable purpose, and at the same time it contains a certain level of personal attributes that really raises the level of reliability, and it could give appropriate underpinning to the textual part of the review.

(5) Quality of the photos

In case of the effectuation of the photos, medium quality characterized the most the photos in the sample. These photos were a little bit gloomy, dark, or blurred. Although photos of extremely low quality, where the photo was not understandable or nearly nothing was visible was in a low proportion, but photos of perfect quality also represented only around 20 % of the photos. Lower quality represents problems, because if the effectuation of the photo is unpretentious, then its reliability decreases, and by that, its credibility, too. This can affect the textual part of the opinion, concerning that the parts are handled together, based on the conclusions of the second research phase.

In sum, photos in the sample can be perceived as moderately precious information sources in their present state: although in case of negative opinions, the reader can find evidence by the photo, and in the open space such factors are identifiable that raise the attention of the reviewer, and the aim of the photos is basically obvious, but sterility characterizes the photos in a greater extent. So these photos do not represent real added value on several occasions, because do not show nor exclusive information, neither

factor that increases reliability. Based on these results, photos in the sample cannot be perceived as equivalent with textual opinions. This falsifies the presumption connected to the focus group results, that is these can be considered as equal elements. In this matter it is surely needed for hotels to educate the consumers, taking into account that – based on experts' expectations – consumer-made photos obtain more and more importance.

8.3.8. Identifiable roles and the usefulness level of reviews

In the presentation of the research phase it became visible that the platform of TripAdvisor can be perceived as a virtual community based on weak relationships. This was confirmed by one participant of the in-depth interviews, who said that TripAdvisor is nothing but an element of social media. The social characteristic was also confirmed by the result that there are referrals back to the other opinions (this was explained more thoroughly in the analysis of the used information sources). The social characteristic of the opinions in the sample was further analyzed, based on this result, and based on the results of the second research phase.
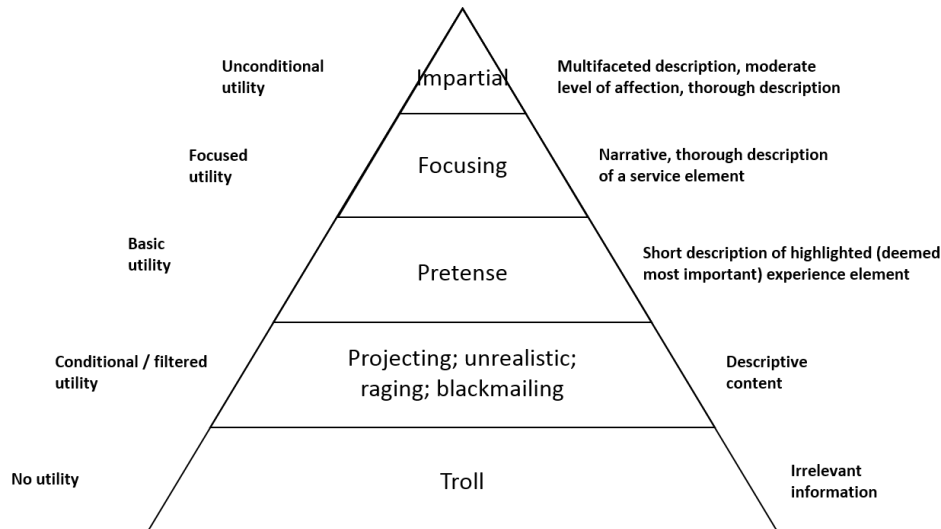
At the end of the second research phase, the roles perceived by the interview participants became identifiable. These roles basically determine the level of usefulness of the opinion, too. All of the presumed roles were identifiable in this research phase, complemented with the following characteristics – the roles will be presented in the following section in ascending order of their usefulness level (see Figure 15):

(1) The troll does not relate to the service in their opinion, thus visualizes not relevant information. For these attributes, their opinions cannot be perceived as useful nor for the consumer, neither for the hotel at all.

(2) In case of the raging role, the reviewer expressed their opinion concerning the service mostly by outrage. So the level of subjectivity was high in these opinions. However, opposed to the troll's opinion, these reviews contained information concerning the service, but these are to be handled with care. Because of this, these opinions represent only a conditional level of usefulness. The written reviews must be understood and filtered, so these opinions require a higher investment of information processing.

(3) In case of the blackmailer role the use of narratives was typical, but two sub-cases were present, concerning the output: the emphasis on the need for compensation, or imputation. These opinions showed again extra emotional level, but reviewers did not formulate their grievance in a raging style. However, these opinions typically described only the detail of the narrative, so cannot represent an

objective initiative. Because of this a virtual usefulness can be mentioned: so it indicates that there is a problem, but the exact size of that problem is not told.

(4) In case of the unrealistic role, the majority of opinions was based on subjective conclusions (typically referred to the ranking of the given hotel), thus the service was evaluated in detail based on this. But these opinions also possess conditional usefulness, because quality-improving elements appeared in these. However, subjectivity as an initiative pervaded the whole opinion, and by that the value of usefulness greatly decreases. In these cases, not evaluative, but only descriptive contents possess real value, which have to be filtered by the reader.

(5) In case of the projecting role, the majority of opinions were formulated with the help of narratives. At the same time, a central element vividly appeared here as well that is such a background information related to the reviewer like the past experience and expectation of the consumer, or the purpose of the travel, and the reviewer related everything to that. Typically, one emotional level went through the opinion. But these opinions also possess conditional usefulness. Here again the contents that describe the service, and the reviewer-related data can represent useful information, but their evaluation does not indicate any objective initiative.

(6) In case of the pretense role, this opinion in the sample is characterized by shorter length, and too general information and evaluation. However, opposed to the in-depth interview results that conclude pretense role is characterized by a review of two or three words, the sample results contradict, because these are mostly characterized by two or three sentences. Nevertheless, these opinions were formerly expected not to contain any useful information, these opinions in the sample gave a basic usefulness: reviewers highlighted the service element that was perceived as the most important, and that they gave basic feedback of. However, the described basic information do not have any higher-level value of usefulness, because the interpretation and underpinning of the content was missing by reason of the non-articulated thoughts.

(7) In case of the focusing role, the reviewer expressed their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the help of one or more intermingled narratives. In this, the reviewer gives a detailed description, but typically analyzing and describing their experiences from one aspect. Because of this, their usefulness level is higher than in case of the aforementioned roles, and by reason of the tunnel vision of the reviewer, he/she provides precious, often exclusive information concerning only their highlighted service element.

(8) Impartial role represents the highest level of usefulness. Characteristics of these opinions is that the writers of the reviews use multilateral description, and express their opinions with moderate emotional manifestation, and give a quite wide range of description about the service elements.

Unconditional utility — Impartial — Multifaceted description, moderate level of affection, thorough description

Focused utility — Focusing — Narrative, thorough description of a service element

Basic utility — Pretense — Short description of highlighted (deemed most important) experience element

Conditional / filtered utility — Projecting; unrealistic; raging; blackmailing — Descriptive content

No utility — Troll — Irrelevant information

Source: own elaboration

In case of negative opinions, the focusing role had the highest proportion – see Figure 16 –, which underpins those former presumptions that negative opinions are typically of focusing nature. Although the impartial role was not present in the highest proportion in the sample, but the proportion of raging reviewers is evanescent. These results falsify that preconception revealed in the second research phase, namely that the majority of negative opinions is characterized by rabidness.

