



MASTER TOURISM

« Tourism, Hospitality and Food Studies »

First-Year Dissertation

The Role of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication in Guest Satisfaction: A Case Study of Amsterdam's Hostels

Presented by:
MARYNE JOUVET

University year: 2024 - 2025

Main Supervisor: Ms. Kristina t'Felt

The Role of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication in Guest Satisfaction: A Case Study of Amsterdam's Hostels

ISTHIA of the University of Toulouse - Jean Jaurès does not expressly approve or disapprove of the content of tutored projects and research dissertations. The opinions therein must be considered to be those of the author.

I dedicate this project to my wonderful grandmother, who sadly passed away a few months ago. Her constant encouragement never left me questioning my abilities. She would have been proud, always believing in me. Although she's no longer here, her love, wisdom, and strength continue to inspire everything I do. Through this project, I pay homage to the profound mark she left on my soul, one that has shaped the person I've become.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to Miss t'Felt, who accepted to supervise me, with dedication and patience, for this master's dissertation. None of this would be possible without her guidance and support. I would also like to sincerely thank the entire teaching team at ISTHIA for their insightful lessons and continuous support during this first year.

A heartfelt thank you to my classmates, who made this year stimulating and enjoyable. In particular, I am especially grateful to Alex, Ana, Iman, Camille, and Valentina, whose support, humor, and friendship have meant a great deal to me and continue to enrich this experience.

I am deeply thankful to my sister, Manon: my biggest supporter, closest friend, and lifelong role model. Her unwavering belief in me continues to give me strength. I also want to thank my father for his constant presence and encouragement, which I value greatly.

I am also very grateful to Isa, my mentor, whose encouragement has helped me grow academically and personally.

A special thank you goes to my friends and colleagues from Amsterdam, whom I met during my gap year. Without them, this journey would not be the same. In particular, I want to thank my best friend, Anna, whose presence and constant support have meant the world to me.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge all those who contributed, directly or indirectly, to the completion of this dissertation.

*"Life is a great tapestry, a mosaic of experiences woven together by love, struggle, and hope."
Madeleine L'Engle*

List of Main Headings

List of Main Headings.....	6
General Introduction.....	7
PART 1: LITERATURE REVIEW & EXPLORATION.....	10
Chapter 1: Beyond the Front Desk - Communication & Hospitality.....	11
Chapter 2: From Words to Wow - Communication, Satisfaction & Guest Experience.....	19
Chapter 3: Hostels & the Amsterdam Pulse.....	27
PART 2: PROBLEM STATEMENT, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, HYPOTHESES	38
Chapter 4: Setting the Scene - The Problem Statement.....	39
Chapter 5: Theoretical Lenses.....	42
Chapter 6: The Hypotheses - Three Axes of Research.....	62
PART 3: PROPOSAL OF A METHODOLOGY AND FIELD OF APPLICATION.....	68
Chapter 7: The Choice of the Research Method.....	70
Chapter 8: Field of Study - Where & Why.....	73
Chapter 9: The Presentation of the Different Tools.....	78
General Conclusion.....	91
Table of Contents.....	111

General Introduction

Today, the use of technology continues to grow in the hospitality sector. Guests can check themselves in and out using digital kiosks and skip the front desk. They can order room service, request housekeeping, make spa appointments, or chat directly with the reception on the hotel's websites or mobile application. Chatbots and AI are always available to handle any questions or inquiries. In the most cutting-edge hotels, robots even deliver towels and meals directly to the guests. While these advancements can offer convenience and efficiency, human touch and interactions between staff and guests still lie at the heart of this service-focused industry. As Herbert Kelleher, the late CEO of Southwest Airlines, once said: *"Anyone who looks at things solely in terms of factors that can easily be quantified is missing the heart of business, which is people"*. Indeed, recent surveys and reports highlight that the majority of customers still prefer to interact with the staff. For example, 1000 people were asked about their preferences, and 86% of them still picked the human touch (CGS, 2019). This shows that hotel employees' skills and training still have to be prioritized before anything else, even in an increasingly digitized world and industry.

The employees in a hotel are present when the guests arrive, when they need something, and when they check out. They are always here in the shadows, ready to jump in when they are asked to. They give the first and last impressions: they say the first "Welcome!" and the last "Have a safe trip back!". One of the tools a receptionist has in their pocket, alongside their PMS or phones, is communication. Daily, they have to deliver with their words, but not only, important information and guidance. The way the front desk staff communicates, express themselves and convey a message, whether it is orally or physically, could be one of the main and most important ingredients in the recipe of satisfying a guest. Unfortunately, staff-guest interactions do not always go as smoothly as both would like. Misunderstandings take place, and conflicts arise. These downsides can leave guests dissatisfied and frustrate employees, so why not try to avoid them and make everyone happy?

In the academically under-studied hostels, the dynamics of communication can become even more important due to their famously informal and social-oriented environments. Guests are usually seeking more interactions and experiences. It places an additional emphasis on effective

verbal and non-verbal communication from the staff in these hospitality accommodations, in particular. Hostel receptionists not only answer the phone or reply to emails, but they also create a welcoming atmosphere and guide guests throughout their experience. This could be especially the case for hostels located in Amsterdam. It appears as a lively and vibrant city where exchanges could deeply influence guests' satisfaction and overall experience.

Then, an emphasis can be placed on human connections, and staff-guest interactions in hospitality, especially in social hostel environments where international guests often rely on staff for support. Hence, understanding how communication quality affects satisfaction becomes crucial. This leads to the central research question guiding this dissertation: ***How does the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication used by staff during face-to-face interactions in Amsterdam influence guest satisfaction?***

This question fits directly into the broader context and the issues raised. It seeks to understand the human aspects of hospitality. Despite the rise of technology and digital tools, it is an element deeply valued by guests. It also targets an academic gap: the study of hostels and their verbal and non-verbal communication style. To reduce the scope, the city of Amsterdam was chosen. It is a way to analyze the topic through a unique and vibrant setting that has a multicultural context. Eventually, this study will bring practical and theoretical insights into how communication strategies impact guest satisfaction in modern hospitality.

Additionally, this research is situated at the intersection of communication studies, sociology, and hospitality management. It draws on hospitality management through its focus on service quality and the guest experience; on communication studies by examining how individuals express and interpret meaning in face-to-face interactions; and on sociology by exploring interpersonal dynamics and the influence of social norms within the institutional context of hostels.

