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Theme Hotels strategy: customers' visit intention and willingness to pay more

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Master's degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management

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ISCTE - University Institute of Lisbon

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Abstract

Theme hotels comprise a growing niche market in the wide hospitality industry. They provide guests with unique experiences by investing substantially in theme decorations and services. In such a competitive business area like the hospitality and tourism one, creativity and innovation toward differentiation are crucial for hotels success.

This study expands the scarce existing literature on European theme hotels with its explorative qualitative analysis of the theming strategy of ten selected hotels located in six different European countries. Moreover, this research focuses quantitively on customers' visit intention to theme hotels. Following the analysis of previous studies and the qualitative findings of this study, a questionnaire was submitted to 156 international travellers to ask them about their willingness to pay more to stay at a theme hotel, their intention to visit it, as well as the importance they would give to theme elements.

Results confirm the importance of theme elements but also of the other servicescape factors, such as location, cleanliness, staff's caring attitude, and staff's responsiveness to guest´s needs, to ensure a certain level of hotel's success. Furthermore, this research concludes that the presence of theme elements does enhance customers willingness to pay a higher price to stay at the hotel, as well as their intention to stay there.

Keywords: theme hotels, themed atmosphere, visit intention, willingness to pay more

JEL Classification system:
M31, L83/L84

Resumo

Os hotéis temáticos constituem um nicho de mercado crescente na vasta indústria hoteleira. A fim de proporcionarem às hóspedes experiências únicas, investem substancialmente em decorações e serviços temáticos. Numa área de negócio tão competitiva como a da hotelaria e turismo, a criatividade e a inovação rumo à diferenciação são cruciais para o sucesso dos hotéis.

O presente estudo extende o conhecimento, ainda escasso, da literatura existente, nomeadamente os hoteis temáticos europeus, pela análise qualitativa exploratória da estratégia temática de dez hotéis selecionados localizados em seis países europeus diferentes. Além disso, esta investigação analiza quantitativamente a intenção de visitar estes hotéis temáticos, bem como em pagar mais e a importância atribuída aos elementos do temáticos do meio ambiente.

Os resultados confirmam a importância dos elementos temáticos, mas também a de outros fatores do ambiente, como localização, limpeza, atitude atenciosa e simpatia dos funcionários e capacidade de resposta dos funcionários às necessidades dos hóspedes para garantir um certo nível de sucesso do hotel. Além disso, esta pesquisa conclui que a presença de elementos temáticos aumenta a predisposição dos clientes em pagar um preço mais elevado para ficar no hotel, bem como a sua intenção de ficar lá.

Palavras-chave: hotéis temáticos, ambiente temático, intenção de visita, disposição para pagar mais

Códigos de classificação JEL:
M31, L83/L84

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1. Introduction

Theme hotels constitute a specific category in the hospitality and tourism field and the previous literature on this topic results to be scarce. Hence, to deepen and expand the existing studies by analysing the theming strategies of European theme hotels would be a useful contribution to research (Köseoglu et al., 2020). A further argument is given by different research conducted in Nigeria and Kenya which shows that a differentiation strategy as it may be the "theming" one for hotels does affect the hotel performance positively (Gorondutse & Hilman, 2018; Njuguna et al., 2019). Moreover, Åstrøm (2020) discusses the main purposes of theming. Firstly, the author pinpoints differentiation referring to "creating a unique identity for a given place" (p. 254). Secondly, the added value which a theme provides to the offered product or service may lead to higher customer willingness to buy, therefore higher sales, as well as to the possibility of charging a higher price. Thirdly, theming enhances guest experience, making them feel more connected to the place.

To create a unique memorable experience for their customers is the goal of theme hotels as well as of other service firms. For that purpose, to understand, analyse, and invest on both service and experience environment from a customer's perspective is key (Kandampully et al., 2023). An engaging experience environment might indeed contribute to enhance customers perceived value. This is achieved by service organizations such as hotels also by actively involving guests in participating in the experience. This concept of value cocreation leads to a higher perceived value whose importance escalated lately. In the last decades indeed the products of service businesses which are in fact experiences have gone through a significant shift since customers seek now more personalised and cocreated experiences rather than focusing on commodities. Therefore, companies that invest on value cocreation tend to outperform their competitors (Roy et al., 2020).

On the other hand, according to Xiao et al. (2013) theme hotels should develop their theme culture but without overestimating it over basic services. In other words, hotel guests appear to give a significant importance to basic services quality regardless the hotel theme and this aspect is relevant since customer satisfaction is a main indicator of hotel performance level and is key for customer loyalty (Rather & Sharma, 2017). However, this input should also boost theme hotels to enhance their theme culture (Xiao et al., 2013). One of this study's aims is to analyse and demonstrate the importance of themed elements in theme hotels despite the findings of previous studies which discuss that essential hotel features are more relevant than themed ones.

Studies have been conducted on theme hotels and hospitality strategic management but most of them involved countries such as the USA, the UK, China and other locations in Asia. Therefore, it would be valuable to enhance studies about strategic management of hospitality firms in other countries (Okumus, 2002; Wassler et al., 2015). Åstrøm (2020) highlights the noticeable lack of literature concerning theme hotels claiming that previous studies regarding the specific category of themed environments within the field of hospitality and tourism are mostly concentrated on theme parks. The gap in theme hotel literature regarding different geographic areas is also addressed by Xiao et al (2013) in their theme hotel research focused on the Chinese industry, in which they mentioned it as a limitation and a useful potential addition for future studies. They also suggested that the influence of themed elements on guest intentions and actions still needed to be investigated as well as the point of view of less experienced customers on the importance of themed elements in theme hotels. The latter factor was pointed out by Sun et al (2021) too, who explained that their research focused on guests who had already stayed at a theme hotel, but future studies should consider customers who have never visited a theme hotel.

Due to all these reasons, this study aims to address the following research questions:

Q1. What are the most important factors to consider for a theme hotel?

Q2. What are the most relevant themed elements in a theme hotel?

Q3. Do themed elements increase customers' intention to visit a hotel?

Q4. Are customers willing to pay more to stay at a theme hotel?

Q5. Do theme hotels represent an attraction themselves?

Given the lack of previous studies about theme hotels in Europe, the objective of this research is to analyse the theming strategies behind European theme hotels, in particular by analysing the relevance of themed elements on customers' intention to visit theme hotels, as well as the most important factors to consider for theme hotels according to online reviews and to the management of a German theme hotel. As a result, this study aims to expand the existing literature on European theme hotels, to give new useful inputs to existing theme hotel managers, and to enhance travellers' awareness of this kind of unique lodging.

In the next chapters the previous literature on the main subjects of this study will be analysed, afterwards a conceptual model which guides this research will be presented. A methodology chapter will follow, which includes the two types of sampling techniques used in this study, the qualitative one and the quantitative one based on non-probability sampling. The operationalization of the variables relevant for this study according to the identified authors will be identified. Consequently, an analysis of the quantitative data will be conducted, and findings

will be discussed. Lastly, this study will end with a chapter including not only conclusions but also limitations, managerial implications, and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

In this first part, the main topics addressed by this study will be examined by analysing the existing literature. Starting from the concepts of customer experience and consumer behaviour intentions, following with a discussion of tourism experience, authenticity, and service- and experiencescape, and concluding this first part with a description of the theme hotel industry and a characterisation of different types of theme hotels.

2.1 Customer experience and consumer behaviour intentions

One of the earliest empirical researchers about theme hotels was Zins (1998) who explained how preferences and expectations of leisure travellers vary from a theme hotel to another. In other words, different types of guests are interested in different types of theme hotels. That may depend on people's lifestyles, personal values, favoured benefits, and vacation styles. Probably one the most valuable findings of Zins' (1998) research was that the match between the theme chosen by a hotel and its target market is definitely a critical and key factor for its success.

A theme hotel provides a unique experience to its customers. Considering a hotel as a product with different features, the guest experience is the whole evaluation of the hotel service comprising several different interactions and phases that customers experience (Baek et al., 2019). Customers experience is strictly connected with customers satisfaction and both these factors play a significant role in the hospitality industry since they foster customer loyalty, favourable word-of-mouth, returning customers, and the entire hotel profitability and financial performance (Åstrøm, 2020; Zhang & Kim, 2022). A high level of satisfaction affects customers' revisit intentions and also their willingness to pay more, which in the tourism industry usually happens in case of particularly valuable products, experiences, and services, and it refers to the maximum amount of money that a customer is willing to spend (Akel & Cakir, 2022). Although the theme hotel atmosphere results to be one of the most relevant factors for customers satisfaction, the price cannot be underestimated since value for money remains a major contributor to value perception (Chang & Lin, 2022).

In 2016, Pavia et al. already asserted that the theme of a hotel definitely embodies a competitive advantage for the business, and it cannot be treated only as one of the different elements of the hotel facilities. On this regard, Chang and Lin (2022) affirm that creating and

maintaining a theme for the hotel has turned into one of the best possible strategies in the hospitality industry to distinguish the hotel from the competitors and to gain a remarkable spot in customers' minds.

Both tangible and intangible attributes should be considered when analysing customers experience in theme hotels. Hotel facilities, room quality, and food and beverage are only a few of the main factors which play a significant role on the overall customers satisfaction. However, the impact of staff service and hotel location on the customers experience is not of less importance (Oliveira et al., 2022; Baquero, 2023). In fact, Sun et al. (2021) suggest that it can be economically convenient for theme hotels to consider intangible factor innovations, for instance regarding the atmosphere instead of more expensive design renovations. The authors also explain how ambient and social cues, which are parts of servicescape, influence each other and how social cues are related to pleasant arousal. The most innovative finding of their study though, was the existence of a relationship between pleasant arousal and place attachment.

The hotel guests' perception on themed elements in Chinese theme hotels was studied by Xiao et al. (2013), who argue that "the choice in overall hotel theme, thematic guest room decoration, thematic F&B experience, thematic services, and thematic exterior design" (p. 147) are the most significant factors among all themed elements. However, the authors conclude that hotel basic aspects like the staff and service quality are perceived by customers as more important than themed features. Therefore, they suggest that themed elements should not be overemphasised and that hotels should be particularly meticulous in developing themed services in order for the theme to actually represent a competitive advantage and to enhance the hotel attractiveness.

Customers' behavioural intentions are strong determinants of customers' actual behaviour, and they represent another relevant factor for the success of a hotel. This topic has been extensively studied in consumer behaviour research and has been increasingly getting particular attention in the hospitality industry. A specific hotel's profitability can be boosted in the long term by customers' favourable behavioural intentions towards that lodging. In fact, those customers' visiting probability and their spreading positive word of mouth will be high and therefore, beneficial for the future of the hotel. Moreover, previous studies affirm that the corporate image has a critical influence on consumers' buying intentions and is determinant for positive consumers' purchase intentions. Considering the hospitality context, corporate image can be described as the overall perception that customers have of a specific hotel, which is determined by what they previously experienced at that hotel or heard and knew about it and its characteristics (Eid et al., 2021).