On the contrary, in case of positive opinions – as it can be seen in Figure 16, too –, reviewers with an impartial role representing the highest level of usefulness were present the most frequently. Furthermore, the roles that represent a higher level of usefulness are the most often present in the sample. This again underpins the general usefulness of positive reviews, and by that their value.
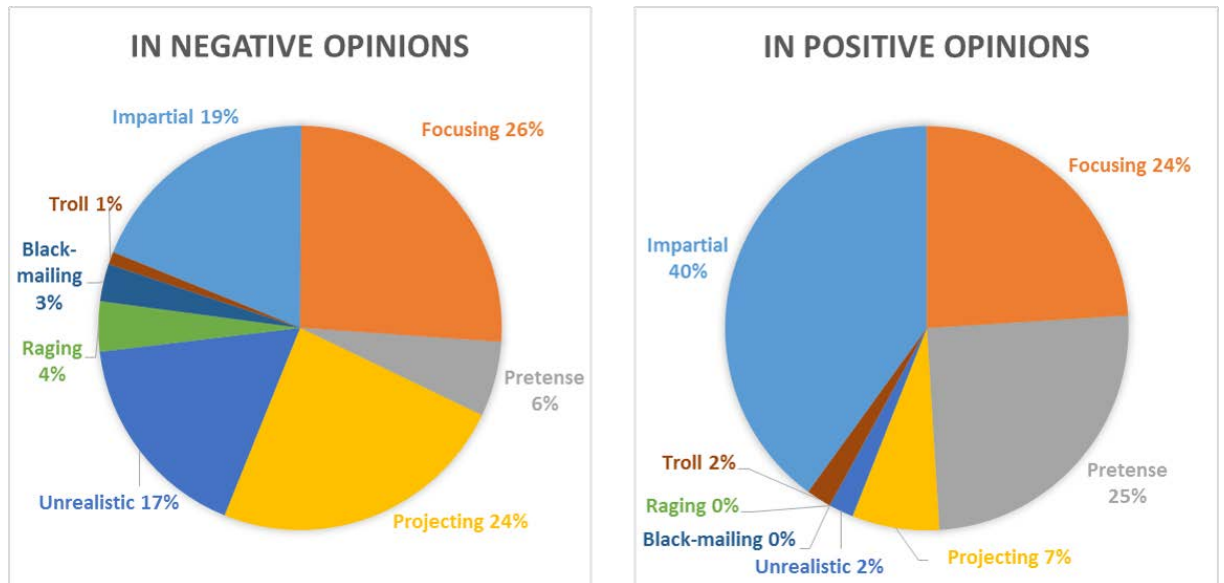
Source: own elaboration

8.4. Summary of the results of the third research phase

In the third research phase, the content dimensions revealed in the first and second research phase were tested and analyzed. The characteristics of these dimensions were separately analyzed in positive and negative e-WOM, because it also became visible from the theoretical framework and the second research phase that these are to be analyzed separately. Results are summarized in Table 38. Furthermore, part of the table is the summary – related to the main aim of the research –, namely what kind of marketing communications value the certain content elements can represent for the hotels.

Table 38. Summary of the results of the third research phase

Content element	Determining feature of the content element		Value of content element
	in positive opinions	in negative opinions	
review title	typically characterized by narrative and expression of level of satisfaction; very similar wording	typically characterized by narrative and expression of level of satisfaction; very similar wording	can emphasize the service element that will be given more emphasis within the review's text
target group of the reviews	two typical target groups: peer, hotel	two typical target groups: hotel, ego	the hotel is often an addressee of consumer reviews, valuable source of information
review's express source of information	referral to other reviews on TripAdvisor	referral to other reviews on TripAdvisor; mention of official sources	identify determining sources of consumer information; extension of marketing communication channels
highlighted service element	typically one highlighted service element (with a	typically one highlighted service element (with a central role within the review)	identify opportunities (competitive advantages) and threats related to service element

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Content element	Determining feature of the content element		Value of content element
	in positive opinions	in negative opinions	
	marginal role within the review)	staff typically highlighted (moderate level of emotionality; low level of specifics)	identify specific consumer needs
	material environment typically highlighted (with specifics included)		develop positioning strategy
			develop the quality of official illustrations (photos generated by the hotel)
advice (to peers)	typical focus on individual, service, or external environment; specific and general wording both typical; low amount of delight	service-focused more typical; general wording more typical; negligible level of outrage	generally objective wording, insights can be gathered for marketing communication activities
advice (to hotel)	most advice on servicing of material elements; other recurring areas: material environment, staff	most advice on servicing of material elements; other recurring areas: material environment, staff	deeper understanding of reviews required to identify indirect advice
	presence of delight	outrage more likely than among positive reviews	pressure for servicing
			acquire suggestions for development
external environment		altogether: low level of presence of such mentions	identify determining external factors
	recommendation and description of external services most typical	more frequently: comparison of focal hotel's services with external services	develop positioning strategy
	moderate level of satisfaction in description	high amount of specifics	include external elements into marketing communications
	few specifics		
response strategy to lived experience	supported by arguments, and personal loyalty are most common – large-scale delight	effective, verbal (most common); conditional exit – sober wording (save the expressions of verbal exit, where the presence of outrage is characteristic)	precise characterization of satisfaction levels
		expression of negative opinion – typically subjective	
		presence of actual or conditional loyalty	
characteristic elements of wording	figurative language slightly more typical for positive reviews than for negative reviews	low general level of problems of interpretability or contradiction	precise characterization of satisfaction levels thanks to figurative language and narratives
	low general level of problems of interpretability or contradiction	narrating an actual experience related to the hotel is most common	more precise description of target audience
	narrating an actual experience related to the hotel is most common		quality control of complaint management activity using narratives as a tool
			develop photos using pictorial descriptions
multifaceted description	pertaining to a specific service element or to the service as a whole	pertaining to a specific service element or to the service as a whole	reviewers describe their opinions objectively in their own ways
		low amount of specifics	

Content element	Determining feature of the content element		Value of content element
	in positive opinions	in negative opinions	
	acceptable amount of specifics		
subjective conclusions	low amount benign assumptions	low amount typically pertaining to hotel's classification	frequency can be decreased through consumer education
affective expressions	majority can be described as satisfied satisfaction appearing in the form of an indirect advice or a multifaceted description – factor increasing review's objectivity narratives more typical to partial or complete satisfaction focus of expressed delight: a specific service element or to the service as a whole – narrative and loyalty as conclusion outrage pertaining to one service element – in the background within the opinion as a whole, use of reserved language;	majority can be described as dissatisfied narratives are most common among dissatisfied reviewers discontent pertaining to one service element delight pertaining to one service element – factor increasing review's objectivity focus of expressed outrage: a specific service element or to the service as a whole – narrative and figurative speech as typical modes of expression;	it is not enough to identify satisfaction levels based on terminology expressing them expressions that express indifference give a guideline regarding the reviewer directs towards rather satisfaction or dissatisfaction identification is supported by figurative language, narratives, response strategy to experience (loyalty), recommendations
background information related to the reviewer	typical content information pertaining to public, social and intimate spaces most typical appearance of personal space	typical content information pertaining to public, social and intimate spaces	deeper understanding of the target group – identify factors affecting prior expectations, deeper study of consumer needs develop positioning strategy insights on developing new service elements
photo attached to the review	larger quantity of attached photos, varied in theme photo as a tool to illustrate a review total, close-in more typical medium quality most typical	typically private sphere, interior of room and bathroom photo as a tool to corroborate a review close-in or detail more typical medium quality most typical	moderate information value – need for consumer education

Source: own elaboration

9. Summary

9.1. Main results and conclusions

In the following, we give an overview of the study's main results following the structure of the research questions. As pronounced parts of the present research, the presentation of the results is focused on the characteristics and significance of the observed content dimensions.

RQ1: How can e-WOM appearing in a virtual community (TripAdvisor) can be characterized as a content type? How can these opinions become pieces of information for hotels?

Consumer opinions in the sample were shown to have more than one target groups: not only other consumers but also the hospitality establishment itself can be an intended recipient of the posted opinion, even as a primary target audience.

In the study of the contents of consumer opinions various dimensions were revealed that contribute to the quality aspects of e-WOM, providing valuable information not only to prospective consumers but equally to organizations.

One such dimension is the specificity of the wording of a consumer opinion. Categories identified under this dimension include **internal contradictions** and **problems of interpretability** as well as the idiosyncratic elements of wording. Internal contradictions and problems of interpretability both act as value destroyers: the presence of such elements can be a sign of an untrustworthy source, and therefore can act as a primary filter in the evaluation of the quality of an opinion. Narratives and figurative speech were idiosyncratic elements of style thanks to which written thoughts gain an ease and depth of interpretability. Moreover, such elements of style were shown to be often indirect information sources about the author of a consumer review, thereby offering a supplementary tool for service providers to more accurately characterize their target group. In addition, the wording of an opinion can act as an express and accurate sign of the level of satisfaction of its author, while the narratives pertaining to a given establishment can act as a form of quality assessment tool.