To guide and navigate this first-year dissertation, a plan was designed and can now be announced. In the first part, a literature review will be developed to explore the key concepts underpinning this study: verbal and non-verbal communication, guest satisfaction, hostels, and the city of Amsterdam. This section will begin by addressing fundamental aspects of

communication, then link these to guest expectations, and gradually narrow the focus to the specific context of hostels in Amsterdam.

In the second part, the problem statement that appears clearer after exploring and gathering literature will be justified. It will be done through the identification of gaps, contributions, and potential practical outcomes. After this, the theoretical framework will be presented by developing the three theories chosen to tackle this topic: Imaginary Travel vs. Real Travel, Dramaturgy Theory, and Communication Accommodation Theory. This part will end by announcing in detail the different hypotheses designed.

Finally, the last part of this dissertation will introduce a plan for the methodology. To do so, the choice between qualitative and quantitative surveys will be made. A precise field of application will be selected. Lastly, the different tools will be presented: observations, interviews, and guest review analysis.

PART 1: LITERATURE REVIEW & EXPLORATION

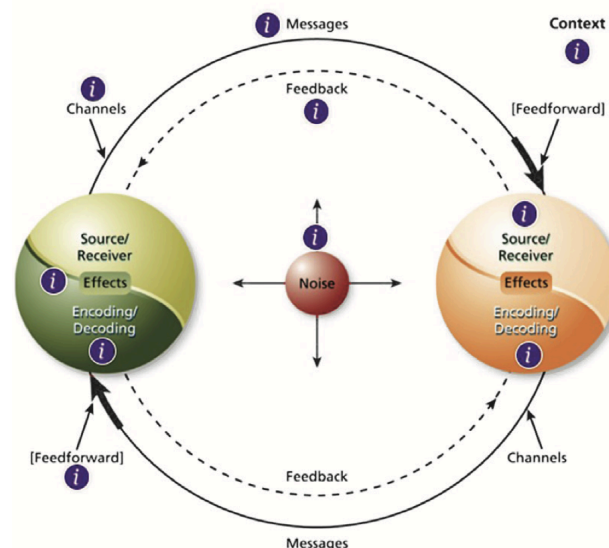
The very first section of this first-year dissertation will cover an exploration and literature review. The goal is to define the core elements of the topic by summarizing and synthesizing prior research (Denney & Tewksbury, 2012). It both contributes to the learning process and helps acquire already available information related to the subject. This part will eventually allow the identification of key themes, highlight the gaps in the current understanding, and provide a solid foundation.

Chapter 1: Beyond the Front Desk - Communication & Hospitality

1.1 General Definitions

In a world driven by human interactions, communication is not just an option but the foundation of relationships, understanding, and trust. No matter how it is done, people spend most of their time communicating. It is almost impossible to avoid it. It was shown that adults spend an average of 70% of their time communicating by listening, speaking, writing, and reading (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor, 2001). It is traditionally defined as the act of communicating with people through an exchange of spoken or written messages (Cambridge, n.d). The actual process remains way more complex than this dictionary definition. Indeed, for decades, researchers have dug deeper into this topic that governs everyday lives. More precise definitions can be given. It could be described as the exchange that occurs when one or more individuals send and receive messages within a specific context, with a clear purpose and an opportunity for feedback, and where the process may be influenced by noise (DeVito, 2015). A whole process of coding takes place: the sender (speaker, writer) encodes a message (sound waves, computer programs, etc.) through different channels (verbal, non-verbal, written, picture, etc.) thanks to experiences, attitudes, skills, and perceptions. The receiver (listener, reader), in turn, decodes the message, which they can reply to using feedback (see figure below).

Figure 1: A Model of Interpersonal Communication¹



The coding-decoding takes place in a **context** that influences how people say things as well as what they say. The time of the day, the social status, cultural factors, or the place can completely transform communication. The Transaction Model of Communication (Barnlund, 1970) is a good example that underlines the crucial importance of context and the different sub-categories that influence and shape the communication process. Barnlund (1970) divides them into five: physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural. The physical context refers to the environment in which the process happens. The psychological context is the mental and emotional state of two or more communicators. Then, the social context corresponds to the norms, rules, and expectations that influence communication. The relational context is the type of relationship between the two senders and receivers of the messages. Finally, the cultural context shows the beliefs, values, traditions, and customs that shape communication styles.

Communication networks can take many different shapes, but one of the most important tools remains **language**. It is defined as a system of communication consisting of sounds, words, and grammar (Cambridge, n.d). This channel can be divided into two: verbal and non-verbal. Verbal language or **Verbal communication (VC)** is the exchange of information through spoken or written means. It relies on words, sentences, and grammatical structures to convey meaning and ensure effective communication (Rocci & de Saussure, 2016). Not only are basic messages

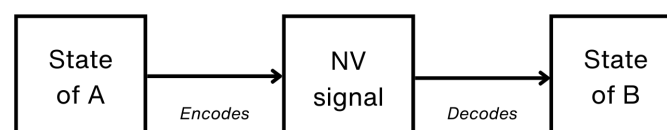
¹ DeVito, J. A. (2017). *The interpersonal communication book* (15th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

transmitted, but people also use them to share thoughts, emotions, and knowledge. It is a primary tool to shape human interactions, relationships, and shared understandings.

Non-verbal communication (NVC), also known as “*bodily communication*” happens when one individual influences another individual, intentionally or not, using the following channels (Argyle, 1988):

- facial expression (smile, brow rise, frown, etc.);
- gaze (individual, eye contact, etc.);
- gestures (bodily actions of hands, head, etc.);
- posture (bodily positions, standing, sitting, bowing, etc.);
- bodily contact (handshake, touch, hug, etc.);
- spatial behavior (proximity, orientation, etc.);
- appearance (clothing, physique, etc.);
- non-verbal vocalizations (accent, pitch, laughing, gasping, etc.);
- smell (body odor, perfumes, scents, etc.).