According to the authors, perceived behavioural control has been studied to be one of the best predictors of customers' intention and to have a positive influence on it in some contexts such as the one of green hotels, which are a type of theme hotel. Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) can be defined as the perceived level of ease or difficulty of performing a behaviour. So, it is shaped by the obstacles and the experiences that customers expect to encounter and have (Verma & Chandra, 2018; Eid et al., 2021).

Some concrete examples of previous studies conducted on theme hotels, customers' behaviour and intentions, and customers satisfaction through online reviews are summarised in Table 1 (see Appendix A).

2.2 Authenticity, servicescape and experiencescape

According to Pine and Gilmore's (2011) theory of experience economy the model of entertainment-based experience used by theme parks and theatres should be the inspiration to be followed by businesses. Moreover, experience is split and categorised into four dimensions by the authors, namely passive participation, active participation, absorption, and immersion. From the analysis of the intersection among these four divisions, a final graph with four categories is created and they are called aesthetics, entertainment, education, and escapism (Soligo & Abarbanel, 2020).

An upward trend in the hospitality industry involves providing theme-based experiences. Pine and Gilmore (2007) argue that this tendency can also be related to two relevant concepts in marketing research which are experience economy and authenticity. The key point is that successful companies "must stage memorable intangible experiences for their customers" and to make it notable they have to create a theme able to capture the attention of the customers. Moreover, guests appear to be more and more interested in living something authentic, meaning that they seek a genuine and real experience (Soligo & Abarbanel, 2020). Authenticity is also a relevant topic among experience economy researchers in the field of tourism. Some studies show indeed how much people care about seeing first-hand the real culture and traditions of a destination and how much this actually represents the reason which pushes them to travel (Hughes, 1995; Johnson, 2007; Lovell & Bull, 2017). Local traditions and culture may also represent a source of competitive advantage for hotel companies to distinguish themselves from their competitors in the market. Specific resources of a region, such as activities, landscapes, heritage, and traditional knowledge are the factors which shape a so-called local culture. After all, tourism has been defined as "the generation, staging, and consumption of experiences through the manipulation of place and the presentation of culture"

(Chen 2022, p. 52). Besides, a broader concept of strategy began to be used in strategic management research, and in that regarding hospitality researchers started approaching it in terms of value creation (Harrington et al., 2014). For example, by analysing environmental factors influencing companies. In the following years, research began focusing also on other external factors, for instance companies' competitiveness and strategic alliances.

The expression "staged authenticity" was suggested by MacCannell (1973) who explained that the authenticity which is performed by locals is often not the original one but rather a kind of reality which is created to match tourists' expectations. The concept of staged authenticity and especially some aspects of it such as the tourists' awareness of these experiences have been investigated in the previous studies. An example of similar research is provided by Chhabra (2012) who found that in fact tourists do perceive an event as authentic even if it takes place far away from the location symbolising the origin of that cultural tradition. Furthermore, authenticity has also been studied from a different perspective which takes into consideration the feeling of nostalgia which leads people to travel to exotic destinations with the wish of rediscovering an idealised past (MacCannell, 1976; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Due to this type of demand, some hotels and resorts chose a theme which consists of the recreation of the past, for example the Caesars Palace in Las Vegas aims to honour the Roman Empire and its triumph (Raento & Flusty, 2006). In this regard, previous studies show that tourists appreciate these replicas' destinations of exotic places or past environments in spite of being aware of their non-authenticity (Feifer, 1985; Wood, 2005; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

A concept which was largely investigated by marketing researchers in the hospitality industry is servicescape. "Service environments, also called servicescapes, relate to the style and appearance of the physical surroundings and other experiential elements encountered by customers at service delivery sites" (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011, p. 255). From a psychological point of view, scholars would like to specify that servicescape is a concept related to a "human-made environment", meaning that it does not regard the whole physical environment but only the part of it which provokes the customer's reaction to a service and consequently to a specific behaviour (Bitner, 1992). Lovelock and Wirtz (2011) explain how time consuming designing the right service environment can be and how much effort, also economically, it requires. However, the complexity of changing a service environment once it is built can also represents a positive factor if considered as an obstacle for competitors to copy or somehow recreate it.
A servicescape includes physical attributes such as ambient conditions, facility cleanliness, spatial layout and functionality, signs and symbols, and artefacts (Bitner, 1992; Xiao et al., 2013). For example, aesthetics, ambient condition, space / function, seating comfort, and

cleanliness are physical servicescape factors in a themed restaurant (Lee et al., 2015), which go together with the customer- and the employee servicescape factors (Hanks & Line, 2018). Customers' attitude and behaviour are indeed influenced by servicescape and an exemplifying situation is when they develop a sense of attachment (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). Elements of servicescape have been studied to have a valuable impact on the customers' perception of the quality of the service, therefore on their satisfaction (Kim & Moon, 2009; Siu et al., 2012; Xiao et al., 2013). Thus, service firms could focus on recruiting specific staff for particular roles and perhaps even train them with some scripted speech and movements, other than paying attention to the employees' uniforms which must obviously be consistent with the servicescape. The term "aesthetic labor" was used by Dennis Nickson to "capture the importance of the physical imagery of service personnel who serve customers directly" (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011, p. 268).

Baquero (2023) confirms that employees are a key factor for service businesses such as hospitality and tourism ones. The author explains how the staff element is a major responsible for customers satisfaction and loyalty by providing a skilful service which makes the guests feel valued. Hence, according to Haile (2021) a major contribution to a competitive advantage for a company in the service industry consists in training the workforce. This will enable employees to improve their skills and acquire new ones, but also enhance their motivation, commitment and productivity. Besides, Chang and Lin (2022) affirm that value perception of customers is at the centre of customer satisfaction which is determinant for solid customer loyalty.

The importance of the staff element is claimed also by Chen et al. (2019) who explain how a remarkable human resource management can make a significant difference in the experience delivered to customers and in the relationship with them. Therefore, employees play a key role in the transition from servicescape to experiencescape which expects them to provide a personalised service diversified depending on the different needs of different customers. Experiencescape contributes to an enhancement of customers' experience, which is achieved when customers' expectations are matched by the experience they were provided, and an accurate environment can be a significant responsible for it (Kandampully et al., 2023). Experiencescapes are described as "functional spaces that allow interactions between diverse stakeholders and capture the entirety of how experiences are produced and consumed in a meaningful whole" (Chen et al., 2019, p. 2). This concept comprises the entire environment in specific places where a personal experience happens in connection with those places and it promotes communications between the company and the customers. When considering

experiencescapes, the experience element is seen as the essential factor of service, but both the service quality and the experience quality are examined. Tourists' destination choices and visitation behaviours may also be influenced by experiencescapes. (Chen et al., 2019).
Kandampully et al. (2023) also recognize the relevance of experiencescape in the service industry and consider it as a unique approach which works by combining firm's resources and expertise to provide a memorable experience for customers. Besides, the authors report Blumenthal and Jenesn' (2019) study results on how experiencescape can improve a customer's immersive experience. Their conclusion is particularly interesting for this research because they affirm that the experience should be themed, other than perceived as safe and characterised by clear boundaries of space and time. "A themed experiencescape can facilitate immersion by adding meaning to the experience, which encourages emotional involvement with the experience by enticing customers to feel interested and willing to increase the level of their aspirations" (Kandampully et al., 2023, p. 10).
The fact that the hotel's ability to provide an environment where customers feel immersed in or actively participative contributes to the creation of memorable experiences was also stated by Pine and Gilmore (1998).

The two approaches of servicescape and experiencescape are undeniably linked to each other and they are both critical factors of success for all service businesses. For that aim, in fact, to focus collectively on both service and experience is key (Kandampully et al., 2023). These concepts and especially some of their components can be critical when it comes to the organisation of a theme hotel, but in the hospitality industry the *theming* goes even beyond that, as explained more in details in the next paragraph regarding theme hotels.

2.3 Theme hotel industry

The global market of theme hotels represents a niche segment of the broad tourism and hotel industry, and it has been estimated to have a value of 13.55 billion US dollars in 2021 which will significantly grow and reach a value of 19.45 billion US dollars by 2030. The world of tourism and hospitality has become quite competitive nowadays and this is one of the reasons why theme hotels' popularity is rising among travellers worldwide. In fact, these particular lodgings offer unique experiences and allow their guests to completely immerse themselves in a peculiar story or theme, which can be anything for example from a famous TV show to a historical era, or a fantasy world (SkyQuest ABIRAW, 2023).

According to the International Theme Hotel Research Institute, the definition of theme hotel is “any lodging property that focuses on a certain culture and is equipped with a unique theme design, construction, and decoration in addition to unique facilities in services" (Wassler et al., 2015, p. 713). In other words, in a theme hotel, as expressed by the word itself, both the tangible and the intangible assets are based on a powerful theme. For this reason, even if all hotels aim to offer the most special experience to their customers, it can be affirmed that the experience offered by a theme hotel is unique and truly memorable for the guests. They will be, not only metaphorically, “temporarily transported to another time and place” (Wassler et al., 2015, p.714) during their stay there. The hotel advertisement could say that they would not be able to experience that in any other place. As previously stated, the theme chosen by the hotel will be greatly present in the lodging and consequently strongly communicated to the customers. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the preferences of customers regarding the desired experience in order to offer them an authentic one (Wassler et al., 2015). As regards authenticity, it has been one of the major critics which theming has received in the last decades. However, the concept of authenticity has recently been reconsidered, being now more flexible and dependent on the context (Åstrøm, 2020).

The beginning of theming may be dated back to the opening of Disneyland in California in 1955. This practice has been considered in a professional way ever since. Moreover, experts recognise theming as one of the most powerful tools available to managers. Theming is a process which is present in several fields, but it may be said that it has a particular relationship with hospitality and tourism since this industry more than any other service industry has the ability to provoke a strong emotional reaction in the customers through the engaging experience created. Experiences indeed can be defined as “mental phenomena that occur in people’s minds and bodies" (Åstrøm, 2020, p. 247) and therefore it is key to provide the most fitting combination of tangible and intangible stimuli which will affect them, as emphasized by the author.