Idiosyncratic contents providing unique and specific information form another dimension of valuable information sources. Pieces of specific information or advice, featured service elements, external factors (i.e. contextual information), review-as-information-source and experience-response strategy are part of this category. Thanks to these sources of information present in a special context, hospitality establishments can become able to identify sources of competitive advantage or dangers related to their activity, to perceive new consumer needs, and to gather supplementary ideas and insights for potential service development and positioning strategy. Moreover, this

information, as a source of market intelligence can be used as a basis for developing establishments' marketing communications activities. Thus, for example, they can acquire new insights and personal viewpoints based on user-generated photographs, or can include in their communications new contextual elements (i.e. external factors) or communication channels deemed important by visitors.

Background information related to the author of a review is another identified dimension. Information within this dimension is generated and voluntarily shared by users while at the same time being specific to them, therefore bearing exceptional marketing value. While background information provided by reviewers was observed to work on several levels of depth, it still contributed to a better understanding of the target group by providing information on such points as a visitor's prior expectations, thanks to which service gaps such as the quality gap between expected and perceived service can be handled. This information equally provides insight into the development of new service elements, or in the evaluation of a hospitality establishment's positioning strategy.

Among dimensions affecting objectivity the following elements were identified: **affective components, specific information, multifaceted review and subjective inference**. The sole presence of these elements gives a primary sign to hospitality establishments on the potential general marketing value of a consumer review. Among these dimensions, however, affective components play an even more important role. Thanks to these, grades of consumer satisfaction can be assumed, thus providing a textual qualitative tool similar to the evaluation of non-verbal components in an interpersonal communication situation.

In the case of photographs attached to reviews, however, only a moderate information value could be identified. While these pictures might contribute to providing insight to the establishment e.g. in the personalization of their own visual self-presentation during their marketing communications activities, the images in the sample were revealed to provide limited further use as "exclusive" information. In this field, therefore, hospitality establishments have a role in educating their consumers.

In summary, one can state that the examined consumer reviews originating from TripAdvisor are a rich source of information and can indeed provide valuable feedback and a communication source to hospitality establishments.
By characterizing the content of user reviews we provide a novel dimension of analysis for these companies, through which they can decide which content element of consumer reviews is most decisive to them. Based on this consideration, they can then consider consumer reviews on a strategic level (see Figure 17).

Figure 17. Identified content dimensions and their value for marketing communications
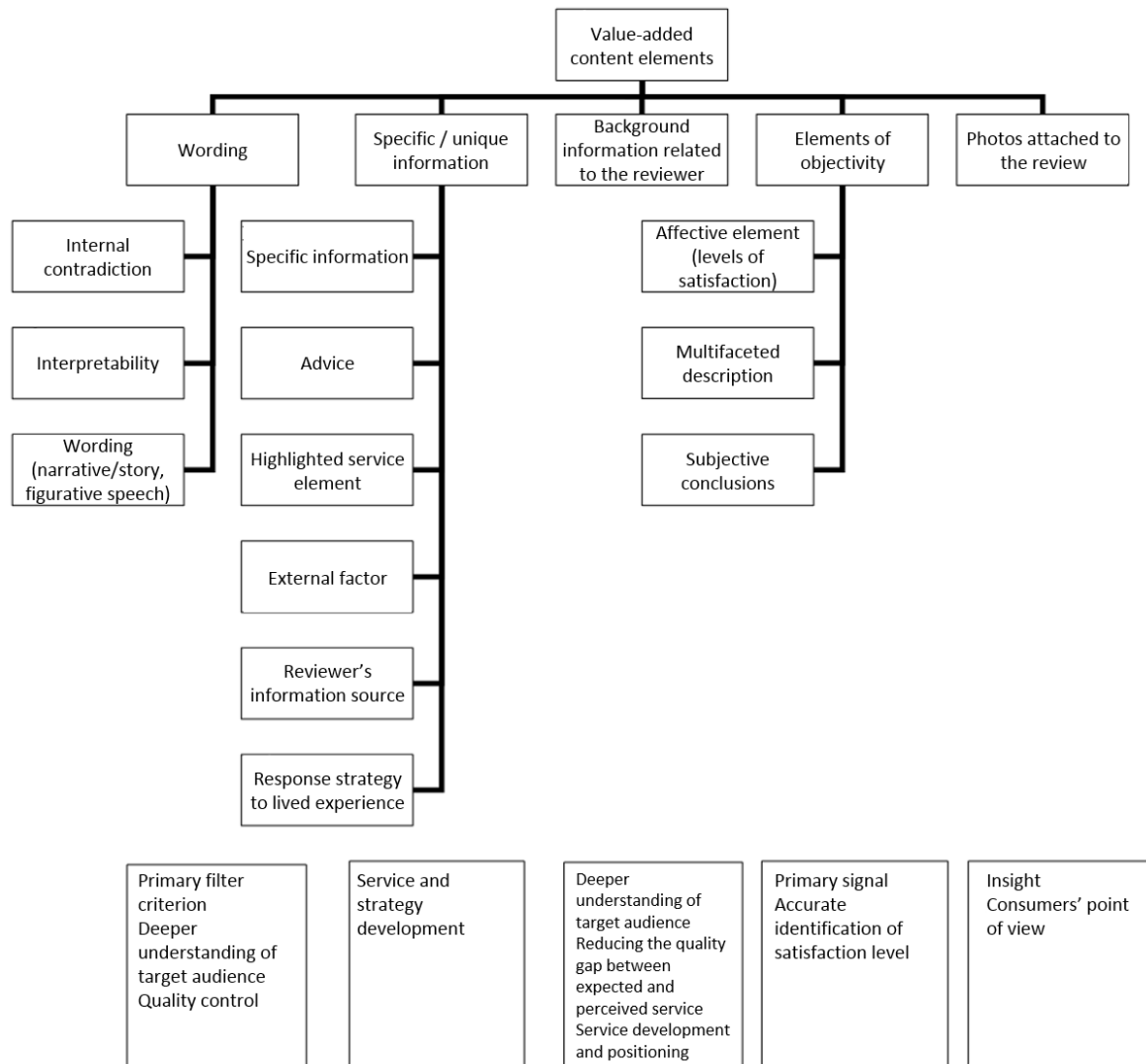
Source: Own elaboration

RQ2: How can positive and negative e-WOM as distinctive content types appearing in a virtual community (TripAdvisor) can be characterized?

Positive reviews from TripAdvisor in the sample generally had a double target audience, namely peers (i.e. potential visitors to a place, with similar interests) and the hotel itself (and its management). In terms of wording, positive reviews in the sample resorted to an important amount of figurative speech, as well as to actual consumer narratives/stories related to the reviewer's own experience with the hotel. At the same time, most positive reviews were exempt of internal contradictions or problems of interpretability. Thus, positive reviews in the sample can be characterized by clearly-formulated information and wording that allowed for generating information that can be deemed valuable.

Specific and/or unique information equally appeared in these positive opinions, generally in connection with the material environment or a particular element of the

service experience. Another recurring content was advice given by the reviewer to the hotel, generally pertaining to the servicing of material elements, accessories in the hotel but also to ideas for the further development of the hotel, in connection with its material environment and human resources. Information in reviews pertaining to the external environment primarily focused on external services (showing the complex nature of the experience of a hotel stay), but generally with fewer actual specifics. Another appearing dimension was the expression of personal loyalty, where in most cases a form of delight was present. Based on the study's results, positive reviews in the sample were generally hardly general or one-sided, thus contradicting one of the study's premises.

The presence of background information related to the reviewer was all but typical among positive reviews in the sample, letting even intimate types of details appear in the texts, thus supporting the highly personal nature of online consumer reviews.