Figure 2: Basic NV paradigm²



The coding-decoding process explained in the figure above also applies to this type of language. To express a state or an emotion, person A encodes a signal through non-verbal channels (facial expression, gestures, etc.) which will be decoded, correctly or not, by person B. If those codes are not shared or interpreted the same way, the risk of miscommunication is greater. Even if verbal and non-verbal communication have two different definitions, they work hand in hand. Abercrombie (1968) said, “*We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our whole body*”. The two complete each other. When someone speaks, they also emit facial expressions, gestures, and gazes to amplify or disambiguate the words that come out (Argyle, 1988). It becomes a double code. There is a physiological explanation behind the complementary aspects

² Argyle, M. (1988). *Bodily communication* (2nd ed.). International Universities Press.

of VC and NVC. Indeed, the brain area called “*Broca*” linked to language also activates when gestures are integrated into speech. It is a shared brain process rather than something independent. When these gestures do not align with spoken words, the brain reacts, showing that they are expected to work together as a unified system (Willems, Özyürek, & Hagoort, 2007).

After understanding the broad concepts and definitions of communication, including its verbal and non-verbal dimensions, it appears coherent to narrow the lens toward interpersonal communication.

1.2 Interpersonal Communication

As communication implies two or more people, it can be defined as an **interpersonal** phenomenon. Academically speaking, it can be defined as an “*interactive process that occurs between people as they exchange and create messages, collaboratively and interdependently, through an interwoven combination of verbal and nonverbal behavior*” (Manusov, 2020). Listening, body language, verbal language, and conduct are elements that play a big role during interpersonal, and face-to-face communication (Lolli, 2013). Beehives are a good illustration of this social construction. Indeed, all the bees have a role; they join forces and communicate to keep the hive alive and working well. It is the shared purpose that binds them into a living and breathing ecosystem.

Interpersonal communication is crucial and has shown true benefits in human societies. Its importance is already shown from a young age and throughout people’s lives as it is a part of the socialization process (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). While interacting with our families, peers, guests, or even receptionists, we develop our sense of self and become aware of our place in society. It allows for the transmission and construction of social meaning, identity, and relationships. Moreover, studies highlighted the direct relationship between the quality of people’s communication and the quality of their lives (Stewart, Zediker & Witteborn, 2005). As a concrete example, there is a positive impact of communication on health and well-being, more particularly in terms of managing stress. Indeed, someone who communicates well within their social network, during social integration, is more likely to be supported both emotionally and practically during difficult times. This leads to better management of stress and more overall

well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Scientifically speaking, it is explained by the fact that in-person communication can increase oxytocin levels and decrease cortisol levels (Seltzer, Proski, Ziegler, & Pollak, 2012). These hormonal changes positively impact stress and negative emotions.

Furthermore, communication lies at the heart of the hospitality industry. It is a key component that cannot be missed. As it is a service-driven industry, it is not about selling a physical product but an experience to the guests.

1.3 The Importance of Communication in Hospitality

Hospitality is a service based on social encounters. There are constant staff-guest and guest-guest interactions. The products sold are not socks or candles. It relies on the **sale of intangibles** since the first mission of a hotel is to take care of its guests.

Interpersonal communication can play different roles in hospitality during staff-guest interactions. Berger (2014) identified five important actions that it can perform. First, it is used for “*impression management*” because employees want to present themselves positively. This is a way for them to manage the impressions guests will have of them. Then, they use their verbal and non-verbal language to “*regulate emotions*” when resolving complaints or managing disappointments. Also, it plays a big part in “*information acquisition*” from the staff since clients seek indications and recommendations about local activities or amenities. “*Social bonding*” is the next role identified. Communication can be used to create a sense of community, reducing social exclusion and meeting the guests’ needs. Finally, Berger (2014) identified “*persuasion*” to up-sell, handle issues, or even influence future returns to the hotel, for instance. These actions highlight the importance of interpersonal communication, verbal and non-verbal, in hospitality.

The employees and actors of hospitality need a set of competencies to be able to accomplish their jobs properly. These skills are split into two categories. Hard skills are technical, tangible, and measurable competencies. Soft skills are non-technical competencies associated with personality, attitude, and the ability to interact effectively with others (Stewart, Wall, and Marcinied, 2016). Even if mastering property management software, speaking different

languages, or having multiple degrees is crucial, it does not mean that soft skills are any less important. Stewart et al. (2016) argue that soft skills should be considered equally, if not more, valuable than technical skills in today's society. Indeed, as the world is ever advancing in terms of technology, hiring processes and criteria have also evolved. Hotels look for “*pleasant*” people who display cheerfulness and enthusiasm to impact their clientele (Magnini, Baker, & Karande, 2013). When students complete their studies, employers expect from them different learning outcomes. They rated written and oral communication skills as one of the most important ones (Hart Research Associates, 2015). This emphasis on interpersonal qualities suggests that social and communication skills are valued more highly than technical ones. It proves once more the importance of communication, verbal and non-verbal, in hospitality.

Behind the front desk, a receptionist uses several tools to fulfill their duties but one of the most important ones will be their verbal language. Indeed, their first and last missions will consist in checking-in and checking out the guests through the way they communicate. Upon arrival, they have to deliver factual information such as the specifics of the destination, the schedules, or even logistical elements. To do so, they use a kind of communication that can be called “*digital*” (Amirou, 1995). Receptionists will not only share factual information through their verbal language, they will also perform an action. This constitutes the performative function of language as presented in the Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969). Words have an actual impact that transcends mere descriptions allowing people to say things and do what they say. For instance, when a hospitality worker apologizes and greets, when a guest complains and requests, they also perform all those actions (Yunita & Wahyudi, 2020).

Furthermore, hospitality employees can be described as “*front-stage workers*” (Goffman, 1959). They are on stage, in front of the guests to give them the best experience possible. Part of their job's requirements is to wear a mask and keep it on no matter the situation. Hospitality work can then be called “**emotional labor**” (Hochschild, 1983). This concept explains that in some work industries employees must regulate their emotions to display socially or professionally acceptable behaviors, through the way they communicate for example. They are usually chosen by management for their “*personalities*”, and their capacity to display politeness and cheerfulness even when they are facing complicated or stressful situations or guests (Watt, 2007; Crișmariu & Țigu, 2019). They are the main people coming in contact with customers and one of their missions is to make them come back.

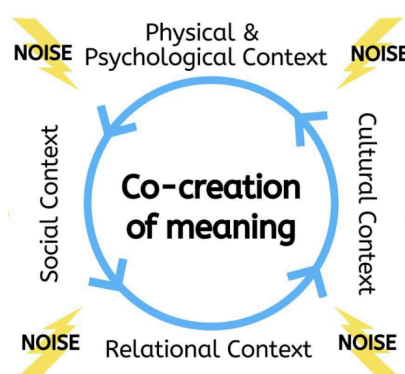
After explaining why communication is so important in the field of hospitality, it appears coherent to present the different challenges that can arise. It is not an easy process that occurs smoothly or without any pitfalls.