In order for an experience not to be treated as a commodity, Pine and Gilmore (2011) affirm that the act of “THEME-ing” the experience should consist of “harmonising impressions with positive cues, eliminating negative cues, adding in memorabilia, and engaging the five senses” (Åstrøm, 2020, p. 248) where cues can also be little details which communicate implicit or explicit signals. They contribute to improving or worsening the experience and therefore affect customers' memorabilia (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The idea that service has increasingly been commoditised by consumers is indeed at the base of experiential marketing. It decreases customer satisfaction, hence encouraging businesses to provide special and unforgettable

experiences (Wassler et al., 2015). The technique of theming, indeed, can be properly used to move the hotel's offer from services to experiences by creating an environment with unique shape and design. In this way, the hotel will distinguish itself from competitors and guests will have a memorable time (Ishak et al., 2017; Åstrøm, 2020).

Competitiveness is a complex concept, and it can be analysed at different market levels but "at the firm level, it can refer to the ability of the firm to compete for market share and customers in a competitive business environment or market segment" (Kim et al., 2022, p. 818). The hospitality industry is characterised by a high level of competition; thus, hotels are encouraged to seek a competitive advantage and the unique differentiation given by a theme is one way to achieve it (Al-shami et al., 2022). Åstrøm (2020) also affirms that businesses should focus on creating special experiences for their customers to engage them in a memorable way and as a result, differentiate their service from that of their competitors. Implementations of innovations and new technologies are other approaches enforced by hotels to follow trends and remain updated on the current customers' expectations. Theme hotels may derive from the market segmentation due to the willingness to specialise in a distinct type of service to offer (Pavia et al., 2016). The uniqueness of the provided experience is only one of the drivers for the theme hotels market development. In fact, as the report on Global Theme Hotel Market affirms, other relevant factors are the growth of the global middle class, which seeks new travel adventures and represents a proper target for theme hotels, and new technologies which give the opportunity to these hotels to integrate in their offer also new and sophisticated experiences such as virtual reality attractions. Nevertheless, theme hotels also face challenges such as a limited target market due to their belonging to a niche segment, high investment costs which may discourage smaller businesses to enter the market and compete with bigger players, and the dependence on external factors like brand trends which may result in an obstacle for long term predictions (SkyQuest ABIRAW, 2023).

Another aspect of specialised hotels which include theme hotels is their attractiveness as a tourist attraction per se. This happens when visitors decide to stay at a specific hotel to experience its themed characteristics, such as themed services and themed interior decorations, as main reason of their trip instead of choosing a hotel because it is located in the area they are interested to see. An advantage for theme hotels which represent a tourist attraction is the fact that there is an increasing tendency towards short vacation, only a few days long, and in these cases people are more interested in choosing the above mentioned type of hotels which can offer them typical aspects of the destination in a single place without them needing more time to visit several attractions around (Pavia et al., 2016).

As for the whole hospitality industry, the key for hoteliers is to stay updated and never stop being innovative and creative. This is especially the case for the global theme hotel market which is a dynamic and competitive world where a relatively small number of major members dominate. However, the quantity of small independent operators entering the market is increasing, as well as the amount of theme hotel categories since new niche markets are being created, for instance music, art-, and wellness-themed hotels (SkyQuest ABIRAW, 2023).

The assortment of themes among which a hotel can choose may be huge. Thus, it is essential to deeply analyse the characteristics of the external environment and especially consumers' preferences before establishing a theme hotel. Moreover, a key concept that must be taken into account is that theming does not involve only tangible assets. In fact, they are the easiest to create but also to copy. Intangible assets can make the difference in theming. Wassler et al (2015) mention the case of a chess-themed hotel in China which had a marvellous interior design but did not manage to complete the theming arrangement with suitable employees, thus having waitresses who did not know how to play chess and disappointed guests who had chosen that hotel due to their interest in the game. It appears to be quite challenging to find a unique classification of theme hotels. In fact, they have been categorised in several different ways and one of the reasons may be the broadness of their definition. Prinz (2009) kept a broad perspective classifying 50 remarkable theme hotels around the world into seven categories, namely countryside, designed spaces, historical ties, luxury residences, mountain pastime, urban hideouts, and wellness islands. Similarly, Zins (1998) divided 225 hotels in Austria into five types which are family, children, tennis, golf, and slim and beauty. On the other hand, Liu (2005) and Peng (2008) adopted a more meticulous approach suggesting in the first place only two groups of theme hotels: cultural and non-cultural. Subdividing then the non-cultural themes into different categories, mostly natural resource based, such as ocean-, desert-, and animal-themed hotels and the cultural ones into classes based on different times in history, on geographical areas like countries, on different kinds of music, sport, cartoons, or even popular trends like high-tech or the Hello Kitty theme hotels (Liu, 2005; Peng, 2008; Xiao, 2012). By considering the different theme hotels market geographically, North America is one of the largest and most popular one, and it is mostly known for its themes based on popular media franchises such as Harry Potter and Star Wars. The main destinations of that market are California, Orlando, and Las Vegas. Although the European theme hotel market is not as large, it is still considered one of the major markets of this niche and highlighted as fastest. One of the main differences between the North American and the European theme hotel markets is that themes in Europe are mostly based on culture, history, and architecture, rather than on

multimedia franchises. Besides for Disneyland Paris and Europa-Park in Germany, indeed, it is not rare to find several smaller independent theme hotels housed in historical buildings or castles (SkyQuest ABIRAW, 2023).

3. Conceptual Model

A few different concepts were explored in the literature review, but the main ones which define the framework of this research regard the customer experience offered by theme hotels, the main themed and non-themed elements which contributed to that, and the customer behaviour in terms of visiting intention.

Two control variables were considered in the formulation of the first two hypothesis (H1, H2), namely the age and the past behaviour which indicates the number of times that travellers have previously stayed at a theme hotel.

Hypothesis H3a and H3b were delineated in the light of the following research on theme hotels in China. Xiao et al. (2013) analysed hotel guests' perception on themed elements and concluded that non-themed basic services in a theme hotel are perceived as more important than the themed ones and play a critical role in customers' satisfaction. However, the authors state that this finding should still encourage theme hotels to improve their theme culture with decorations and several different elements, but they show how it is crucial for these unique lodgings to invest on the quality of their basic hotel services regardless their theme.

In their research Yarimoglu and Gunay (2020) studied the effect of visit intentions on customers' willingness to pay more to stay at a theme hotel and confirmed that the relationship exists, visit intention does affect customers' willingness to pay more. According to their findings, this is an important effect since it is the second biggest one in the research model, and it is supported by previous studies such as Han et al. (2010) and Verma and Chandra (2018). Thus, hypothesis H4a and H4b were formulated.

Han et al. (2010) were among the first ones to examine the effect of perceived behavioural control on customers' visit intention in the context of a particular theme hotel category, namely green hotels. Their findings affirm that customers' intention to stay at green hotels is positively affected by perceived behavioural control. Similar research was conducted by Yarimoglu and Gunay (2020) with Turkish customers. Among the objectives of their study there was the effect of perceived behavioural control on visit intention, but that relationship did not result as significant, conversely to other studies' findings. Customers perceived behavioural control has also been analysed in recent studies by Verma and Chandra (2018) and Eid et al. (2021) and it appears to be a positive influence on customers' intention to visit green hotels,

which are a type of theme hotels. Following these conclusions, hypothesis H5a and H5b of this study were defined.

Observing the aforementioned previous literature, this study focuses on the following hypothesis:

H1. Customer's age explains their visit intention.

H2. Customer's past behaviour explains their intention to stay at the hotel.

H3a. Themed atmospheric cues enhance customers intention to stay at the hotel.

H3b. Themed atmospheric cues enhance customers willingness to pay a higher price to stay at the hotel.

H4a. The customers willingness to pay a higher price explains their visit intention.

H4b. The customers willingness to pay a higher price mediates the relationship between themed atmospheric cues and customers 'visit intention.

H5a. The perceived behavioural control explains customer's visit intention.

H5b. The perceived behavioural control moderates the relationship between themed atmospheric cues and customers 'visit intention.

Research framework:

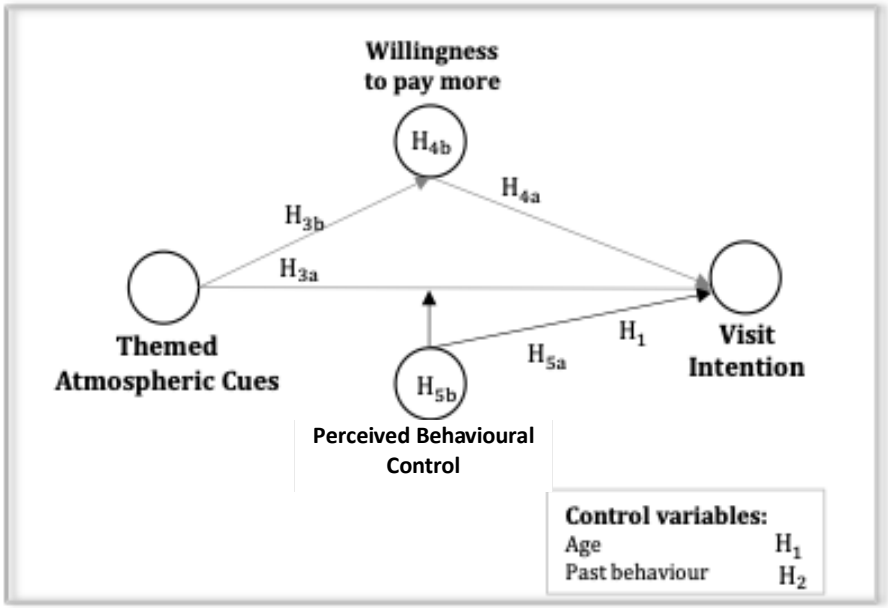

Figure 1: The conceptual model.

4. Methodology

In this chapter the hybrid methodology of this study will be presented. This research followed a qualitative method through an interview to a theme hotel's e-commerce manager and an analysis of online reviews, and a quantitative method through the elaboration of an online survey to international travellers and theme hotels' customers. The answers to the interview were discussed and compared with the data obtained by the reviews' analysis and the results of the qualitative part of this research contributed to the creation of the quantitative questionnaire.

4.1 Qualitative Study

Study objective: The qualitative study consists of two parts. The analysis of online reviews of the selected European theme hotels comprises the first part of this study whose aim was to examine the themed and non-themed elements of those lodgings and how they were valued by customers. For the second part of this qualitative study an interview to the e-commerce manager of a theme hotel in Germany was conducted with the objective of analysing their theming strategy and obtaining valuable insights on customers' behaviour and experience in a theme accommodation from the hotel point of view.