In connection with the general objectivity of positive reviews, the study observed a low general level of subjectivity of these reviews, while multifaceted reviews were present on multiple occasions, pertaining to a particular service element or even to the service in its entirety, with often a number of specifics included. Interestingly, expressions with an affective element in these reviews equally tended towards objectivity, as positive reviews in the sample were characterized by a moderate satisfaction. Elements of dissatisfaction equally appeared as an unexpected dimension of positive reviews, often as part of a more complex advice destined to hotels or as part of a multifaceted description of a reviewer's experience. Most positive reviews in the sample can be characterized by a moderate level of emotionality, while the appearing expressions of delight are sometimes – in an unexpected way – accompanied by the expression of outrage. While outrage itself is altogether hardly typical to the pool of positive reviews in the sample, it often appeared as focusing on one specific service element. This result highlights that – altogether – positive reviews tended to provide objective points of view.

Positive reviews were more likely to have attached image files as compared to negative reviews. Attached photos can be characterized by a variety of themes and a moderate quality of execution. Attached photos in the sample generally were primarily destined to support and adorn the reviews' words.

Content characteristics of negative opinions in the sample largely overlapped with those of positive reviews. Therefore, in the following description of negative reviews, the presentation focuses on the differences. Regarding the target audience of a review, reviewers' own self appeared most often alongside hotels. This difference of target audience between positive and negative reviews highlights the importance of these latter to organizations in question.

Specific and/or unique information equally appeared among negative opinions, generally in connection with and with an emphasis on a particular element of the service experience, making it a decisive point of the review. Furthermore, staff if often treated separately from the rest of the service experience, even though few specifics appear here from the reviews. Advice given to hotels in question equally appeared among negative reviews, even though in these cases hotels were characteristically addressed in the advice with an expressed outrage. Exit strategy appeared as a particular element of the subsample of negative reviews, with reviewers verbally expressing their exit from the future use of a hotel's services, an expression often accompanied again with that of outrage. Interestingly, and contradicting prior expectations, a sign of conditional loyalty equally appeared in negative reviews, and this dimension also was identified as a factor increasing a review's objectivity. Negative reviews in the sample typically had a low level of bias, and did contain specific types of information.

Background information related to the reviewer's person was equally typical of negative reviews, but information pertaining to personal space was relegated to the background.

In terms of the overall objectivity of the negative reviews, while subjective opinions can indeed be found in the subsample (most of them pertaining to the misclassification of the hotel), their number was fairly limited. Multifaceted descriptions were typically present in the subsample, similarly to positive reviews, even though specific information provided by reviewers was scarcer. Expressions with an affective element in these reviews equally tended towards objectivity, as reviews in this subsample were characterized by a moderate dissatisfaction. Satisfaction appeared as an unexpected dimension of objectivity of negative reviews, typically pertaining to a given service element While most reviews in the subsample can be characterized as moderately emotional, next to the appearing expressions of outrage – in an expected way – expressions of delight equally appeared in a few reviews. This result highlights that negative reviews – just like their positive counterparts – altogether tended to provide objective points of view.

Pictures attached to negative reviews of the sample were found to be lower in quality, still, they were used in the aim to support the written negative opinion.

As a result of the content analysis, one can state that both positive and negative e-WOM in the sample turned out to be valuable sources of information to hotels in question, which finding contradicts the view expressed by experts in the in-depths interview phase of the study. Thus, positive reviews turned out to be valuable as genuine sources of information, not only as constituent parts of a necessary critical mass. Hotels therefore equally ought to monitor positive reviews with care.

Negative reviews were found to be primarily considered by interviewed experts as potential threats. Our study reveals that – contrarily to this prior assumption – user-generated reviews in the sample tried to be objective in their own way, while angry and unrealistically negative opinions often perceived by professionals as dominant among negative reviews were, in reality, relegated to the background.

It also became apparent that the quality of consumer reviews can be ameliorated, for which hotels can be instrumental in educating their guests. By this, they can contribute to considerably lowering the presence of quality-reducing elements within consumer opinions following a hotel experience.

RQ3: What are the expectations about e-WOM of the various stakeholders in terms of content?

An additional research question arose in connection with the identified content elements, namely which are those that stakeholders (consumers and hotels) deem valuable.

The in-depth interviews highlighted the importance of a review's title, and the presence of information and specifics about cleanliness, hotel staff and exterior environment, marking these as required elements of a valuable review. Focus group interviewees, however, found a review's title much more irrelevant, while they introduced information about food as another expected content element.

Based on these differences between expressed expectations, one can deduce that consumers attach importance to certain service elements (such as catering) that may be disregarded by hospitality establishments as decision support factors. Such identified service elements in the research were typically hardly investment-intensive, while, based on consumer reviews, they provided an important subjective added relative value to consumers. This finding highlights the fact that a deeper understanding of consumer reviews might contribute to unveiling consumer-specific decision support elements, otherwise potentially overlooked by organizations. Identifying such factors can contribute – in the long term – to the possible repositioning of a hospitality establishment.

Beyond expected content elements, our study equally focused on unveiling information that our interviewees (i.e. decision makers) deemed valuable. These dimensions were altogether defined as factor increasing reviews' overall quality. Such dimensions identified during the in-depth expert interviews were: specific/unique information, multifaceted analyses, the presence of background information on the reviewer, characteristic elements of wording, and photos attached to reviews. As seen in the analysis of the contents of positive and negative e-WOM, the presence of all the

latter dimensions was identified in the research sample, supporting the overall marketing value and quality of consumer-generated reviews.

RQ4: In what ways do authentic and (supposedly) manipulated positive or negative e-WOM differ?

As show in the theoretical review, manipulated e-WOM can be considered a specific type of e-WOM, where – as part of a targeted marketing communications activity – an organization "employs" a consumer or other organizational stakeholder to generate e-WOM related to its activity. One of our study's presumptions was to identify content dimensions that could complete the related literature.

The focus groups enabled us to identify personal strategies through which participants filter e-WOM that they deem manipulated. Dimensions of these strategies were the presence of unrealistic situations in the reviews, an excessive wordiness of the review, its too general nature, the lack of any personal background information, or the use of unequivocally extreme wording in a review.

These results highlight that these dimensions act as the opposite of factors increasing reviews' overall quality. This finding however raises the question whether participants blend together the phenomena of low-quality and manipulated reviews. The present study's framework did not allow to further examine the perceived difference between genuinely manipulated and supposedly manipulated consumer opinions.

At the same time our in-depth interviews revealed that content manipulation is an actual and topical phenomenon, as various levels of manipulation were identified from the interviewees mentions. We therefore call for further scientific investigation in the area, as if these manipulated reviews can correctly be identified then platform owners and/or hospitality establishments can take effective action against them. Hotels can furthermore educate their consumers to be able to confidently identify manipulated opinions, thus supporting them in their decision-making process, and protecting themselves against misleading negative reviews that can be at the origin of great actual damage to the hotels.

RQ5: How do online rating sites become virtual communities?

The description of TripAdvisor as a social medium showed that it can be characterized as a virtual community based on common interest but weak social ties. The present study's results confirm this characterization. Our study points out the social dynamics of e-WOM on this channel, as reviews in the sample did refer back, on multiple occasions, to other TripAdvisor reviews. These references suggest a fundamental trust and bonding towards other reviewers and supports the phenomenon of appreciation of social media as a source of information. In our sample of reviews we did not observe

signs of peculiar language use or the presence of a shared communication standard, which would be signs of a deeper level of community.

However, the idea of community is reinforced by the presence of clearly identifiable roles which determined the utility of a review. Such identified roles were those of raging, unrealistic, impartial, blackmailing, focusing, projecting or pretense-members, or that of trolls. The highest level of utility was identified at impartial reviews that developed their description in both horizontal and vertical perspectives, thereby offering a thorough and therefore valuable information to readers. Focused reviews provided a lower-profile, yet still prominent utility. Their descriptions provided an in-depth information of a limited number of highlighted service elements. Altogether, impartial reviews were most numerous in the positive subsample, while focusing reviews dominated the negative subsample. This result once again highlights the overall business utility that can be extracted from within these user-generated reviews.