1.4 The Obstacles of Verbal & Non-verbal Communication in Hospitality

Being able to communicate effectively is not an easy task. What is said or heard in a conversation does not have the same meaning, and does not make the same sense for everyone. Each individual will read a situation in the light of their own world (D'Iribarne, Segal, & Chevrier, 2022). This subjectivity combined with potential obstacles could interfere with the transmission of messages leading to misunderstandings and conflicts. It occurs when the intended message from the sender is not accurately received or interpreted by the receiver (Kamal Bahrain et al., 2023). Today's advancement of technology has brought even more challenges for communication.

As mentioned earlier, communication relies heavily on **context**. It can be where the conversation takes place, with whom, or at what time of the day.

Figure 3: The Transaction Model of Communication³



³ Lapum, J., St-Amant, O., Hughes, M., & Garmaise-Yee, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Introduction to communication in nursing*. Toronto Metropolitan University Pressbooks.
<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/communicationnursing/chapter/transaction-model-of-communication/>

In the Transaction Model of Communication described earlier, Barnlund (1970) also represents what he called “*noise*”. These are the elements that disrupt communication. They can be physical (environment), psychological (emotions), and cultural (different communication styles). These aspects can constitute barriers to an effective interaction, they are key factors that might alter it. In a hotel or hostel, it can be the noisy background, the light, or even the layout of the reception. It might influence the communication process because, for instance, a guest might struggle to hear the receptionist over loud background music. Also, if a guest is stressed, they might be less patient than a guest who is happy and relaxed. Kamal Bahrain et al. (2023) showed that the most common communication barriers were: linguistic, cultural, and physical. According to them, the challenges linked with language come from elements such as the different existing terminologies, heavy accents, jargon, or regional dialects. There can also be physical barriers like the sound level, the layout, or the temperature. For example, a crowded and very loud space might impact concentration and also prevent meaningful conversations from happening. Lastly, they mention the cultural differences as there are different ways to communicate depending on where people come from. Disilva and Arun (2017) also discussed the barriers that could emerge in terms of communication in the hospitality industry.

Among all verbal communication tools, English has become the dominant lingua franca in hospitality. It means that it is a language used for communication between groups of people who speak different languages (Cambridge, n.d). Studies were made to show that English constitutes the best option to communicate between people from varied linguistic backgrounds. This is the reason why this language is labeled nowadays “*English International Language*” or “*lingua franca*” (Kılıçkaya, 2009). Even though English is widespread in the world of hospitality, it can also mean that this over-reliance fosters linguistic barriers. If guests do not speak it very well it can create an obstacle important to be navigated.

To go further, cultural differences and non-verbal language, in particular, have a very special relationship. They often create friction and misunderstandings between cultural and national groups (Argyle, 1988). There are varied body languages, vocal tones, and words. For example, strong eye contact might mean aggressiveness while in other cultures it can be a sign of interest and participation. A thumbs-up can be seen as a sign of encouragement for some but as an offensive gesture for others.

In summary, communication does not always go as planned and runs as smoothly as one may think. It is strongly influenced by cultural norms, physical environments, or languages. These so-called “noises” interfere with the communication process and can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or even conflicts.

This first chapter brought to light the main principles and ingredients in the recipe for communicating. This meticulous process was presented in detail with its different components. Then, interpersonal communication as well as its advantages and benefits were described. Furthermore and as this topic lies at the heart of hospitality, the reasons why communicating is so important in this particular context were highlighted. Finally, the main challenges and barriers that can slow down verbal and non-verbal communication in hospitality were listed. This chapter allows a general overview and exploration which comes as the foundation for the rest of this literature review. It is now important to consider how these communication practices directly impact guest satisfaction and experience. Hence, the next chapter will define guest satisfaction, what drives it, how it can be met, and how it can be directly linked to verbal and non-verbal communication.

Chapter 2: From Words to Wow - Communication, Satisfaction & Guest Experience

2.1 Guest Satisfaction as a Social Process

When researchers talk about guest satisfaction it is usually and mostly through a marketing approach. It can be defined as “*the attitude or feeling of a customer towards a service or product after it was experienced*” (Jamal & Naser, 2002). It creates an empathic or emotional response to the perceived discrepancy between what the customer expects and what they assess of a performance (Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000). Most of the time, satisfaction is considered achieved when the perceived service meets or exceeds customer expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In this case, a feeling of “*pleasure*” will be felt (Kasiri et al., 2017). Major concepts and theories were created to understand and enhance customer satisfaction. The most famous ones are the Service Profit Chain Model (Heskett et al., 1994), the SERVQUAL Model (Parasuraman et al., 1988), the CSI (Fornell et al., 1996) or even the 4P’s (McCarthy, 1960).

They focus mostly on the surface level, on individual preferences and economic factors. Only little attention is given to the deeper social or emotional context.

Furthermore, the traditional and older definition of satisfaction in the service industry tends to consider clients as passive, and inactive. It was as if they were simply sitting and waiting for satisfaction to fall into their hands. For example, the Economic Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) sees the service delivered to clients as a transaction: they pay for a service and it is delivered to them according to fixed terms. It leaves no space for something more than a basic exchange, interactions, or collaboration. This closed vision has evolved through time to offer a shift from transactional goods and services to experiences. It was introduced in the Experience Economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Through this reasoning, they started considering guests as rather active and as “*co-performers*”. They participate and actively engage to “*co-create*” the experience through their actions, perceptions, and emotions. It proves that guest satisfaction is not just a transactional outcome but a **social phenomenon** that emerges from interactions. It can be explained through a sociological lens to move towards social dynamics, collective experiences, and cultural contexts that constitute the guest experiences.