Sample: This study considered ten theme hotels in Europe for the analysis of online reviews. The selected lodgings are located in 6 different countries which are Belgium, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Ireland (Please refer to Appendix B for a more detailed hotels' description). The wide geographical area covered by these hotels allows this research to be more representative of the European reality of theme hotels. Moreover, one interview was conducted with the e-commerce manager of one of the aforementioned theme hotels, namely the V8 Hotel in Stuttgart, in Germany.

4.1.1 Data collection

The two parts of this qualitative study include both primary and secondary data.

The 50 most relevant guests' online reviews on Booking.com and on TripAdvisor.com for the ten above-mentioned theme hotels were examined in the first part of this qualitative study. One hotel was excluded from the analysis of reviews on Booking.com due to its not being present on the platform. In some cases, less online reviews could be considered because of the limited number of existing reviews.

Although it would have been advantageous to perform a face-to-face interview due to the possibility to also observe the themed environment closely, a semi-structured interview with

the e-commerce manager of V8 Hotel was conducted remotely via online call due to geographic constraints and financial costs. The interview was conducted in English since both the interviewer and the interviewee felt confident enough in that language, so no translation was needed, but only a transcription (see Appendix C for the complete interview transcription).

4.1.2 Data Analysis

4.1.2.1 Online Reviews

An analysis of the guests' reviews for the selected theme hotels was conducted by taking into consideration data from Booking.com (data retrieved in May 2023) and from Tripadvisor.com (data retrieved in August 2023), which were the most visited travel and tourism website worldwide in June 2023 with around 614 million and 189 million visits respectively (Statista, 2023). Nine over the ten selected theme hotels are active on booking.com, the exception is "La Balade des Gnomes" in Heyd Belgium, while all of them are present on TripAdvisor.com.

On Booking.com, the evaluation criteria include Staff, Facilities, Cleanliness, Comfort, Value for Money, Location, and Free Wi-Fi. An average score for each one of these criteria is provided in addition to all the individual reviews from customers, and the rating scale used throughout the whole platform is from 1 to 10. Differently, on the other above-mentioned popular website, the rating scale is from 1 to 5 and the analysed categories are only four: Location, Cleanliness, Service, and Value.

Starting the analysis on Booking.com, it is noticeable that the main and only factor which all these nine hotels have in common is "value for money" as worst average score, despite it always being equal or above 7, except for the "Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort'" in Saariselkä (6.8). This aspect also appears in several reviews, where travellers mention that due to the high price paid for the room their expectations were higher than what they experienced. In spite of that, it is noteworthy how all the selected hotels are generally positively valued on Booking.com, all having an average rate between 7.9 and 9.8.

The most appreciated factors by hotel guests appear to be Staff, Location, Comfort, Cleanliness, and Free Wifi. By examining these elements among the most relevant reviews on the website, it is clear how hotel employees play a significant role in customers' experience. However, the evaluation on the staff does not seem to be related to how much employees are part of the theme, but rather to their friendliness, politeness, helpfulness, and knowledge. Continuing to the second most relevant aspect, it is curious how location was greatly rated both in hotels which are located in the middle of nowhere only surrounded by nature and in hotels which attract guests because of their unique architecture but that are based in a city centre full

of shopping and dining venues. This is also the case in Tripadvisor.com's reviews and it evidently demonstrates that each one of these different theme hotels offers a very distinct experience to its guests, but the high satisfaction of customers is a proof of these hotels' ability of attracting the right type of clients and engaging them in a successful way that meets their expectations. The peculiarity of each theme hotel affects the kind of wishes the customers have in regard to the surroundings services. For instance, for an "arctic" hotel in the north of Europe it may be mostly important to offer snow activities, guided tour, and hikes, while for a "music" hotel in a European capital it may be more relevant to be near a stadium and well connected with public transportation to the city centre. For what concerns cleanliness, this was not only rated as one of the most relevant factors, but it was also mentioned very often in the reviews of both websites. Regardless the theme, architecture, and design of the room, guests clearly value a clean environment and do not hesitate to point out any dust or dirtiness as complaints in their final comments.

Lastly, comfort and free Wi-Fi have received high scores in the customers evaluations, but more specifically they were particularly cherished in the Northern Europe theme hotels which seem to be located in relatively remote areas. Geography in these cases may play a relevant role in influencing guests to appreciate being able to get internet connection. In addition, a hotel can decide to clearly highlight this service by using a WhatsApp group with guests to notify them immediately when northern lights are visible from the hotel, as in the case of the Arctic Treehouse Hotel whose rooms windows are wide and facing the northern lights. By analysing customers reviews, it can also be noticed how comfort is often considered as synonym of cosiness and niceness regarding the room, and good hospitality with qualities like kindness and helpfulness regarding the staff.

The number of reviews for V8 Hotel, Nhow Hotel, Arctic Treehouse Hotel, and Vliegtuig Hotel is higher on Booking.com but it is the opposite for the other five hotels, without considering La Balade des Gnomes which could only be examined on Tripadvisor.com.

When comparing Booking.com online reviews for the selected hotels with the data extracted from Tripadvisor.com, it is valuable to notice consistent results. Similarly, to what discussed in the first part of the analysis, on the second most visited travel and tourism website worldwide Value presents the worst score for all the selected themed lodgings except Vliegtuig Hotel. The Location of this unique airplane hotel in Teuge is indeed the lowest rated aspect of this Dutch accommodation, even though the score is 4.4 which is quite high and confirms the great appreciation of guests who describe this theme hotel as a luxurious experience. Vliegtuig Hotel and Dromoland Castle are the only two out of these ten lodgings with a general rate of 5

out of 5 on Tripadvisor.com, and besides their highest rated characteristic being Cleanliness (4.9), several other insights can be identified from the customers reviews. Vliegtuig Hotel offers a unique opportunity of an exclusive experience in a whole airplane which includes a jacuzzi, a sauna, a deluxe breakfast, a comfortable bedroom, and the possibility to explore the cockpit and also sit on a balcony with a view over Teuge airport, which is still in use for helicopters and skydiving. Similarly, in Dromoland Castle guests feel like in a fairy tale, they recognised an impressive attention to details throughout the whole property and remarkable availability and care by the staff. According to customers' comments, they really feel like royals during their stay at this Irish castle and they enjoy the wide variety of amenities and possible activities.

Lastly, with its 7.9 score on Booking.com and its 4.0 score on Tripadvisor.com, the Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort which can also be identified as the igloo resort results to be the worst in the selection considered for this study. Its glass igloos and the offered hikes and activities such as tours with husky and reindeers are still not enough to create the memorable experience customers expect when booking there for the resort's price. Most of the complaints concern poor services and lack of clear information about them, other than a very basic offer of food, high prices, and inefficient tours.

In conclusion, according to guests' online reviews on the two most popular travel websites, nine out of the ten selected European theme hotels appear to be very successful and a major factor which allows this to happen is the ability to attract the right target of customers. In fact, one of the keys for the success of a hotel is to match and possibly exceed customers' expectations. Although online reviews show that theme hotel guests still substantially value non-themed elements such as cleanliness, they also reveal that that hotel theme and all its themed elements are so much valued that customers are willing to stay at that unique lodging and also to return there despite the higher price.

4.1.2.2 Interview

The V8 Hotel in Stuttgart is one of the hotels for this research and it has been included in the previous analysis of online reviews. In particular it has a score of 8.6 out of 10 on Booking.com and 4.5 out of 5 on Tripadvisor.com, and in the reviews, guests highlight a remarkable attention to details, a very nice staff, and the cars exhibition as well as the strategic location to visit Mercedes and Porsche museums.

A remote interview was conducted with the e-commerce manager of V8 Hotel, Mrs Angela Malmsheimer, to try to investigate their theming strategy and how it contributes to the success of the business.

In general, the outcome of the interview analysis confirms the findings extracted from the online reviews. The V8 Hotel stakeholder indeed points out the importance of both themed and non-themed elements for the hotel success and explains what elements they consider as their main advantages. The location is definitely on top of that list since it is a key factor for this themed lodging to be able to attract both leisure and business travellers. The proximity to both famous car museums and good train and public transportation connections drives both tourists and businesspeople to prefer this accommodation for their trips. An interesting fact is that the usual stay is quite short, it is not surprising for the hotel to have guests staying only one or two nights, and this is not considered as a negative thing, but a characteristic given the location and the kind of hotel. The interview outcome also supports the relevance of the personnel on customers satisfaction. They identified that the staff responsiveness, attention to details and care about each individual guest are highly appreciated. The interviewee indeed admitted that V8 Hotel invests a lot on intangible elements like trainings for its employees, as well as their high-quality work clothes, and some digital innovations to improve work efficiency. Besides, the hotel also spends a lot on tangible elements like decorations and specific furniture. The overall effort is evidently recognised by guests as it leads to a great rating for the aspect "attention to details".

Furthermore, the e-commerce manager of V8 Hotel explained how they are able to attract not only both leisure and business travellers, but also different segments of customers, meaning that families, solo travellers, couples, etc stay at this unusual hotel. Another interesting insight is that the V8 Hotel affirms that they do not have direct competitors and that they just compare themselves with other hotels in their area. Lastly, they assert that most of the reservations they receive are made via direct inquiries such as emails or directly on their website, but without considering the direct bookings, most of the others are definitely made through the platform Booking.com.

In conclusion, the interview answers result to be in line with the data obtained by the online reviews analysis and in addition they disclosed how this theme hotel is successful. As a matter of fact, the only obstacle which was mentioned is that the demand for themed rooms is very high and therefore sometimes at the V8 Hotel they feel like they are still too short on themed rooms., even though they have 26 themed rooms. However, the disadvantages and negative aspects topic has not been addressed deeply in this interview, so this is a limitation and a suggestion for future studies.

4.2 Quantitative Study

Online surveys present numerous advantages such as a low implementation cost, the possibility to reach a wide range of people relatively easily, the fact that they allow anonymity, and the chance of personalizing questions' design and of setting mandatory complete responses. On the other hand, these data-gathering tools also have some disadvantages, for example the reliability of their results might be questionable due to the possibility of respondents to falsify information. Moreover, a limitation of online surveys is the difficulty to reach certain categories of people who do not have access to smartphones or other devices with internet (Evans & Mathur, 2018).

This questionnaire was designed applying all the information gathered from previous literature as well as from the qualitative data of this research. It was created on Google Form and all the questions were in English since the target respondents were travellers with several different nationalities and this research is being developed in English. A pre-test was conducted with five people, all of them being fluent in English, to test the response time and identify potential issues in the accuracy and clarity of the questions.

Study objective: The questionnaire aims to analyse travellers' decision making towards theme hotels and contributes to their awareness on this kind of unique lodging.