Based on the study's results, it can be stated that TripAdvisor users do form a genuine community. Therefore this channel provides a wider range of opportunity for hospitality establishments, as they can become members of the aforementioned community, thereby contributing to raising consumer trust, while they can equally use the platform as a direct communication channel with consumers. It also becomes apparent that consumer education is still a necessity, for which this channel can provide a suitable framework.

To conclude, one can state that the analysis of consumer reviews of selected hotels on TripAdvisor showed that these reviews can provide hotels with valuable information, that can be used for developing both their services and marketing communications.

9.2. Scientific and practical significance of the results

One scientific significance of the present research is its exclusive reliance on a QUAL-qual research design to answer its research questions, thus providing further evidence for the importance of such studies in marketing research. Our study confirms that – as opposed to previous scholarly research on e-WOM largely emphasizing quantitative methodologies – that the use of a purely qualitative research can be justified.

Another scientific achievement of the present study is to highlight the importance of studying the contents of e-WOM. Indeed, even though there is an ever growing research corpus on e-WOM, studies focusing on content are mostly relegated to the background.

Our study points out that e-WOM is now hardly only diffused through textual contents, with visual and audiovisual forms exponentially gaining in importance. Following this observation, we propose an extension to the definition of electronic word-of-mouth. Another scientific aim was to complete the Hungarian-language literature on the topic. Even though a number of national studies already focus on the phenomenon (see e.g. Michalkó et al., 2015; Kemény, 2015; Nagy et al., 2014), research activity in the field is considerably lagging behind its international dynamics.

The present research shows that it is worthwhile for hospitality establishments to devote a greater attention to positive opinions beyond primarily dealing with negative reviews. Our study calls for the necessity of a change of culture in terms of the handling of consumer reviews and to related response policies.

Identified content elements ought to be used by hospitality establishments as assessment criteria, thanks to which a deeper understanding of target audiences and actual consumers is made possible on these channels, thereby contributing to reducing the perception gap in service quality. Identified consumer needs can in turn lead to service development, and market intelligence filtered from consumer-generated reviews can contribute to revise and improve their marketing communications strategy. Furthermore, e-WOM provides an additional source of marketing communications channels, such as user-generated photos, and in an integrated approach, the fine-tuning of the organization's own imagery to fit consumer feedback.

Our results draw hotels' attention to the fact that consumer education can considerably improve the quality of consumer reviews, and as a crucial element of consumer decision-making, to eventually and actually take the role of a "sales assistant" specified in the dissertation's theoretical part.

One recommended area of consumer education is to dispel myths among consumers about services to be expected from various types of hotels, thus moderating potentially unrealistic prior consumer expectations, reducing in turn the potential perceived quality gap between expected and perceived service.

Another recommended area of consumer education relates to the reliability of online opinions. The dimensions identified in the study can help hotels to determine the pool of content elements deemed most important in their communications. Chosen elements can be integrated in hotels' own evaluation systems, thanks to which they can facilitate the creation of online consumer reviews about complex touristic experiences, and at the same time ensure the quality of these opinions.

TripAdvisor can be used as a channel for such consumer education initiatives, as hotels can educate potential consumers in their responses to actual reviews. We therefore believe that hotels should devote a greater attention to consumer review sites such as TripAdvisor.

9.3. Limitations and future research directions

The present study suffers from the customary flaws of qualitative research, thus in spite of the methodological triangulation carried out through the various research phases its results cannot be generalized. Moreover, subjective interpretations may have appeared during the coding process. However, results presented beforehand may serve as a sound base for further quantitative research in the area.

Our research was limited to examining consumer reviews on 4-star hotels in Budapest. This operationalization of the empirical work is associated with a more specialized circle of reviewers, as the authors of reviews in the sample can be assumed to be primarily middle-class foreigners. These socio-demographic characteristics may have distorted the results, as reviewers with a similar background can be expected to be more experienced and better educated than the average. It is therefore recommended that the investigation be extended as to include a wider range of hospitality establishments, and notably lower category hotels, and hotels situated outside of the capital. Such an extended research framework would enable a certain comparability and filtering of the distorting effect of commenters' backgrounds.

In addition, the communication channel containing the opinions can equally be decisive: our research only includes only one interface with a proprietary evaluation system, namely TripAdvisor. We recommend that further research take into account several other information sources with a variety of evaluation systems, thus letting to reveal a potential impact of the platform on user-generated content.

Another proposed future research direction is the more in-depth study of manipulated opinions, for which the present study failed to provide a proper framework.

Finally, research on e-WOM in visual and audiovisual forms is a novel and promising field of research. To complete the findings of our study in this area, we recommend an interdisciplinary approach, with, among others, the integration of semantics and semiotics.

Annexes

Annex 1. Interview guides

1/A – Interview guide of in-depth interviews

<u>General experience</u>
1. In your opinion, how did the internet change the hotel industry?
2. What is the hotel industry's general opinion about online consumer opinions?
3. In your experience, what is the role of and how decisive are online consumer reviews in hotel selection?

<u>Response practices</u>
4. What general corporate principles does your hotel have in connection with consumer reviews about the hotel? (who manages the review sites, does the hotel react, why, how?)
5. Do all consumer reviews need to be answered?
6. What channels to use/listen to? Which are important, which are not so important? Does it count on which channel a consumer review appears on?

<u>Experience about consumer reviews</u>
7. General trend sin connection with consumer reviews about the hotel? Quality, wording, use of pictures, role of negative reviews, etc.
8. What do consumer reviews focus on?

<u>Value of consumer reviews</u>
9. What accounts as valuable information in positive and negative reviews?
10. How are consumer reviews used? (evolution?)
11. Manipulated vs. authentic consumer reviews: what attributes do characterize them in their opinion? Did they meet such reviews? Have they already questioned the contents of a review?

1/B – Interview guide of focus groups

NO SUPPORT DEVICE SHOWN UNTIL QUESTION 4 !!!

The goal of the research is to investigate what consumers think about consumer reviews on TripAdvisor.

1) general experience
- Please think about your latest vacation. How did you plan it?
- What kind of lodging do you usually book?
- In your choice of lodging, what are your main information sources?
- What sites do you visit when you look for consumer reviews? Why?
- What do you think about TripAdvisor? What experience do you have about the site (since when do you use it, how often do you use it, what kind of user do you believe you are)?

2.) Recall of previous hotel experience – Please try to remember a situation when you were looking for a hotel on TripAdvisor!

- Which are the considerations that you make when reading consumer reviews? How did you read / filter them? (first page only, directed to negative reviews, etc.) How much time do you spend reading a review?

- Please try to recall a specific experience with a positive / negative review on TripAdvisor. What do you remember?
- Why do you think you remember this particular situation?
- What was memorable in the remembered consumer review?
- What was the most useful piece of information for you in the recalled positive review?
- What was the most useful piece of information for you in the recalled negative review?
- What was your experience with information search in connection with the positive review?
- What was your experience with information search in connection with the negative review?

3.) Positive and negative reviews – Authentic and manipulated reviews

ACTIVITY: IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE DIMENSIONS OF (EXCEPTIONAL AND GOOD QUALITY) POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ONLINE REVIEWS? WHAT INFORMATION WOULD YOU INCLUDE IN A POSITIVE / NEGATIVE REVIEW? („CAULDRON" EXERCISE – CONTINOUS EXTENSION OF DIMENSIONS DURING THE INTERVIEW)

- In what context and why do you use consumer reviews? What is your opinion about consumer reviews?
- In your experience with TripAdvisor, how often do you consider review titles? *(length, content, wording [style, specific vocabulary, expressions], readability, utility [argument quality], presence of emotions, specific advice, information content [general and specific/exclusive], balance, bias, presence of information about the sender)*

- In your experience with TripAdvisor, what characterizes positive reviews? *(length, content, wording [style, specific vocabulary, expressions], readability, utility [argument quality], presence of emotions, specific advice, information content [general and specific/exclusive], balance, bias, presence of information about the sender)*
- In your experience with TripAdvisor, what characterizes negative reviews? *(length, content, wording [style, specific vocabulary, expressions], readability, utility [argument quality], presence of emotions, specific advice, information content [general and specific/exclusive], balance, bias, presence of information about the sender)*

NO SUPPORT DEVICE SHOWN UNTIL THIS POINT!!!

