

## Online Customers Reviews:

### Implications for the Brand and Consumers

#### Using Online Reviews

If you have ever planned a big trip or holiday, then it is very likely that you have used an online review site (e.g. TripAdvisor) to help choose the best hotel for you, by seeing how real consumers rate them.

There are multiple reasons that many consumers rely upon online reviews and ratings for all kinds of purchases, not just hotels, these include:

- **Trustworthiness** = Consumers often trust the opinions of fellow travelers more than traditional advertising or hotel descriptions
- **Authenticity** = Personal experiences provide a more authentic and unbiased perspective
- **Recent Experiences** = Online reviews offer insights into real and recent experiences from people who have stayed at the hotel
- **More Detailed Information** = Reviews can provide specific details about different aspects of a hotel, such as room cleanliness, staff friendliness, amenities, and overall ambiance
- **Easy Rating Systems** = Numerical or star ratings allow for a quick and easy comparison between hotels
- **Tailored Choices** = Reviews can help individuals find hotels that align with their preferences and needs
- **Identify Potential Problems** = Prospective can often use reviews to identify potential concerns raised by previous visitors

As you can see, there are lots of good reasons to use online reviews. But how do consumers and brands deal with mixed up reviews. Let's find out by looking at an unusual hotel - the Hans Brinker Budget Hotel in Amsterdam.

#### Welcome to the Hans Brinker Budget Hotel

Here is their actual profile from TripAdvisor. This is NOT a consumer review, but was posted by the hotel itself. It gives you a great sense of how they position the hotel.

- *Welcome to Hans Brinker, the cheapest, the worst, the best.*
- *No swimming pool, no room service, no pick-up service, no bridal-suite, no gym, no spa, no bellboy*
- *But cheap rooms, a restaurant, a nice bar, a club, 24 hour reception and 500 beds.*

- *The Hans Brinker Budget Hotel is the famous budget hotel in the city center Amsterdam.*
- *This budget hotel can accommodate individuals, backpackers and groups (students, scholars etc.). The hotel has single, double and triple rooms and dorms up to 8 persons.*
- *Each room has a private bathroom and lockers for personal belongings.*
- *Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served at the spacious common area. There is a bar and an underground club, which is open every night till late.*
- *Free WIFI-access is available in the common areas.*

To support their "worst/best" positioning, here is an example of one of their ads. As you can see, they are clear about the low quality of the hotel.

While the ad is designed to be humorous, it should also help frame and set expectations for potential hotel guests.



### **Their TripAdvisor Scores**

The hotel has an interesting mix of ratings (as at 2023), as follows:

- Excellent = 293
- Very Good = 579
- Average = 451
- Poor = 166
- Terrible = 196

## Sample TripAdvisor Customer Reviews

### **4/5 Excellent Hostel - Almost Hotel Quality**

*Overall a fantastic hostel. 20+ of us stayed, and the rooms were good quality - with either 4 or 6 to a room. Good quality bunk-beds and bathrooms.*

*Check-in and out was a little slow, and breakfast wasn't fantastic but for the money it's excellent. In short walking distance of the tram, and all staff are helpful and friendly with the bar open for most of the day.*

### **1/5 Bar staff nightmare**

*The staff were so rude, this Australian man behind the bar was the most rude person I met in Amsterdam, where everyone else is so friendly. He even was horrible too my kids (8 and 6) when they went to order apple juice without me. How does a guy like that get a service job ?*

### **1/5 One of the worst experiences of my life**

*To begin with, the place is really really expensive for what they offer. It felt more like a prison cell rather than a shared room. There were all sorts of shady people in the hostel.*

*We also paid extra for the breakfast, however, it was very minimal with just bread and some ham and cheese, which was really not worth the price that we paid.*

*Everything is done in a cheap way and even the showers are designed to save water, but it only becomes an annoying factor since you end up spending more time in the shower.*

### **5/5 What a way to turn 18**

*We have just come back from the best weekend here. Travelled from the UK to celebrate my son's 18th birthday. The people are great, the staff are awesome, the rooms are clean and own bathroom.*

*Absolutely cannot complain about anything. We will be coming back here that's for sure . The vibe at the bar is amazing and we met some other really cool people. 100 per cent recommend this place ... absolutely faultless.*

### **4/5 Good budget hotel.**

*You get what you pay for. Cheap but top end. As long as you expect bunk beds you'll be fine.*

*Good mattress, duvet and pillow. Secure rooms. Clean well fitted shower rooms. Good location in the center of town. All staff were helpful. Would return.*

### **1/5 Poor service**

*I booked a mixed dormitory bed for 3 nights. I did not feel comfortable staying there. I wanted to check out after 1 night but they wouldn't check me out early since I had made the booking for 3 nights. No refund anything or taking responsibility.*

*I wouldn't recommend this place. The overall vibe was cold, and I'm actually glad I spent the rest of my stay in a much nicer hostel.*

### **1/5 Horrible Hostel, So many other better choices!**

*My hostel experience here was wretched from the moment I walked through their doors. The place was absolutely disgusting, one of the worst I've encountered.*

*Check-in took well over an hour, one staff member for one of the busiest hostels? What a joke, be prepared to waste half your day.*

*Staff were the most wretchedly rude humans to grace this earth. The manager Lisa is off putting and condescending, she's like an old bat school teacher. If you don't like hostels find a new job.*

### **3/5 With friends**

*Simple check-in. Same for breakfast every day, no vegetarian option. Disgusting coffee. Stuffy in the rooms. Clean and modest, but worth it.*

### **5/5 The place and the people**

*Well, people are helpful here and flexible as well since they got a bar with huge space for many people. Rooms are descent, not perfect, but they are alright for travelers.*

*The staff are amazing, people are great. There is a bar with extraordinary low prices compared with the rest of the Amsterdam, I would suggest to raise them up a bit, they really are cheating themselves.*

*I enjoyed every second of it, I might not gonna stay in the hostel again, but I will definitely come back to meet the employees, they are awesome and beautiful inside out, every and all the way.*

## Student Discussion Questions

1. Assuming that you were traveling to Amsterdam - based upon their own description (and ad) and the above customer reviews above - on a scale of 1 (no way) to 5 (definitely), how likely would you be to stay at this hotel?
2. People have mixed reviewed - some loved it, while others hated it - why do you think this would be the case? What factors about the traveler might influence their satisfaction level?
3. Do you think that it is just normal for hotels to get mixed reviews? Building on Q2, why might be the case?
4. Based on some of the negative reviews - but compared to how the hotel is happy to describe itself (its own positioning) - do you think that the hotel needs to take action and make some improvements?
5. These reviews, plus their advertising, plus photos of the hotel and various media stories - all form part of physical evidence. Outline a few reasons why physical evidence is important for a hotel's success?