Indeed satisfaction can be understood as a social phenomenon shaped by interactions between guests and staff. Tourism goes beyond a simple commercial transaction, it can constitute a symbolic exchange (Amirou, 1995) where the travelers expect more than just service from the workers. Thinking this way, the guest experience can be directly linked to touristic individuals and collective **mental imaginaries** (Amirou, 1995; t’Felt, 2018). Travelers start imagining what their trip will be like before it even starts through social media, pictures, advertisements, etc. These thoughts, created during socialization and experiences, are building their expectations concerning the hospitality services that will be delivered to them. When the travel actually happens the guest directly faces reality which contributes to the creation of new images and the partial deconstruction of the ones they already had in mind (t’Felt, 2018). The reality faced can either align or be in opposition with what the guest expected. This formula will create satisfaction or dissatisfaction. For instance, it could hypothetically happen when a guest books a romantic getaway at a hotel because they saw a dreamy advertisement on Instagram, but they find out when they arrive that it is located next to a construction site. On the contrary, another guest may book a budget-friendly hotel expecting only basic amenities but when they check in, they are warmly welcomed by the staff and end up forming friendships with other travelers.

Considering things in such a light shows that satisfaction can be viewed as a symbolic exchange, where guests are not just receiving a service but are engaging in a social process of meaning-making. After giving these insights about guest satisfaction, it could be interesting to discover what influences it, and what drives it in the hospitality sector.

2.2 Factors Influencing Guest Experience

When studying guest satisfaction, many factors are usually brought up. In previous studies, many areas contributing to the guests' experience were carefully analyzed. Usually, the first things that come to people's minds are tangible elements such as cleanliness, localization, and price. These were proven, by many researchers, to be critical determinants in influencing guest satisfaction and business success (Singgalen, 2024). Even though those tangible factors were studied, over and over again, in relation to guest satisfaction; it does not mean that they are the only things influencing it.

Indeed, more **intangible** aspects like staff, atmosphere, or service quality are also carefully studied and taken into account. In the intangible category, staff behavior seems to be prominent in studies that were made on such topics. As mentioned above, soft skills have been given a whole new importance with the growth of technologies and competitive landscapes. It means that the factors linked to guest satisfaction, perspectives, and imaginaries are becoming more and more linked to staff service delivery. In many hotels, service quality and staff behavior were found to have the most significant impact on their experience and on their stay. For instance, there is a positive relationship between the staff's personality traits and the perception tourists have of the service delivered (Sadik, 2020). A guest will have a better experience when they perceive a hotel as "*hospitable*" (warm, professional, and welcoming) through the personal interaction they have with the staff (Heide & Grønhaug, 2009). In studies conducted on hostels, the employees' competence, friendliness, and helpfulness have been given marked importance, even before cleanliness and price (Taskov et al., 2014; Lima & Vicente, 2016). It means that once more intangible takes precedence over tangible factors in today's evolving society.

David Riesmann, a sociologist, compared traveling and vacation places to a marketplace dating back from before industrialization (Amirou, 1995). By that, he meant that it was a warm and social village that evoked a strong sense of community. It manifests a level of openness and a willingness to engage and interact with other people on a deeper and more human level. It pushes guest satisfaction to go beyond simple material needs to also focus on social interactions. The studies conducted in hostel settings linked to guest satisfaction highlight the importance of the ambiance. Indeed, hostel guests demand a “*creative place*” meaning that they are looking for communication, new experiences and knowledge, something unusual and unique (Borovskaya & Dedova, 2014). For them, a relaxing and friendly atmosphere that enhances conviviality is crucial (Lima & Vicente, 2016). It echoes the new traveling trends and imaginaries which show that the basic need is no longer sleeping but rather **socialization** and **experience** (Quadri-Felitti et al., 2021).

Guest satisfaction is more about the feeling of being taken care of rather than staying at top-tier facilities (Verma & Waghela, 2022). Often staff members take on symbolic parenting roles to bring constant kindness, availability, and protection (Amirou, 1995). There is a true caregiving dynamic that creates a psychological and social relationship between staff and guests. It addresses emotional needs while socially mirroring familiar roles such as the one of a guide. This relational aspect plays a crucial role in shaping how guests evaluate their experience, often influencing more than material offerings alone. While tangible factors like cleanliness or price are proven important, intangible elements such as staff behavior and service quality have been showing a growing impact on guest satisfaction and experience. This leads us to think more about social interactions between staff members and guests. Effective communication could also play a central role.

2.3 Direct link between Communication and Satisfaction

Effective communication is a crucial factor directly contributing to the experience and overall satisfaction of guests in hospitality. The way the staff communicates in a hotel will shape and influence tourists’ stay, whether through their words, tone, attitude, or even gestures.

Studies on guest satisfaction have proven that **social interactions**, where communication is central, bring strong advantages to the hotel guest experience. It is a “*vital*” aspect that creates “*civility*” and “*utility*” benefits for the clients (Chen et al., 2020). In other words, staff-guest interactions encourage friendliness and social connection but also provide useful information and assistance at the same time. These emotional and practical advantages create a more holistic and satisfying guest experience. Staff-guest face-to-face interactions help fulfill all the needs of a guest more effectively (Chen et al., 2020). It is also reinforced by the fact that the strong collective image that prevails in the minds of travelers is the type of sociability a trip or destination offers, especially the social environment and ambiance (Amirou, 1995). It truly reflects a broader human desire: people are increasingly trying to connect with others on a deeper, more authentic level while traveling. This need for social connections and interactions might not apply to all commercial accommodations the same way. Places with more communal characteristics and spaces such as hostels, family-friendly resort hotels, or lifestyle hotels may encourage more exchanges (Chen et al., 2020). In short, social interactions, where communication lies at the core, play a key role in driving guest satisfaction and shaping a positive experience.

Furthermore, acting as a “*social glue*”, **communication** itself in hospitality allows people to bond (Berger, 2014), build relationships, facilitate conflicts (Mohapatra, 2024), build trust, and even develop closeness (Kirchmayer & Patterson, 2003). These effects collectively highlight this pivotal role in enhancing guest satisfaction and their overall experience within the hospitality industry. Verbal and non-verbal cues can be found inside communication itself and these two channels in particular have also been proven to have a significant contribution. First, clear and mastered **verbal communication** is crucial if the staff members want to deliver effective messages that include specific information about the destination, schedules, and logistic details (Amirou 1995; Chen et al., 2020.). It is also very important to strategically manage verbal language because it can have negative effects on them. For instance, refusals and saying “no”, are considered as “*face-threatening acts*” since it is completely opposed to expectations (Yunita & Wahyudi, R. 2020). This proves that the staff has to be careful and get around these kinds of verbal expressions to leave a positive effect. According to Yunita and Wahyudi (2020), polite words will also leave a very good impression as they place the guests in a respectable position.