4.)   providing examples – study if titles and textual information

Please imagine that you are preparing for a vacation. You are searching among 4-star hotels on TripAdvisor and one of the prospective hotels is Starshine Hotel Budapest, which is also a 4-star hotel but it is very sympathetic because of its moderate price and central location. You find the following consumer reviews while browsing TripAdvisor:

- *4 cases:*
  - *positive only,*
  - *mixed, but with positive dominance;*
  - *mixed, but with negative dominance;*
  - *negative only*

WORK IN PAIRS. ONE CASE PER PAIR. EACH PAIR OF INTERVIEWEES RECEIVE A DIFFERENT CASE. LIMITED TIME TO READ.

EXERCISE: USE THE PROVIDED MATERIALS (highlighter, post-it, …) TO MARK WHICH PIECE OF INFORMATION WAS USEFUL WITHIN THE REVIEW! PLEASE DETAIL YOUR THOUGHTS ON EACH REVIEW ON A SEPARATE POST-IT SHEET.

- Based on the consumer reviews, what are your impressions of this hotel?
- What can you recall about the hotel?
- What information do you find determining in these reviews? Why?
- Based on the titles, which review would you read?
- What information do you find important in each review?
- What are your expectations related to positive / negative reviews about this hotel?

EXERCISE: CHOOSE ONE OF THE REVIEWS THAT WERE GIVEN OUT TO YOU AND REPHRASE IT IN A WAY THAT IT BE MOST USEFUL (AND VALUABLE)!
- What should be changed in order for it to be useful?
  - *How should information in it be worded?*
  - *What information is missing from the review that you would include?*

EXERCISE: TRY TO CATEGORIZE THE GIVEN REVIEWS: WHAT KIND OF ANIMAL EACH OF THEM WOULD BE? MAKE A DRAWING!

EXERCISE: TRY TO DETERMINE WHICH ONE OF THE REVIEWS IS MANIPULATED!

- Do you think there is a review among those that you received that was not written by a „simple" user? What makes you say that?
- In your experience, have you met reviews that you suspected not being written by a „simple" user? What made you suspect that?
- Have you met such reviews on TripAdvisor?
- Can we filter these reviews? How? What are your strategies?

CHANGE OF TOPIC – FROM TEXTUAL REVIEWS TO VISUAL INFORMATION SOURCES

5.) Pictures attached to consumer reviews on TripAdvisor
- How often do you view consumer-generated pictures when browsing TripAdvisor? In your experience, what characterizes these pictures *(quality/execution, focus, which service element is put into the focus, are they positive or negative, exclusive information, information about the sender)*?
- What role do you think these pictures have?
- What do you expect from pictures on this site (what should they focus on, how should they be executed, what information should be present and how)?

SHOW PICTURES FIRST!!!

6.) Examples - pictures

EXERCISE: SELECT THOSE PICTURES FROM THE ENVELOPE THAT YOU BELIEVE BELONG TO THE GIVEN CONSUMER REVIEWS.
- What helped you make the match?

CLOSURE

- A LAST GLANCE ON THE „CAULDRON". IS ANYTHING MISSING?

Annex 2. Examples from the third research phase to the main identified content dimensions

Multifaceted reviews	Ex.
negative opinion (about service element)	*The WiFi was free, but it didn't work most of the time. (#264)*
negative opinion (about service as a whole)	*basically, all these are details, but we had a feeling that no one really cared whether the guests felt comfortable/happy with the service/hotel. On the other hand, i have to say that air-conditioning was very pleasant – it was effective but very quite, we didn't even feel it in the room. The windows had good isolation so we didn't hear the noise from outside. Breakfast was rich, but not 16eur rich. Free wifi was good. Location was good. (#144)*
positive opinion (about service element)	*The room was a little bit small but well decorated and very clean. (#20)*
positive opinion (about service as a whole)	*The architecture is great. We had a new and modern double room. The rool itself was good (nice rain shower, international tv, really comfortable bed). But there were two negative aspects. The heating is like an AC and it's too noisey. And there is a transparent slot in the bathroom door. The breakfast is very good and rich ! Different kinds of juices, coffee etc. cereals, fruits, salads, breads, croissants, eggs etc. As you run a 4**** superior house it would be nice to add pancakes to the breakfast (#349)*

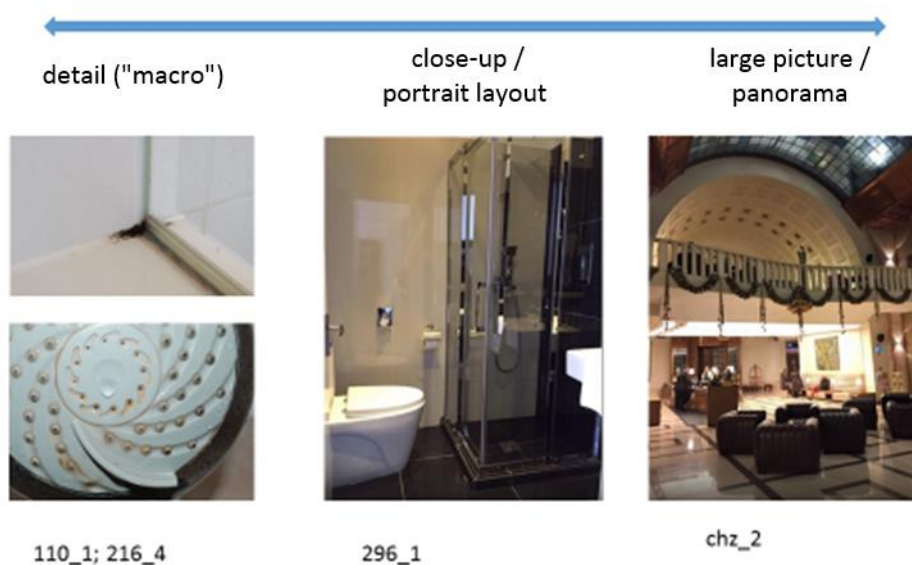| Types of advice	Ex.
focusing on individual	*Those wanting to be near the nightlife or the atmosphere of the city should look to a hotel in Pest. (#62)*
focusing on service	*PS: Wifi is fantastic and quick. If you need to make long calls, its great and no matter how many users there are they have good (#223)*
focusing on external element	*Try a place called Trofea Grill for a wonderful all you can eat buffet including drinks (alcohol included). (#12)*
specific	*You can arrange a shuttle from the airport via the hotel at around £6 each single, just email the reception. (#238)*
general	*Perfect stay for the winter holidays season. (#170)*
cause and effect argument	*The massage staff is iffy, sometimes good and sometimes extremely bad. Avoid the Thai masseuse. (#187)*
experience	*So park outside on the street if you choose this hotel. (#219)*
general	*Overall i would not recommend this hotel for budapest. there are far better options for the same price. (#14)*

Wording	Ex.
figurative language	*Breakfast: expect perfection and still find yourself at a loss for words. (#370)* *I have no idea why I have chosen this place, I could stay in the mortuary. (#17)*
social dimension	*As big a fan I am of Tripadvisor, I always use TA before booking a hotel and for the most part it's spot on but sometimes the TA community fails me.* *I don`t understand why everybody raves about this place. (#51)* *I agree with many of the other reviews-the baths were great (the focus of my visit), breakfast was good, staff was helpful, price is more than reasonable, location is good. (#185)* *People had complained about noise, and we were next to the lift, but it's like any big hotel in a city – if you are a light sleeper then use earplugs! Problem solved. My partner slept fine without any, and there was no noise from outside streets that disturbed us. (#288)* *I chose this hotel based on previous reviews and it's location close to the main market and I'm glad to say we weren't disappointed. (#43)*
problem of interpretability	*The loccation was excellent, close to evvery place a turist needs!!! (#167)* *Hotel staff is quite invisble, but met expectations (#137)*