Questionnaire design: In order to achieve the proposed objective, the questionnaire was divided into five sections: Themed atmospheric cues importance, Perceived Behavioural Control, Perceived Intention to stay at a theme hotel (Visit intention), Willingness to pay a higher price, and sociodemographic information (Please refer to Appendix D for the complete script of the questionnaire). The questionnaire was designed containing close-ended questions that respondents had to answer by compulsorily choosing one and only one response for each question.

The questionnaire was submitted during the month of July 2023 and the responses were treated and analysed with the software SPSS and SmartPLS to estimate the proposed model; a more in detail explanation of it is provided in the following chapter of quantitative data analysis.

5. Quantitative Data Analysis

5.1 Sample characterisation

Figure 2 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample which is made up of 156 participants. The majority of respondents are female (67.9%) and the age group which is most represented is between 18 and 25 years old (41.9%). The oldest age group which includes 55-year-olds and above is the least represented (9.0%). Moreover, most of the surveyed people have a bachelor's degree (43.6%) or even a master's degree (38.5%), and just a 0.6% hold the lowest level of education. Lastly, the majority of participants are Italian (68.6%) and almost half of the sample has never stayed at a theme hotel (49.4%) which shows that this sample is biased and most probably will interfere with the conclusions.

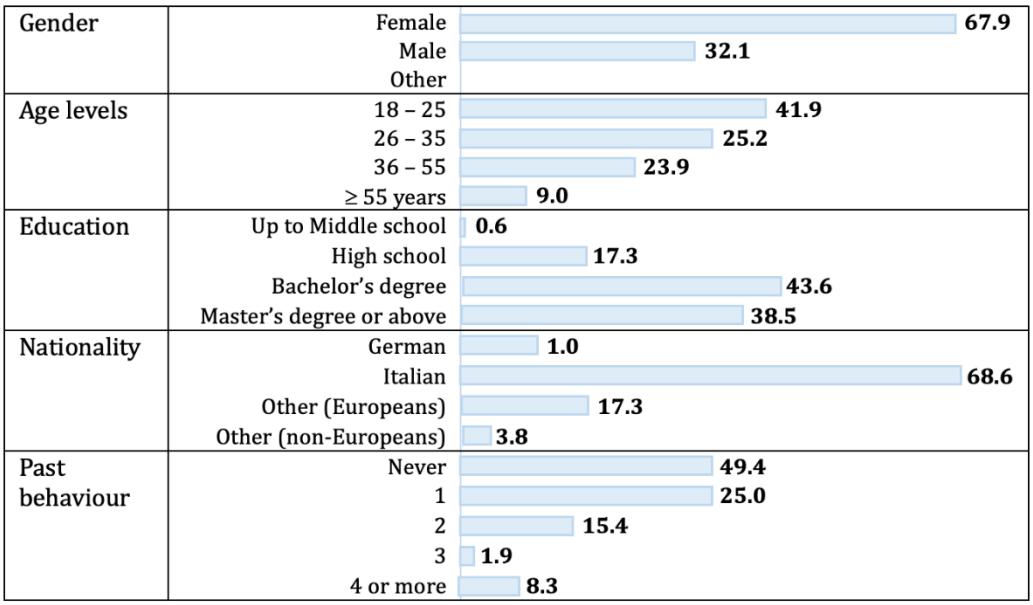

Figure 2: Sociodemographic profile of the participants (%)

Regarding the importance given to non-themed atmospheric elements, participants attribute, on average, a higher level of importance to the cleanliness of the rooms, and to the staff's genuine and caring attitude (Figure 3).

Regarding the mean importance level given to themed-atmospheric cues, participants give on average higher level of importance to the thematic design in public areas, thematic exterior, and thematic room decoration (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Mean level of importance of the non-themed elements

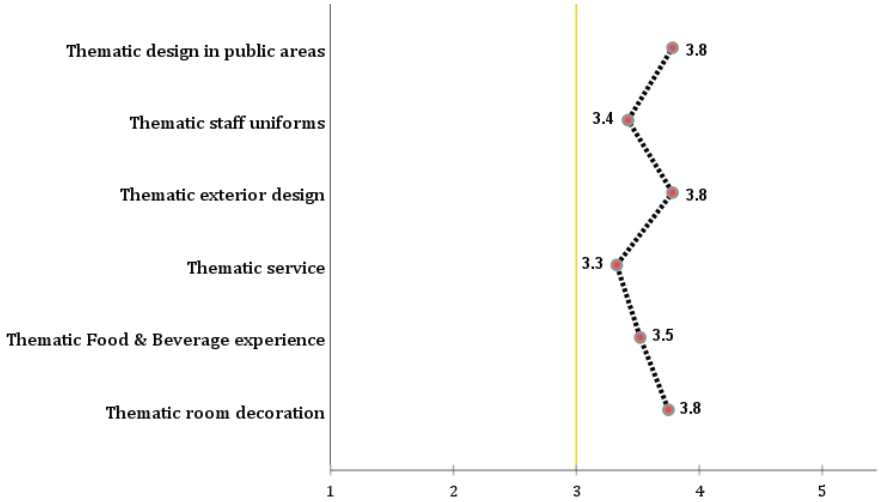

Figure 4: Mean level of importance of the themed elements.

Regarding the mean level of importance of thematic atmospheric elements and the mean level of importance of non-thematic elements, it can be said that these two variables are linearly and moderately correlated in the sample and this relationship is significant in the population (R-Pearson=0.632; Sig<0.001).

5.2 Reliability of the constructs

In order to know the consistency among the items of each construct, the coefficients of Cronbach's Alpha were computed (Table 2). There are two items concerned with the construct perceived behavioural control that will decrease the value of the reliability of this construct if not omitted. With the omission of these two items, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is between 0.62 and 0.7. Because this study is exploratory, the corresponding for the construct behavioural

control is acceptable. The table also shows that the other items are reliable with the other constructs.

Constructs	Items	Cronbach's alpha coefficients
Themed Atmospheric Cue	TAC1 (p1.1) TAC2 (p1.2) TAC3 (p1.3) TAC4 (p1.4) TAC5 (p1.5) TAC6 (p1.6) TAC7 (p1.7) TAC8 (p1.8)	0.906
Behavioural control	BC1 (p2.1)* BC2 (p2.2) BC3 (p2.3) BC4 (p2.4)*	0.622
Visit intention	VI1 (p3.1) VI2 (p3.2) VI3 (p3.3)	0.771
Willingness to pay more	WTPM1 (p4.1) WTPM2 (p4.2) WTPM3 (p4.3)	0.822

Note: (*) means omitted items from the estimations.

Table 2. The values for the Cronbach's coefficients

5.3 Identification of the dummy variables related to past behaviour

The variable 'previous stays in a theme hotel' or past behaviour has been treated as a dummy variable. Thus, it was recoded into two categories: 'stayed at least one time' and 'never stayed at a theme hotel'. In this case the category used as reference level is the one regarding participants that 'never stayed at a theme hotel' that is, therefore, set to be equal to 0.

5.4 Moderator Variable

The variable 'perceived behavioural control' is a moderator if it changes the strength of the relationship between the independent variable 'themed atmospheric cues' and the dependent variable 'visit intention'. There is a moderating effect or an interaction if the moderating variable (perceived behavioural control) exerts a significant effect on the relationship between the independent variable (themed atmospheric cues) and the dependent variable (visit intention).

5.5 Mediator Variable

The variable 'willingness to pay more' is a mediator variable when the independent variable 'themed atmospheric cues' significantly explains the mediator, and, at the same time, the mediator significantly explains the dependent variable 'visit intention'.

When the direct effect of 'themed atmospheric cues' on 'visit intention' is not significant but the total effect is significant, the mediation is designated by full mediation; when the direct effect of 'themed atmospheric cues' on 'visit intention' is significant, the mediation is called partial mediation. That is, full mediation occurs when the independent variable no longer affects the dependent variable in the presence of the mediator. Partial mediation is the case when the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is reduced in absolute size but is still significant when the mediator is introduced in the estimation.

The result of combining these models is visualized in the next figure.

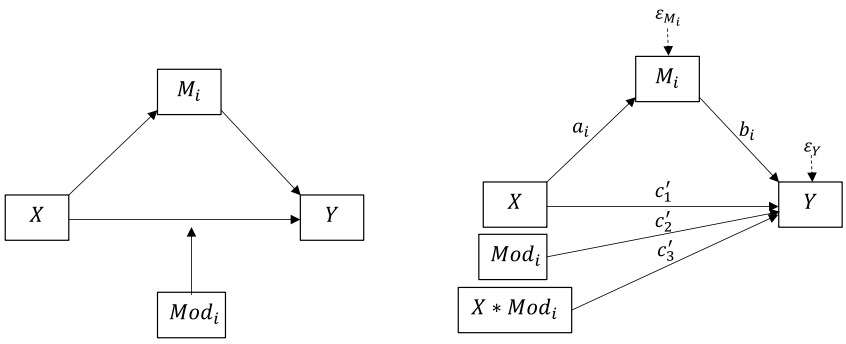

Figure 5: The combined model

Where (1) the indirect effect of X (themed atmospheric cues) on Y (visit intention) through the mediator (willingness to pay more) is equal to $a_i b_i$; (2) the direct effect of X (themed atmospheric cues) on Y (visit intention) is equal to c_1'; and (3) the interaction effect, $X * Mod_i$ (themed atmospheric cues * perceived behavioural control), is equal to c_3'.

The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) bootstrapping technique is used to estimate the model from the software SmartPLS, version 4 (Ringle et al., 2015). The PLS is an adequate approach to be used in the presence of a causal relationship. The PLS-SEM algorithm uses a maximum number of iterations equal to 3000 and the stop criterion is set at 10^{-7}; to take a decision about the significance of the estimates, 5000 samples are randomly generated, and the level of significance is equal to 0.05.

5.6 Estimations

There is not a multicollinearity problem once all values for the variance inflation factor (VIF) are below the threshold value of 3, meaning that the independent variables are not strongly correlated among them. Therefore, the significance of the estimated coefficients associated with each independent variable is accurate and the interpretation of each estimated coefficient allow to assume that, keeping all other variable constant, for a unit change of the independent variable, it is expected that dependent variable will increase/decrease in average. Table 3 identifies the estimated coefficients.