In addition, the body, vocal behavior, and physical appearance of the staff have a positive effect on the client's emotional response while a negative attitude will create the opposite effect (Kueh, 2013). This follows the Theory of Attribution where individuals are considered to interpret and assign causes to others' behaviors and actions (Heider, 1958). In hospitality, guests often rely on **non-verbal** cues such as smiles to form quick judgments about the staff. Such positive attitudes lead them to think that the receptionist is friendly and competent. In turn, it pushes people to have a more favorable perception of the overall service experience (Magnini et al., 2013). Hotel employees' physical appearance and behavior, a way of communicating non-verbally, helps create the first and last impressions, the first and last cognitive responses (Crîșmariu & Țigu, 2019; Yunita & Wahyudi, 2020). They are the ones coming in contact with the customers. It means that this first communication, through display, can influence how guests perceive the overall quality of service and the hotel itself.

After showing that verbal and non-verbal communication have direct and positive impacts on guests' experience and satisfaction, it is also important to underline strategies that can make this communication bulletproof against challenges and misunderstandings that arise from interpersonal, intercultural, and intergenerational staff-guest interactions.

2.4 Tailoring for a better Guest Experience

Verbal and non-verbal communication play a fundamental role in shaping the guest experience positively. But, as discussed in the previous chapter, many communication challenges arise in hospitality. Misunderstandings, conflicts, and uncomfortable situations can happen as most staff-guest interactions are intercultural, intergenerational, and interlingual. There is a true opportunity to adapt this communication to suit each guest's unique background and eventually enhance guest experience and satisfaction. "*Everyone reads the situation in the light of their own world*" (D'Iribarne et al., 2022). This quote recognizes that each guest brings a unique worldview. According to D'Iribarne (2022), any type of communication, seen or heard, does not have the same identical meaning for everyone. Every person comes with their own culture, language, values, and life experiences. Understanding that they bring their own "*world*" into the interaction should encourage staff members to approach their verbal and non-verbal communication with curiosity, flexibility, and empathy. It could help create a sense of comfort, respect, and connection.

The challenges and obstacles that can interfere with the effectiveness of the staff's verbal and non-verbal communication were explored in chapter one of this literature review. It was said that they can lead to misunderstandings but the direct consequences it may have on guests' experience and satisfaction should also be underlined. Indeed, if a client do not receive the information they need or do but in an inaccurate way, it will create frustration for them. They will eventually feel neglected, and disconnected and also lose faith in the employees. It will finally cause a state of discontentment and dissatisfaction (Kamal Bahrain et al., 2023). In this article, they give as an example the "*industry-specific*" jargon which can lead to confusion. For instance, it can happen when a receptionist says to a guest: "Due to our high turnover rate, we cannot give you a room upgrade". The word "turnover" has a precise meaning in hospitality that might not be known by everyone which can confuse the guest.

Solutions can be thought to avoid any dissatisfaction and on the contrary increase satisfaction to give a better experience to the guests. As meeting the customers' needs is a priority, tailoring the service as much as possible for each of them can be very beneficial. A **personalized service** in hospitality can be defined as a psychological and emotional concept that aims to make the guest feel unique and understood (Verma & Waghela, 2022). There is not only one way to do it but the most important is to adapt the service delivered to individual guests needs and behaviors. Studies have shown a positive relationship between personalized service and guest satisfaction (Zhang, 2018; Yun & Hanson, 2020). Indeed, the staff must pay attention to their clients, person after person, to achieve the highest level of satisfaction possible. It aligns with the Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973). It develops the idea that interpersonal relationships develop in layers, just like an onion. The staff can "*peel the onion*" by engaging in deeper, more meaningful interactions with guests. It is a balance of personalization and respect which can help build trust and overall enhance the guest experience while avoiding superficial and transactional exchanges. The staff can do so by tailoring their communication style to the guests.

Furthermore, as guests can have many different cultural backgrounds it can also be very important to be aware and gain knowledge about their different codes, norms, and values to enhance any staff-guest interaction. This is where "**Cultural Sensitivity**" comes along. It can be defined as the "*ability to recognize, respect, and accommodate cultural differences*" (Gumaste et al., 2024). The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1986) presents six

stages during the development of a greater intercultural competence. At first, one's culture is seen as central and as a baseline. It corresponds to the “*ethnocentric*” stages: denial, defense, and minimization. Then there is a shift toward the “*ethnorelative*” stages where cultural differences are recognized, respected, and navigated with precautions. It happens through: acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Bennett, 2017). Being able to follow this whole process requires strong cultural intelligence (CQ) which corresponds to “*an individual's capacity to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings*” (Ang et al., 2007). Findings show a positive relationship between CQ and guest satisfaction. It helps the employees navigate cultural differences which in turn provides fulfilling service experiences (Muir, 2024). In short, cultural sensitivity and intelligence are crucial elements to enhance staff-guest interactions, where both verbal and non-verbal communication play key roles. Communication needs to stay flexible and adaptable to respect the needs and expectations of everyone.

In addition, as Maya Angelou famously said: “*People will forget what you said, forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel*”. This quote highlights an important point that can be made about **emotional sensitivity** and **intelligence**. Emotional intelligence (EI) can be defined as the skills that help people understand and manage emotions in themselves and others to succeed (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In a bibliographic analysis, more than 80 empirical studies, published in academic journals, were found to be directly linking emotional intelligence and hospitality (Oliveira & Sohn, 2025). This proves that it is a well-researched and relevant factor in understanding and improving service quality. There is again a positive relationship between EI and guests' overall satisfaction (Lam et al., 2021). Elements such as active listening or empathy, part of EI, are often mentioned in correlation with the guest experience in hospitality (Min et al., 2015). Active listening is crucial to know how and when to respond to customer complaints, to make them feel heard, and to give them a voice (Min et al., 2021). First, the message is being heard, then understood. That message is remembered and interpreted through verbal and non-verbal cues. It is evaluated in relation to the context. Finally, feedback and responses are given with words and body language also (McCain & Marsh, n.d.). Empathy or the “*ability to understand and share the feelings of another person, involving both cognitive and affective components*” (Davis, 1983), can reduce guests' anger and dissatisfaction by showing that the staff understands their complaint or frustration (Min et al., 2015). Overall, emotional intelligence and sensitivity emphasize the need for hospitality staff to tailor their communication to each guest's emotions to create meaningful, satisfying experiences.