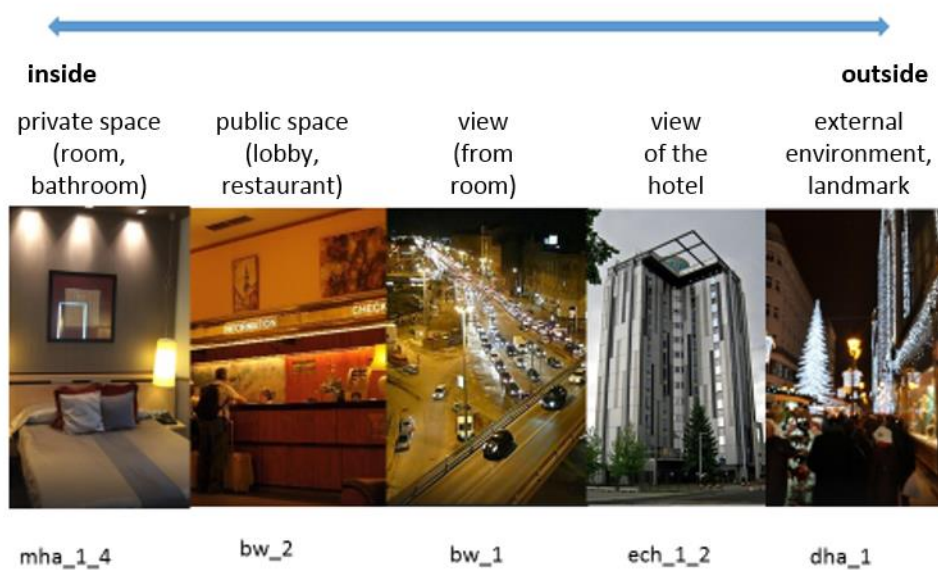| Response strategy to experience	Ex.
targeted negative voice	„The room does the job but unfortunately if you are planning a relaxing city break get away I wouldn't stay here. (#267)
substantiated negative voice	„I definitely won't go back, and won't recommend this place unless you have some urgent matter at the embassy and you travel with one luggage. (#364)
personal discouragement	„We are returning to Budapest for the race again this year and are staying at a different hotel......." (#315)
targeted recommendation	„Great and service oriented personel. Walking distance to everything. Nice area. Can really recommend this hotel - especially for couples." (#8)
substantiated recommendation	„If it is luxury you are looking for then pay more and stay somewhere else, but if you want a clean and comfortable place to stay with a decent breakfast in an ideal location, you can't go far wrong." (#321)
personal loyalty	„We were totally relaxed at the end of our stay. Thank you to you all. We loved our time in Budapest and will be back! Lynda (UK) and Julia (Berlin)." (#25)
exit	„We did ask reception staff if perhaps there was a problem with our AC and they said they checked it and it was fine." (#216)

Attitude	Ex.
negative review with delight	„On a positive note, the wi-fi was excellent. The password was randomly changed throughout our stay without any notice though, and so we had to call down to get the new password." (#381)
positive review with outrage	„Some of the staff were chatty and smiled, mainly those in the restaurant at breakfast, some of the reception staff were helpful and others were really, really miserable. Lovely view of the Danube, but for us, it was on the wrong side of the river." (#19)
"OK" state – indifference	„We weren't too impressed by the hotel. There are far superior hotels in the area, it was "okay". (#398)
state nearing satisfaction – indifference	„The hotel doesn't have any wow factor but rooms were reasonably sized and always clean and tidy and gives free Wifi."(#250)
state nearing the lower limits of acceptability - indifference	„The rooms and the bathroom are basic". (#168)

Annex 3. Examples to identified dimensions in user-generated photos

Focus of the photos

detail ("macro")	close-up / portrait layout	large picture / panorama

110_1; 216_4   296_1   chz_2

Content of the photos

inside   outside

private space (room, bathroom)	public space (lobby, restaurant)	view (from room)	view of the hotel	external environment, landmark

mha_1_4   bw_2   bw_1   ech_1_2   dha_1

**Degree of personal nature of
the photos**

sterile	open	social	personal	intimate
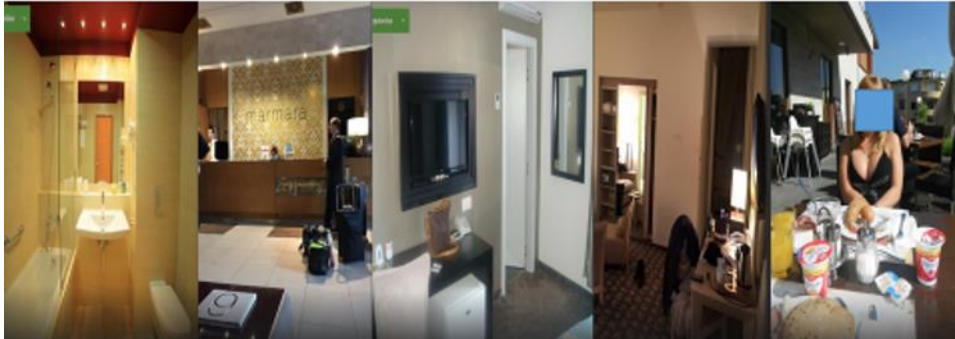
| hcg_2 | mhb_1_2 | hcg_1_5 | 369_1 | hcg_1_5 |

Quality of the photos

very poor	poor	mediocre	good	excellent
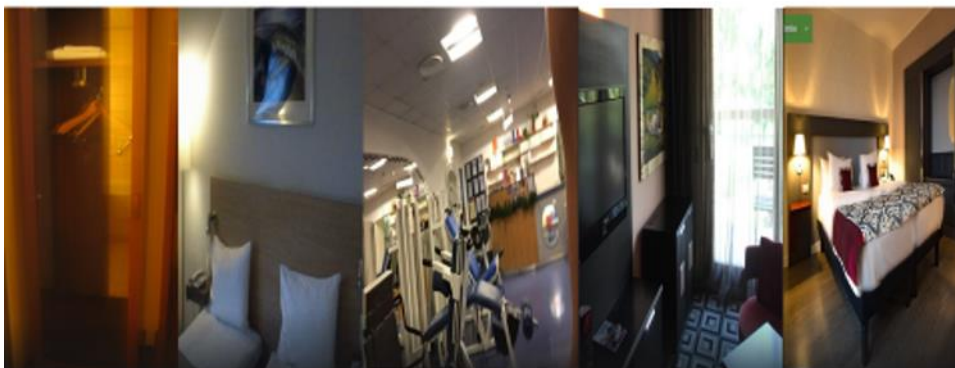
| nhb_6_5 | ttc_4_5 | ttc_4_5 | bh_2_4 | hpz_5 |

Identifiability of the purpose of the image

unidentifiable   identifiable

da_2_2

nhb_3_3

kk_4
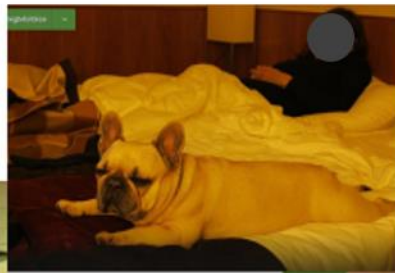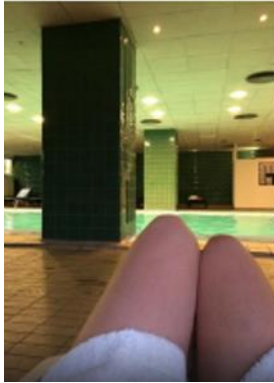
Annex 4. List of publications by the author in the dissertation's topic

Refereed journal articles (in English)

- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Kiss, Tünde, Gáti, Mirkó, Csordás, Tamás (2015): Social media activities of small and medium-sized enterprises: Special contents and their consumer reactions in the case of Hungarian catering establishments. KÖZGAZDÁSZ FÓRUM 18:(125) pp. 78-97.
- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Csordás, Tamás, Gáti, Mirkó (2015): Small businesses and their social media audiences: What inspires consumers to like pages of small catering establishments in social media? KÖZGAZDÁSZ FÓRUM 18:(123) pp. 77-98.