Dependent variables	Independent variables	Direct effects	P values	Total effects	P values
Willingness to pay a higher price	Themed atmospheric cues	0.178	0.033	0.178	0.033
Visit intention	Themed atmospheric cues	0.162	0.060	0.190	0.021
	Willingness to pay a higher price	0.155	0.091	0.155	0.091
	Age	-0.036	0.598	-0.036	0.598
	Past behaviour	0.059	0.711	0.059	0.711
	Perceived behavioural control	0.032	0.719	0.032	0.719
	Perceived behavioural control × Themed atmospheric cues	-0.138	0.232	-0.138	0.232
	Perceived behavioural control × Willingness to pay a higher price	0.158	0.053	0.158	0.053

Table 3. Estimated coefficients

Several conclusions can be made:

1. The willingness to pay a higher price can be a mediator if the level of significance is set to be equal to 0.1. In that case, the independent variable 'themed atmospheric cues' significantly explains the customer' visit intention $\left(\hat{\beta}_{\text{TotalEffect}} = 0.190;\ \text{Sig} = 0.021\right)$; the themed atmospheric cues significantly explain the 'willingness to pay a higher price' $\left(\hat{\beta} = 0.178; \text{Sig} = 0.033\right)$; and the 'willingness to pay a higher price' significantly explains the visit intention $\left(\hat{\beta} = 0.155; \text{Sig} = 0.091\right)$. Thus, hypotheses H3a, H3b, H4a, and H4b are validated.
2. The perceived behavioural control can be a moderator since its interaction effect on the relationship between willingness to pay a higher price and the visit intention if the value of the level of significance belongs to the interval (0.053; 0.10). In that case, the estimated interaction effect increases that relationship $\left(\hat{\beta} = 0.158; \text{Sig} = 0.053\right)$. In sum, H5a is not supported but H5b is.

3. Age and past behaviour cannot be controlling variables since they do not significantly explain the visit intention ($\mathrm{Sig's} > 0.05$). Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 are not supported.

The explanatory power of the estimated model is revealed in Table 4. It can be said that 25.1% of the variations in visit intention is explained by the model, after adjusting R^2 for the sample size and the number of independent variables. The value of R^2 equal to 0.285 is considered weak. This result suggests that there are more independent variables that explain the visit intention besides those that were included.

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Visit intention	0.285	0.251
Willingness to pay more	0.032	0.025

Table 4. R^2 and R^2 adjusted

5.7 Hypotheses' validation and results' discussion

The validation of the hypotheses is summarized in Table 5.

Hypotheses	Validation
H1. Customer's age explains their visit intention.	**Not validated**
H2. Customer's past behaviour explains their visit intention.	**Not validated**
H3a. Themed atmospheric cues enhance customers' willingness to pay a higher price to stay at the hotel.	**Validated**
H3b. Themed atmospheric cues enhance customers' intention to stay at the hotel.	**Validated**
H4a. The customers' willingness to pay a higher price explains their visit intention.	**Partially Validated** (if $0.091 \leq \alpha \leq 0.10$)
H4b. The customers' willingness to pay a higher price mediates the relationship between themed atmospheric cues and customers' visit intention.	**Partially Validated** (if $0.091 \leq \alpha \leq 0.10$)
H5a. The perceived behavioural control explains customer's visit intention.	**Not validated**
H5b. The perceived behavioural control moderates the relationship between themed atmospheric cues and customer's visit intention.	**Partially Validated** (if $0.053 \leq \alpha \leq 0.10$)

Table 5. Hypotheses' validation

Results show that customers' age and past behaviour in terms of number of previous stays at theme hotels do not explain their intention to visit themed lodgings. However, on a more positive note, this study shows that themed atmospheric cues, presented by Xiao et al. (2013), do have a positive influence on customers' intention to stay at theme hotels (H3b), by being able to enhance it. In addition, the importance of themed elements is proved by the validation of hypothesis H3a which discloses how they also increase customers' willingness to pay a higher price to stay at these specific hotels. Customers' willingness to pay a higher price

was analysed by Yarimoglu and Gunay (2020) who found the existence of its relationship with visit intention. The authors stated that visit intention positively influences customers' willingness to pay more, while this research focused on the reversed relationship and was able to partially validate it. Hence, a partial validation of the willingness to pay a higher price to explain visit intention and to mediate between themed elements and visit intention can be concluded (H4a, H4b). This research was not able to validate hypothesis H5a and this is in line with Yarimoglu and Gunay's (2020) study which did not find a significant relation between perceived behavioural control and visit intention, contrarily to other studies such as Han et al. (2010), Verma and Chandra (2018), and Eid et al. (2021). Lastly, the role of moderator for perceived behavioural control on the relationship between themed atmospheric cues and customers' visit intention was partially validated (H5b).

6. Discussion, Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

6.1 Discussion and Conclusions

The hospitality world is wide and include several categories of different services. Even when trying to narrow it down by considering only hotels and excluding other businesses such as restaurants, cruises, casinos, and other kind of events, the choice remains extremely vast. Among the numerous types of lodgings, theme hotels were the ones selected and examined in this research. When it comes to themed concept services and places, the mind easily goes to some of the most famous theme parks like Disneyland, which is a themed amusement park that also provides themed accommodations. In fact, as stated by Åstrøm (2020) most of the previous studies on themed businesses focused on theme parks. This study instead is focused on minor and independent theme hotels located in Europe and investigated their theming strategies considering the importance of themed and non-themed elements as focal points. Furthermore, this hybrid quantitative and qualitative research aimed to examine the point of view of travellers and hotel guests on these unique lodgings, and more specifically their willingness to pay more to stay there. Following the suggestion of previous studies such as the ones of Xiao et al (2013) and Sun et al (2021) which considered for their sample customers who had stayed one or more times in a theme hotel, the quantitative analysis of this research consisted of a questionnaire which was responded by several travellers with little to none experience on theme hotels.

As a result, this research proves how themed elements such as staff uniforms and special services in a theme hotel are highly recognised by hotel guests as they demonstrate extra attention to detail by the business. However, in line with what Xiao et al (2013) affirmed, they need to be combined with positive non-themed elements such as cleanliness and staff's genuine and caring attitude (see Figure 3) in order for the hotel to receive a positive evaluation. Thus, it cannot be stated that themed elements are more important than the basic non-themed elements. On top of that, the strategic location of the theme hotel also appears to be an essential factor in the customer experience, both for it to be relatively easily reachable at the arrival and for the possible activities for the customers in the surroundings. All these elements were highlighted in the qualitative part of this study.

The element of the price was also discussed and studied in this research. While the qualitative part of the analysis evidently displayed how the price of these hotels represents in most of the cases one of the worst rated factors, despite it still showing quite a high score; the quantitative data analysis shows that the presence of themed elements enhances customers willingness to pay a higher price to stay at the hotel, other than enhancing customers intention

to stay there. The possibility for a theme hotel to charge the customers a higher price thanks to its uniqueness representing an added value has also been expressed by Åstrøm (2020). In addition, this research was able to partially validate that customers willingness to pay a higher price explains their visit intention to a theme hotel and also plays a role as a mediator between hotel themed elements and the above-mentioned visit intention.

Both the qualitative and the quantitative part of this research demonstrated the importance of themed elements for a unique customer experience which leads to the different above-mentioned advantages. This result is in line with the argument of Kandampully et al. (2023) who affirmed that investing in both service and experience environment is key for theme hotels to be able to provide a memorable experience different from the competitors' ones. Servicescape, with its physical environment elements that can cause a customer's reaction, as well as experiencescape elements, which create a connection between the hotel and the guests, are essential for an immersive customer experience which enhances customers' interest and by matching their expectations it can also influence visit intention, as asserted by Chen et al. (2019). Examples of such relevant elements are the themed design in the hotel lobby, the attention to details in the guest rooms decorations, and the employees properly trained to be friendly and at the same time to match the theme with uniforms, knowledge, and behaviour.

6.2 Limitations

As the majority of the studies, this one also presents some limitations such as the small sample size, due to lack of time and participants availability, which may have affected some conclusions, such as some hypotheses which could not be validated. Besides, by relying on responses to an online survey, this research is exposed to the risk of biased results due to the possibility of respondents to falsify information, and to the disadvantage of not being able to reach those people who do not have access to internet.

Moreover, it has not been possible to interview stakeholders from all the desired different European theme hotels since they were not open to cooperate for this research, their perspectives would have definitely been an interesting contribution to this study. Only one e-commerce manager of a hotel was interviewed, and this limitation is expanded by the fact that this analysis did not inquire customers and managers of the same hotel, but only one hotel's manager and general travellers. Language can also represent a limitation, in fact, even though all the respondents spoke fluent English, some details might have been misunderstood since the questionnaire was submitted not only to native English people.

Considering the methodology for the analysis of the interview and the online reviews which comprise the qualitative data of this study, no specific software was used, but instead the researcher performed the analysis using interpretations skills and tools such as Microsoft Excel for a further support, organization, and examination of the data collected. The use of a more sophisticated software would have made the qualitative results' discussion more objective since the human analysis is more likely to be somehow subjective.

Lastly, as already acknowledged, existing literature on theme hotels resulted to be scarce, hence a limited number of previous studies could be consulted to identify the constructs of the conceptual model and to formulate the hypotheses of this research. Due to the same reason, a few of the considered studies were not very recent.

6.3 Theoretical and Managerial Implications

In view of all the above-mentioned conclusions, this study provides different contributions. Firstly, it contributes to expand the scarce existing literature on European theme hotels. In fact, previous studies such as Okumus (2002), Xiao et al (2013), and Wassler et al. (2015) underlined the fact that the existing research on theme hotels was mostly considering the geographic areas of the USA and different countries of Asia, but not Europe. Secondly, it strengthens the enhancement of travellers' awareness on these unique lodgings and all the minor and independent cases of theme hotels which exist in different countries. Thirdly, it helps theme hotel managers to better understand what their guests value the most. Indeed, there are various managerial implications which can be concluded from this research. One of the most interesting is the confirmation that a proper investment in a theme is definitely worth its cost because it is an effective differentiation strategy which creates unique experiences for customers who are nowadays more and more interested in memorable stays. However, the findings of this study remind managers who are investing on themed elements that the basic ones should be significantly taken into consideration regardless, because they would risk to largely decrease the customers revisit intention especially if the price is higher than standards hotel as it can fairly be in case of a theme hotel. Moreover, a relevant suggestion for managers of these kind of lodgings is to carefully decide a strategic location. Depending on the type of theme and environment, it can be close to public transportation, or in a remote area but where the hotel offers a number of tours and activities for the guests. In any case, the key is the consistency between the hotel theme, its location, and the services it offers. Furthermore, theme hotel managers should take into consideration the importance of the service and experience environment, meaning that a major part of the investment on theming should be focused on that

and not only on the material elements. In other words, servicescape and experiencescape elements are the most relevant ones for the customer experience and even though they might appear as more expensive to create, it should be noticeable that they are also the more difficult to copy by competitors. Lastly, managers should also keep in mind the importance of employees both internally for the business and externally for the relationship with guests, therefore it is important to provide them not only with proper equipment but also with adequate trainings. To conclude, authenticity is a factor which is highly appreciated by customers and even more than that they mostly care about receiving the experience that they were expecting or a better one.