In conclusion, having efficient verbal and non-verbal communication in hospitality is very important in relation to satisfaction but strategies can be thought about to make the experience even better. Communication needs to stay as flexible as possible but also adapt to the guests' needs and backgrounds. Personalization, CQ, EI, and sensitivity have been showing positive impacts on customers. Not only do they enhance the experience but they also reduce the risks of misunderstandings, conflicts, and dissatisfaction.

This chapter presented guest satisfaction with more than a marketing definition. It was shown as an active social and symbolic exchange between staff and guests where mental imaginaries help build expectations. When these are met or positively transformed the experience is enhanced. After giving these definitions and explanations, the different factors influencing satisfaction were tackled. Indeed, even if tangible factors are key, there is a gradual switch towards more intangible importance. This is where verbal and non-verbal communication can be directly linked to guest satisfaction and experience. These elements have a positive relationship but it does not end here. Challenges can be reduced and satisfaction increased when this VC and NVC are tailored to the needs and backgrounds of the guests. With this foundation, it could be interesting to look at how these communication dynamics unfold in the specific context of hostels. They indeed offer a unique environment for face-to-face interactions. The next chapter of the literature review will explore this idea and it will finally focus particularly on the city of Amsterdam, where hostel experiences are shaped by vibrant diversity.

Chapter 3: Hostels & the Amsterdam Pulse

3.1 Hostels as a Unique Social Concept with a Distinctive Communication Style

Nowadays, the hospitality industry cannot be limited to simply hotels. For the past decades, various types of accommodation have emerged and keep growing more and more. One of these developing categories is the Hostels. They are commonly defined as low-priced accommodations that offer, to young people traveling individually or in a group, shared spaces such as dormitories, bathrooms, kitchens, and living areas (Bhatia, 2002). Today, this traditional

definition could be considered slightly outdated since new concepts keep developing and also fall under the umbrella term “hostel”. For instance, there are Capsule Hostels with private sleeping pods or Hybrid Hostels that combine dorms and private rooms to welcome guests from different tourist segments.

Historically speaking, the very first youth hostel was created by Richard Schirrmann in 1909 in Altena, Germany. His initial goal was to offer young people, especially students, affordable accommodation while they were on pedagogic trips. To do so, he turned an empty classroom into a dormitory and opened his first hostel in a former school. The purpose was not only economical, Schirrmann wanted to promote cultural exchanges through travel. As his innovation was a success he decided to create an association in 1919, the German Youth Hostel Association, to support the development of more hostels. It then became a movement that expanded nationally and internationally (Simpson, 2017). Richard Schirrmann’s vision shaped the hostels everyone knows today, emphasizing accessible accommodation with social interaction and cultural exchanges.

While cost remains a key factor, many travelers are increasingly drawn to hostels for the **social experiences** they offer. A “*stay in a youth hostel is a means to an end, and an end in itself*” (Sun et al., 2014). This quote illustrates how hostels serve not only as an accommodation but as something deeper, with a wider meaning. When someone decides to stay in a hostel the choice is not only practical but also symbolic. Unlike traditional hotels, hostels foster a sense of community through shared spaces, communal activities, and an environment designed to encourage social interaction among guests (Murphy, 2001). Each accommodation type has its own sociability, a “*micro-society*” with specific structure, rituals, and ideals (Amirou, 1995). Hostels, in particular, stand out for having a unique social environment that encourages interactions between guests or between the staff and guests. Furthermore, the main criteria applied to people during the hiring process in hostels are the following: be young, be open, take initiative, be sociable, be similar to the guests, and be interested in communicating with them (Borovskaya & Dedova, 2014).

As mentioned, hostels are considered places fostering a sense of community. Their layouts made with the presence of common areas are prone to social exchanges and interactions. These atypical characteristics directly impact the verbal and non-verbal communication types being

used by hostel employees. Indeed, while privacy is limited, greater emphasis is placed on communication and the style was proven more “*informal*” than any other type of commercial accommodation (Borovskaya & Dedova, 2014). A hostel receptionist might say, “Hey guys, welcome! Grab a drink and make yourself at home!” whereas a hotel receptionist would say, “Good evening, sir. Here is your room key”. The distinguished communication style used in hostels seems to be deeply influenced by space and context. The anthropologist Edward T. Hall worked on the perception and use of space in social interactions (1966). His theory of proxemics analyzes how people create personal spaces around them, which in turn shapes their expectations for how social spaces should be organized. This theory helps explain why, in hostels, the boundaries between personal and social space tend to be more flexible, which can encourage spontaneous conversations. This unique verbal and non-verbal communication style comes from the layout but also from what people have in mind when they think about this type of accommodation. The perceived brand personality traits of hostels, also known as the characteristics people imagine of a brand if it were human, are usually “*friendliness*” and “*easy-goingness*” (Sun et al., 2014). This is why verbal and non-verbal communication tends to be more casual, approachable, and inclusive compared to other types of accommodation.

To echo chapter two, the few studies on guest satisfaction and experience in hostels highlighted the staff and their behavior as the main factor. Indeed, studies such as Taskov et al. (2014) emphasize that hostel staff are central figures in guest satisfaction. Their competence, friendliness, and helpfulness were given “*marked importance*” in guests’ evaluations of their stay” (Lima & Vicente, 2016). These qualities go beyond technical and practical service delivery. They reflect how staff communicate and connect with guests on a human level. Customers are purposely looking for communication, which is very important to them (Borovskaya & Dedova, 2014). This underlines the correlation between verbal and non-verbal communication and hostel guest experience in hostels.

After explaining the hostels’ definition, history, social environment, and distinct communication style, it can be interesting to understand how and why they emerged and continue to grow in the hospitality landscape. This lens offers valuable insight into travelers evolving expectations and the increasing demand for authentic, social, and experience-driven accommodation.

3.2 The Changing Face of Hostels: Economic Drivers & New Travel Trends

The development and growing demand for budget accommodations can be attributed to the fact that the world has experienced numerous economic crises and decreases in purchasing power, which have lowered people's ability to spend large amounts of money on tourism and leisure. Consequently, this shift has encouraged the creation of low-cost tourism (Lima & Vicente, 2016). Because of such events and their consequences, people are scared sometimes (Rather et al., 2022) to spend large amounts of money and cannot afford extensive and expensive travel. This **economic factor** re-shaped people's priorities and financial abilities to travel. This argument is usually the first that comes to mind when mentioning the emergence and growth of hostels or any other affordable accommodations. But it cannot be limited to it.