Refereed journal articles (in Hungarian)

- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Csordás, Tamás (2016): Fogyasztók a vállalatok ellen? – Negatív online szájreklám a virtuális kereskedelmi közösségekben [Consumers against organizations? - Negative electronic word-of-mouth in virtual commerce communities]. MÉDIAKUTATÓ 16:(3-4) pp. 157-168.
- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Gerencsér, Orsolya (2016): A negatív e-WOM elsöprő ereje – az online tűzvihar (firestorm) jelensége [The power of negative e-WOM – the phenomenon of online firestorm]. JEL-KÉP 2016:(4) pp. 17-32.
- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Csordás, Tamás (2016): „Kellenek a review-k; ez egy fogyasztói igény." – Turisztikai szakemberek véleménye a TripAdvisor felületén megjelenő fogyasztói véleményekről [„Wee need reviews; this is consumer demand." - Opinions of tuurism experts about the consumer reviews of TripAdvisor]. MARKETING ÉS MENEDZSMENT 2016:(3) (in press)
- Markos-Kujbus, Éva (2016): Az on-line szájreklám jellemzői marketingkommunikáció szempontjából [The attribues of electronic word-of-mouth from the perspective of marketing communications]. VEZETÉSTUDOMÁNY 47:(6) pp. 52-63.

Other journal articles (in English):

- Csordás, Tamás, Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Gáti, Mirkó (2014): The Attributes of Social Media as a Strategic Marketing Communication Tool. *JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION* 4:(1) pp. 48-71.

Other journal articles (in Hungarian):

- Kujbus, Éva (2010): Zsebben hordozható világ – avagy a mobil Internet fejlődése és térhódítása [Pocket portable world – the evolution and expansion of mobile internet]. *E-TUDOMÁNY* 8:(1) pp. 1-24.
- Kujbus, Éva (2010): Mobilinternet-használat és Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megye [Mobile internet use and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county]. *SZABOLCS-SZATMÁR-BEREGI SZEMLE* 45:(3) pp. 353-363.

Conference presentation and/or appearance in book of proceedings (in English):

- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Kiss, Tünde, Gáti, Mirkó, Csordás, Tamás (2015): Social media activities of small and medium - sized enterprises – special contents and their consumer reactions in the case of Hungarian catering establishments. *ICEBM 2015*, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Nov 20-21, 2015.

- Markos-Kujbus Éva, Csordás Tamás, Gáti Mirkó (2015): Small businesses and their social media audiences: what inspires consumers to like pages of small catering establishments in social media? *ICEBM 2015*, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Nov 20-21, 2015.
- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Csordás, Tamás (2015): Users' Perception of Online Consumer Reviews in Virtual Commerce Communities, *6th EMAC Regional Conference*, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Vienna, Austria, Sep 16-18, 2015, ISBN:978-3-200-04265-0
- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Csordás, Tamás, Kiss, Tünde, Horváth, Dóra (2014): Consumers against organizations? - Negative electronic word-of-mouth in virtual commerce communities. *5th EMAC Regional Conference*, University of Economics in Katowice, Katowice, Poland, Sep 24-26, 2014. ISBN:978-83-7875-210-3, pp. 121-128.
- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Gáti, Mirkó (2012): Social media's new role in marketing communication and its opportunities in online strategy building. *ECREA 2012: 4th European Communication Conference*. Istanbul, Turkey, Oct 24-27, 2012., pp. 1-17.
- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Gáti, Mirkó (2012): The attributes of social media as an online strategy tool. *Media Management Education Association (emma): Annual Conference*, Corvinus University of Budapest, Budapest, Hungary, Feb 10-11, 2012, pp. 1-14.
- Nyirő, Nóra, Nagy, Gábor, Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Varga, Zsolt (2012): Internet and only the Internet? *Media Management Education Association (emma): Annual Conference*, Corvinus University of Budapest, Budapest, Hungary, Feb 10-11, 2012, pp. 1-14.

Conference presentation and/or appearance in book of proceedings (in Hungarian):
- Gáti, Mirkó, Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Csordás, Tamás (2015): „Lájk első látásra": Mi inspirálja a márkák kedvelését az online térben, kis vendéglátóhelyek esetében? [„Like at first sight?" – What inspires liking brands in online social media in the case of small catering establishments?] Paper preseted at *Az Egyesület a Marketing Oktatásért és Kutatásért XXI. Országos Konferenciája* [21st National Conference of the Hungarian Association for the Education and Research of Marketing], Aug. 27-28, 2015, Budapest, Hungary. ISBN:978-963-313-189-3, pp. 57-67.
- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Kiss, Tünde, Gáti, Mirkó, Csordás, Tamás (2015): „Lájkolom őket, de ennék is náluk?": Aktivitásra buzdító kis- és középvállalati közösségimédia-tevékenységek fogyasztói fogadtatása magyarországi vendéglátóhelyek példáján keresztül. [„I fanned them, but would I eat at their place?" – Encouraging social media activities of small and medium-sized enterprises and their consumer-reactions – the case of Hungarian catering establishments] Paper preseted at *Az Egyesület a Marketing Oktatásért és Kutatásért XXI. Országos Konferenciája* [21st National Conference of the Hungarian Association for the Education and Research of Marketing], Aug. 27-28, 2015, Budapest, Hungary. ISBN:978-963-313-189-3. pp. 68-78.

- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Csordás, Tamás, Somos, Gabriella (2015): "Ha több mint húszan fejtik ki, hogy jó, akkor nagy baj nem lehet vele" - A felhasználói vélemények észlelt szerepe virtuális kereskedelmi közösségekben ["If there are more than twenty consumer reviews about it there couldn't be a real problem" – The perceived role of consumer reviews in virtual commerce communities]. Paper preseted at *Az Egyesület a Marketing Oktatásért és Kutatásért XXI. Országos Konferenciája* [21st National Conference of the Hungarian Association for the Education and Research of Marketing], Aug. 27-28, 2015, Budapest, Hungary. ISBN:978-963-313-189-3, pp. 79-89.
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- Markos-Kujbus, Éva (2013): Az online szájreklám, mint a marketingkommunikáció eszköze [Electronic word-of-mouth as a marketing communciation tool] *A Magyar Marketing Szövetség Marketing Oktatók Klubja 19. Országos Konferenciája* [19th National Conference of the Hungarian Marketing Association's Marketing Teachers' Club (EMOK)] Budapest Business College, Budapest, Aug 28-29, 2013. ISBN:9789637159329, pp. 741-758.
- Markos-Kujbus, Éva, Gáti, Mirkó (2012): A közösségi média mint online stratégiai eszköz [Social media as a strategic marketing tool]. *A Magyar Marketing Szövetség Marketing Oktatók Klubja 18. Országos Konferenciája* [18th National Conference of the Hungarian Marketing Association's Marketing Teachers' Club (EMOK)], University of Miskolc, Miskolc, Hungary, Aug 30-31 2012. ISBN:978-963-661-995-4, pp. 8-18.
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Book chapters:

- Csordás Tamás, Markos-Kujbus Éva, Horváth Dóra (2016): Márkakommunikáció. In: Bauer András, Kolos Krisztina (szerk.). Márkamenedzsment. 300 p. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2016. pp. 112-129. (ISBN:978 963 05 9744 9)

- Markos-Kujbus Éva (2015): A harmadik generációs Kia Sportage megjelenése a hazai piacon In Malota Erzsébet (ed.). Marketing nemzetközi színtéren: Esettanulmányok a hazai és külföldi piacokról. 224 p. Budapest: Alinea Kiadó, pp. (ISBN: 9786155303883)

- Horváth Dóra, Mitev Ariel, Bauer András, Csordás Tamás, Gáti Mirkó, Markos-Kujbus Éva (2014): Az alma megosztása és feldolgozása: Kép, szöveg és mém az új generáció változó információ fogyasztásában In: Lehota József, Berács József, Rekettye Gábor (szerk.): Tomcsányi Pál akadémikus 90 éves: Az életminőség anyagi és szellemi igényeinek kielégítése fogyasztási marketing szemlélettel: Felolvasó ülés és tanulmánykötet. 305 p. Konferencia helye, ideje: Budapest, Magyarország, 2014.03.05 Budapest: MTA Agrár-közgazdasági Bizottság Agrármarketing Albizottság, pp. 93-109. (ISBN:978-963-508-702-0)

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