6.4 Future Research

In the future the same study could be carried out but with a larger sample. Besides, while this research involved all types of travellers, it would be interesting for future studies to include a further variable in a similar questionnaire to be able to classify customers in different clusters such as families, friends, couples / honeymoon, solo travellers, etc. Moreover, a similar study in the future may not take into consideration customers who have already stayed at a theme hotel, but only a group of people who have never stayed at one of these unique lodges but that have been exposed to some theme hotels' marketing policies such as promotion material, as suggested by Sun et al. (2021) as well. Lastly, future investigations can also be more restricted and detailed, for instance by focusing only on respondents from one country or belonging to one specific age group.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Table 1

Source	Title	Aim	Method	Sample	Findings
Wassler et al. (2015)	Hotel Theming in China: A Qualitative Study of Practitioners' Views.	(1) how the reality of hotel theming in China is currently perceived by practitioners in light of specific cultural and political contexts, (2) what opportunities, challenges, and added market value of hotel theming in China bring as perceived by practitioners, and (3) how practitioners perceive the future of hotel theming in China	Primary data: focus groups	Focus groups, in a preeminent Chinese university in East China, with 42 hospitality-experienced Chinese Graduate students (mid- upper-level hotel managers, senior executives of hotel groups, and hotel owners)	Data revealed that hotel theming has four analytical dimensions, namely, the current state, perceived facilitators, inhibitors, and future prospective for developing such strategy in China. Results showed that the specific traits of the Chinese hotel market are highly important for the success of hotel theming in the given context.
Oliveira et al. (2022)	Hotel customer segmentation and sentiment analysis through online reviews: an analysis of selected European markets	to verify how distinct markets evaluate hotels in the Algarve through the analysis of online reviews, in order to identify if satisfaction and dissatisfaction attributes are similar among some of the main markets of overnight stay tourists in the region.	Secondary data: online reviews	15,585 ratings and text reviews in three different languages retrieved from Tripadvisor	Results demonstrated that not only satisfaction and dissatisfaction rates towards hotel attributes differ according to the language, but also that customers from different countries place dissimilar emphasis on hotel attributes.
Chang & Lin (2022)	The Effects of Atmosphere on Perceived Values and Customer Satisfaction toward the Theme Hotel: The Moderating Role of Green Practice Perception	This research investigated the influence of atmospheric cues on customers' perceived value and satisfaction and the possible effects of green practices in shaping customer satisfaction.	Primary data: online survey	267 subjects who had stayed in a theme hotel in the preceding six months.	Results of the research indicate that customers 'atmosphere perception of the theme hotel positively affects customer satisfaction, while the perceived value of the hotel mediated the effects of atmosphere on customer satisfaction.
Akel & Cakir (2022)	Theme park hotel experience, experiential satisfaction and behavioural intention: examination of visitors' experiences	to explore how different types of experiences in theme parks influence visitors' experiential satisfaction and behavioural intention.	Primary data: survey available in four different languages. Participants were approached face-to-face.	The 400 participants to the survey involved consisted of different nationalities, which included 100 Turkish, 104 Russian, 98 Arabic and 98 British.	The results highlight the existence of different visitor behaviour in the experience economy, tourism experience and experiential satisfaction among visitors of several nationalities. However, the results highlight the existence of common visitor behavior on behavioral intention among visitors of these nationalities. This study reveals that visitors of different nationalities can have both diverse experiential and cultural motivations.

Source	Title	Aim	Method	Sample	Findings
Sun et al. (2021)	Place attachment to pseudo establishments: An application of the stimulus-organism-response paradigm to themed hotels	to assess place attachment in the themed-hotel context.	Primary data: survey	282 tourists approached at the Macau Ferry Terminal Ticketing Office	Social cues are positively associated with pleasant arousal, and ambience cues are positively associated with social cues. Moreover, pleasant arousal is positively associated with place attachment. Emotional factors can trigger the formation of place attachment to a themed hotel.
Hu & Yang (2020)	Determinants of Consumers' Choices in Hotel Online Searches: A Comparison of Consideration and Booking Stages.	to show how hotel review- and price-related attributes affect consumers 'formation of consideration sets and hotel bookings	Experimental survey (simulation)	324 adult U.S. citizens who had previously booked hotels online	Consumers 'evaluations of certain attributes vary across consideration- and booking stage. Consumers view prices as an indicator of hotel service quality. Thus, they consider promotional price cuts analogous to lower service quality, which may override the potential benefits of cost reduction.
Baquero (2023)	Is Customer Satisfaction Achieved Only with Good Hotel Facilities? A Moderated Mediation Model	to investigate the effect of customer perception of hotel facilities on customer satisfaction by integrating the mediating effect of customer perception of the personnel and business organization and the moderating effect of the customers ' family income	Primary data: survey	376 surveys completed in two four-star Spanish hotels in June 2022	The results showed that customer perceptions of facilities had a positive effect on their overall satisfaction, which was partially mediated by both personnel and business organization. Family income moderated the relationship between the perception of facilities and satisfaction in such a way that it was more intense in high-income customers. Medium- income customers had a more intense relationship with the perception of the personnel and business organization, together with the hotel facilities being to their satisfaction. Therefore, not only facilities, but also personnel and business organizations are important key players for achieving customer satisfaction in hotels, and family income should also be considered.

Appendix B: Hotels profiling

The sample of hotels that was analysed through secondary data includes:

1. *"La Balade des Gnomes" in Heyd (Belgium)*

This unusual hotel provides 12 different magical worlds, but they all have in common the theme of an imaginary world and childhood spirit. Some examples of this hotel rooms are: the Desert Stars room inspired by a Moroccan atmosphere, the Cabin in the Forest with nature elements, the Hutta di Zobabou-Bou described as land of Africa, The Monk's Despair which is a tribute to Gaudí, others with themes like trolls and gnomes, and a room built in the shape of the Trojan horse.

2. *"V8 Hotel Classic" and "V8 Hotel" in Stuttgart (Germany)*

The V8 Hotel was renewed in 2018 and has now a total of 153 design and themed rooms, apartments, meeting rooms, restaurant and bar. Other than a restaurant, three conference rooms and a bigger event area, this hotel has standard rooms which present theme elements like wall graphics, but also a variety of themed rooms where each one is different and has its own style. In the Mercedes suite for example the bed end has the shape of a Mercedes car. This Motor-world themed hotel is strategically located in Stuttgart for automobile fans since they can find there in the city also the Porsche Museum and the Mercedes-Benz Museum.

3. "nhow hotel" in Berlin (Germany)

This is Europe's first hotel dedicated to music and is located in a strategic area in Berlin. The hotel has 304 rooms which are the vision of New York designer Karim Rashid, who's introduced a futuristic look in pink hues. They include iPod docks and a mini-bar complete with nail varnish. Moreover, the hotel has keyboards, guitars and Bluetooth speakers available 24hr as room service. Nhow is also the only hotel in Berlin having its own music studios and recording booth. It also has an art gallery, which can be reserved for hosting events.

4. "Arctic Treehouse hotel" in Rovaniemi (Finland)

The Arctic TreeHouse Hotel presents a unique blend of luxury comfort in the heart of Arctic nature, local Lappish traditions and modern Scandinavian design. The hotel provides 3 different types of accommodation: Arctic TreeHouse Suites, the Arctic GlassHouses with their own private sauna, and the luxurious ArcticScene Executive Suites which sit in their own tranquil location on a steep wooded hill slope. All of them have panoramic windows for the guests to enjoy breathtaking views. The hotel also has a restaurant and the area offers many activities and tours for the guests.

5. "Vliegtuig Hotel" in Teuge (The Netherlands)

This hotel consists of an entire airplane which has been converted into a single luxury suite for two guests. Guests here have the complete craft at their disposal, including its top-flight facilities, which include a Jacuzzi, separate shower, infrared sauna, mini bar, three flat screen televisions, blu-ray DVD player with a comprehensive collection of DVD's, a pantry with oven/microwave combination, coffee and tea maker, free wireless internet, air conditioning, etc. It is located at Teuge International airport and the surroundings offer various activities for both nature- and spa lovers. The hotel also offers extra packages that guests can book as a flight lesson or a sightseeing flight.

6. "Crane Hotel Faralda" in Amsterdam (Netherlands)

This hotel is literally in a crane. In 2019 after a major restoration, the monumental 50-meter-high crane in Amsterdam started its second life as a brand-new luxury hot spot with 3 suites

and a TV Broadcasting studio. This hotel has 3 different themed suites called Mystique, Free Spirit, and Secret, and it can also be rented for private events.

7. "TreeHotel" in Harads (Sweden)

Treehotel is a family-owned business founded in 2010 located in the tall pine forest and the rooms are suspended 4-10 metres above the ground and are accessible by ramp, bridge, or electric stairs. All the rooms are designed by a different architect and the aim is to mix the modern design with the quiet of the forest to create a feeling of luxurious relaxation. Treehotel has a guesthouse restaurant where breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served.

8. "Ice Hotel" in Jukkasjärvi (Sweden)

Icehotel brand was founded in 1989 just as an art gallery which rapidly became a hotel and it used to be only a winter seasonal resort until 2016, when it was expanded to Icehotel 365 which is run on solar power to keep –5°C all year. Icehotel Winter is world's first and largest hotel built out of snow and ice. It is located in Jukkasjärvi in the empty space on the riverbank and it has been recreated every winter (during November and early December) for the last 30 years, every year with brand new art to experience. It lasts around 5 months until spring. The Icehotel Winter has fifteen to twenty standard ice rooms, with ice décor and a bed made of ice, but it also houses twelve art suites uniquely designed and hand-carved, all of them created for the very first time.

9. "Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort"' in Saariselkä (Finland)

Kakslauttanen is a family hotel located in in Lapland, in the largest Finnish National Park, 250km north of the Arctic Circle. This Resort offers different types of accommodation, such as Glass Igloos, Snow Igloos, Chalets and Suites. It is open both in winter and in summer and every season offers a variety of activities and tours which can be done in the surroundings. The resort also has a venue available for events and weddings.

10. "Dromoland Castle" in Newmarket on Fergus (Ireland)

Dromoland Castle dates back to the 16th century and is the ancestral home of the O'Briens of Dromoland, whose lineage dates back 1,000 years to Brian Boru, one of the last High Kings of Ireland. This castle is now a luxurious hotel which is located in a 450-acre estate and provides also a restaurant, a bar, a spa, a golf course, and events venues. The Castle Hotel offers different types of suites which have in common the royal design.

Appendix C: Interview

1. <u>What is your theme concept?</u>

Our theme concept is automotive. So, we have automotive themed rooms as well as an automotive design in the whole hotel.

2. Behind the foundation of this hotel, was there first the willingness to open this specific type of theme hotel or the willingness to open a hotel and the theme hotel type followed?
   - If it's the second case, what were the main factors that cause the switch to this theme hotel?

   Since the beginning there was the willingness to open this specific hotel because of the location. Our location is in the middle of the Motorworld, respectively we have Mercedes-Benz and Porsche as the two big automotive companies directly in front of our doorstep.

3. How does your theme represent a key success factor for your hotel?

   Thanks to the automobile theme, we are not only able to address leisure guests, but also many business guests who want to stay in an extraordinary hotel or hold their events here.

4. What are the main obstacles you face as a theme hotel?

   Because the demand for themed rooms is so high, we feel like we are still short with our 26 themed rooms.

5. What are the main advantages of being a theme hotel?

   We think that thanks to our theme concept we are not only addressing one type of group of guests, but many different ones, including business guests, private travellers, couples and families with children.

6. What do you think are the customers reasons to choose this specific theme hotel?
   - Are these the same for all your customers segments? If not, how are they different?
   - What are your customers segments?

   Well, I think the main reason for customers to come here is that they want to stay in an exceptional hotel, which is planned down to the smallest detail. And even if we have different customers segments, that main reason is the same for all of them. Regarding the segments, we have a lot of both regular and first-time customers. Families, couples, single travellers, groups or even business guests stay at our V8 HOTEL.

7. What do you think are the customers' expectations when choosing this hotel?
   - Are these the same for all your customers segments? If not, how are they different?

   Our customers mainly want to experience the automotive theme up close, so that's what their expectation is mostly about. Another factor that they value and they put their expectation on is the public transportation connection which is very convenient from our hotel. Especially business guests like to stay at our hotel because they have the perfect

transport links with us, and also large corporate events can be flexibly arranged for each business guest.

8. Do you think your customers still value *(satisfaction)* more the quality of basic hotel services compared to theme elements/decorations and authenticity?

   Ehm… I think it's more a combination of both. I would say that the two elements for which our guests appreciate the V8 HOTEL the most are its own style and the responsiveness of the staff. In general, I must say that guests appreciate our hotel very much, this is thanks to theme which is present even in small details, but also thanks to some non-themed elements like the staff who is very responsive to the needs of guests and without that or if the rooms were not very clean, probably the customers wouldn't be so satisfied.

9. Do you think the theme environments decorations - servicescape - enhance customers' *expectations* when choosing the hotel?

   Yes of course, guests choose our house because of the theme, and they have high expectations because this hotel is something very special thanks to the Motorworld, which is built like a museum for young and old cars, as well as sports cars and it is right outside our door.

10. Which variables are important in regard to the hotel theme, and why are they important?

    The location is probably the most important for us, because we have big automotive companies like Porsche and Mercedes on our doorstep. The unique atmosphere as well, thanks to our theme developed in detail as I said before. And for us the aspect of the entertainment is also important and with the size of 187 rooms, our hotel is perfect for corporate events or private parties. Our event and meeting rooms can be used for small meetings from 2 people up to 200 people.

11. How much effort do you invest on your theme elements compared to the basic hotel services *(meaning the services that also all regular non-theme hotels offer)*?

    We put quite a lot of effort also in other hotel services that are not strictly related to theme aspects. For example, our themed rooms and our design double rooms can be connected with our intermediary doors and this makes these rooms suitable for families. Plus, our serviced apartments have a living and kitchen area perfect for long stay guests. Moreover, on our event area Power is a car lift integrated, with which you can drive for example with your wedding car into the event area on which the wedding celebration takes place.

12. Considering theme elements in your hotel, how much do you invest on the tangible - and how much on intangible ones? Why?

There is a lot of investment in both tangible and intangible elements. We invest a lot on furnishings and decoration, as well as in employees with high-quality work clothes, trainings and digital advances that simplify the work.

13. How does the theme contribute to the improvements of hotel performance in terms of customer satisfaction?

    We think that one of the most important factors for our customers satisfaction is our staff. We see that customers are satisfied because the employees always take a lot of time for each individual guest and are available for any request from organising a shuttle transfer for them to arranging a birthday cake.

14. How do you usually evaluate customers satisfaction? Do you emphasise the theme elements in your customers satisfaction survey? - Can you also provide some feedback (reviews) you received from customers regarding the theme environments (elements)?

    We mostly rely on customers online reviews and here you can see two examples from two different types of customers:

    Vacation | *Couples*

    Beautiful hotel, especially for car lovers. The rooms are super nicely decorated with great attention to detail. We were in the Porsche room and would book the room again. The breakfast was very good! The spa area with the panoramic sauna was a highlight. The hotel is very central. The hotel staff was always very friendly and helpful. We are fascinated by the hotel and will definitely come again.

    Business trip | *Solo traveler*

    I attended an event at V8 and it was very professionally organised. While I didn't stay at the hotel, the staff was very friendly and took care of my luggage. The ambience is very good specially for car lovers. Highly recommend.

15. How does the theme contribute to the improvements of hotel performance in terms of customer loyalty?

    Thanks to its being unusual and special, this exclusive theme definitely contributes to customer loyalty.

16. What are the percentages of first-time customers and regular customers?

    We can say that we have 50% first time customers and 50% of regular customers.

17. How much does the theme influence the price you ask to your customers?

    Not at all, as we stick to the region's workload.

18. How sensitive to price do you think your customers are?

I would say not a lot, but we don't usually do particular promotions. We have our daily rate, our early bird rate and the save rate. The portals always have a price difference of 20 € compared to our direct booking prices because we also want to increase our direct bookings. We have like every hotel in the world also fair surcharges but otherwise our prices are always in the same frame.

19. What channels do customers use the most to book at your hotel?

    Most guests book via direct inquiries (homepage, phone or mail) otherwise most bookings are made via Booking.com.

20. Do customers come to your hotel with the main purpose of staying there or more for visiting the destination (and the hotel choice follows)?

    The main reason to stay at our hotel for most of our guests is to sleep in one of our themed rooms, but we also have business customers, and their reason is also that they have business appointments in the region.

21. What is your perception regarding the customers motivations to stay? And for how many days do customers usually stay?

    The customers always stay between 1 and 2 days in the hotel. During the week our guests are mainly business travellers and during the weekend more leisure guests come to see the V8 HOTEL and the Stuttgart region.

22. Can you give a percentage of the different occupation demand rate of your themed rooms vs. your non-themed rooms?

    No, I'm sorry but we don't have any information about this.

23. Who is your main competitor? Why? Is it because it's also a theme hotel or is it for another reason?

    According to our management, we do not have a main competitor. So other than that, we usually compare ourselves with hotels in the immediate vicinity and hotels of the same classification.

Appendix D: Questionnaire

Themed Hotels

Hello!

I'm Claudia and I'm a Master's student in Hospitality and Tourism Management at ISCTE Business School in Lisbon.

This questionnaire is part of my Master's thesis on themed hotels, takes about 10 minutes to answer, and consists of 5 sections. Responses are anonymous and confidential, and all information provided will be used for purely academic purposes only.

Thank you in advance for your time and your help with my research!

(Image: Conrad ~ Maldives Rangali Island source: www.redsavannah.com)

I - Themed atmospheric cues importance

1.1 When considering a themed hotel for your stay, what level of importance do you give to the following themed elements? *

(source: www.v8hotel.de)

	1. Extremely unimportant	2. Unimportant	3. Neutral	4. Important	5. Extremely important	Don't know/don't want to answer
Thematic guest room decoration	○	○	○	○	○	○
Thematic Food & Beverage experience	○	○	○	○	○	○
Thematic service	○	○	○	○	○	○
Thematic exterior design	○	○	○	○	○	○
Thematic staff uniforms	○	○	○	○	○	○
Thematic design in public area	○	○	○	○	○	○
Thematic aromas and scents	○	○	○	○	○	○
Choice in overall hotel theme	○	○	○	○	○	○

1.2 When considering a theme hotel for your stay, what level of importance do you give to the following non-themed elements? *

(source: www.vliegtuighotel.nl)

	1. Extremely unimportant	2. Unimportant	3. Neutral	4. Important	5. Extremely important	Don't know/don't want to answer
Staff's knowledge	○	○	○	○	○	○
Staff's responsiveness to guests' needs	○	○	○	○	○	○
Staff's genuine and caring attitude	○	○	○	○	○	○
Food and beverage quality	○	○	○	○	○	○
Restaurant service	○	○	○	○	○	○
Quick and efficient check-in	○	○	○	○	○	○
Location	○	○	○	○	○	○
Security	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comfortable bedding	○	○	○	○	○	○
Cleanliness of guest room	○	○	○	○	○	○
Price	○	○	○	○	○	○

II – Perceived Behaviour Control

Please rate your level of agreement with the following sentences, regarding your thoughts about a stay in a themed hotel and your final intention of choosing it.

*

(source: www.labaladedesgnomes.be)

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree	Don't know/don't want to answer
Whether or not I stay at a themed hotel when traveling is completely up to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am confident that if I want, I can stay at a themed hotel when traveling.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have resources, time, and opportunities to stay at a themed hotel when traveling.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Finding a themed hotel when traveling takes time and effort.	○	○	○	○	○	○

III - Perceived Intention to stay at a themed hotel (visit intention)

Please rate your level of agreement with the following sentences, regarding your thoughts about a stay in a themed hotel and your final intention of choosing it.

*

(source: www.treehotel.se)

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree	Don't know/don't want to answer
I am willing to stay at a themed hotel when travelling.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I plan to stay at a themed hotel when travelling.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will make an effort to stay at a themed hotel when travelling.	○	○	○	○	○	○

IV - Willingness to pay a higher price

Please rate your level of agreement with the following sentences, regarding your thoughts about a stay in a themed hotel and your final intention of choosing it.

*

(source: www.kakslauttanen.fi)

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree	Don't know/don't want to answer
It is acceptable to pay more for a hotel which presents themed elements.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to pay more for a themed hotel.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to spend extra in order to stay at a themed hotel.	○	○	○	○	○	○

V – Sociodemographic information

What is your gender? *

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male
- ◯ Other

What is your nationality? *

Your answer

What is your age? *

Your answer

What is your highest education level? *

- ◯ Middle school
- ◯ High school
- ◯ Bachelor's degree
- ◯ Master's degree or above

What is your monthly net income *

- ◯ No income
- ◯ Up to € 1000
- ◯ € 1001 - € 2000
- ◯ € 2001 - € 4000
- ◯ € 4001 - € 6000
- ◯ € 6001 or above