Not only do people have a more limited budget for travel, but they are also ready to “*compromise*” the amount spent on accommodation to focus on their **experiences** and all the expenditures linked to it (Park et al., 2019). Younger people still remain the major hostels' targets as their budget is usually limited. They look for affordable places that will offer them everything they need while allowing them to spend the rest of their budget on other elements and activities (Moisa, 2010). This shift towards experiences, lifestyle, or sociability is motivated by a generational evolution. Indeed, Millennials (people born in the 80s and 90s) and Generation Z (people born in the late 90s and early 00s) are the main actors in this redefinition of travel motivations. According to Ramgade and Kumar (2021), these generations prefer to stay in hostels because they want to prioritize social interactions and shared adventures. They want to meet new people while they travel and this goes before having the most luxurious hotel room. Young Europeans who follow the traveling trend of Interrail also value freedom, flexibility, spontaneity, and meaningful social experiences (Hildesheim, 2022). These people who travel through European capitals by train often stay in hostels, places that follow what they are looking for. Meeting the needs of the current generations is crucial because they are the travelers of today and the travelers of tomorrow.

In addition, COVID-19 also contributed to the evolution of traveling trends and motivations towards experience and sociability. Indeed, social distancing and lockdown measures have pushed people to socialize and reconnect with their friends and relatives (European Travel

Commission, 2020). Hostels, with their communal environments and emphasis on interaction, are well-positioned to meet these post-pandemic desires.

As mentioned in 3.1, today classic and traditional definitions of hostels are starting to be outdated. They cannot be limited to cheap dorms with basic amenities. They are undergoing a constant evolution to try and align with what the travelers seek, with their new travel motivations. Instead of saying that it is a low-priced accommodation that offers shared spaces such as dormitories, bathrooms, kitchens, and living areas (Bhatia, 2002); it could be defined as an offer of lodging options with communal facilities, at an affordable price, in a unique social environment (Ramgade & Kumar, 2021). In 2025, there are modern hostels with unique designs, layouts, and amenities that deliver more than basic services: they offer an experience. While the definition of hostels has evolved, the type of guests also did. For a long time, backpackers and solo travelers were the typical hostel customers but it cannot be limited to them anymore. New segments are joining the market. For instance, the “*flashpackers*” seek adventure and social experiences with a higher spending capacity because they prefer more comfortable accommodations and modern amenities (Hannam & Diekmann, 2010). This is just one specific example, but increasingly, different age groups such as business travelers, digital nomads, and families, among others, are also choosing hostels as their preferred place to stay.

To conclude, the growth of hostels in the tourism market has been and is still driven by economic factors, changing travel motivations, and the emergence of new customer segments. Budget-friendly accommodations are developed and are usually chosen because of financial factors but it is not the only argument. Travelers, especially young people, chose them for their social atmospheres because they prioritize experiences and interactions. Travel motivations and trends completely shifted away from hostels that only provide minimal and cheap services to fulfill guests’ basic needs.

To reduce the scope of this study on verbal and non-verbal communication in hostels, I decided to focus on those located in the city of Amsterdam. It is a global and multicultural hub that creates a unique setting where guests’ expectations and experiences connect with the role of hostel staff in influencing guest satisfaction. It can help understand the dynamics at play in a specific context and environment. The next two subparts will provide an exploratory review of

Amsterdam as a destination. These sections will tackle the city's global and multicultural dynamics, as well as its unique hospitality landscape and fit for hostels.

3.3 Amsterdam as a Global Multicultural Destination

Through time, the Netherlands' capital, Amsterdam, turned from a small urban trading center into a prominent tourism city and **destination** (Gerritsma, 2019). In 2023, more than 20 million international tourists set foot on Dutch territory (UNWTO, n.d.). The global and international appeal of Amsterdam comes mainly from the historical and cultural heritage it carries. The presence of world-renowned museums such as Van Gogh, The Rijksmuseum, and Anne Frank House attracts millions of art and history enthusiasts every year. Together, these three cornerstones welcomed more than 5 million visitors in 2023 (Rijksmuseum, Van Gogh Museum, & Anne Frank House, 2024). These names truly resonate internationally. Furthermore, the unique architecture along the 17th-century canal ring is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site making it a must-sight-seeing site for millions of people (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). The famous canal houses and vibrant facades cannot be missed as it seems to be highlighted on every single Instagram post mentioning the city of Amsterdam. Various events and celebrations also constitute a true tourist-magnet. One day a year up to 2 million people are covered and dressed in orange to celebrate the King's Birthday (City of Amsterdam, 2025). For a few days, each October, Amsterdam turns into a live music scene counting more than 200 venues and around 3.000 artists during the Amsterdam Dance Event (ADE Website, 2024). These elements and events truly build Amsterdam's unique identity and place it as a strong touristic destination globally for many different audiences.

In addition, the Venice of the North appears as a **cultural mosaïc**. International visitors come from all over the world. The overnight visits in 2023 were made by people from Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, and "*other countries*" (NTBC, 2024). All these guests make Amsterdam a pluricultural destination. Every day, different cultures converge in the city's streets, languages are superimposed, traditions follow each other, and social behaviors come together.

Not only do the visitors bring this multicultural aspect to Amsterdam, but it is also the many citizens living in the city. Not less than 174 different nationalities have been registered by the town hall last year (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2024). It indicates a remarkable level of diversity that mixes cultures, languages, cuisines, and traditions. This idea could be linked with the concept of a melting pot: *“Like metals melted together at great heat, the melting of several cultures will produce a new compound, one that has great strength and other combined advantages”* (Maddern, 2013). This metaphor helps illustrate the blending of various cultures in Amsterdam. It creates a fusion that does not necessarily erase individual identities, on the contrary, it can offer a unique cultural mosaic, a cultural landscape with strengths, vibrance, and dynamism. Besides the many nationalities co-living in Amsterdam, together they constitute a culturally rich workforce.

Furthermore, it is interesting to see Amsterdam's approach to multiculturalism. Some European cities, including Amsterdam, saw a shift in their approach to cultural diversity. Years ago, *“multiculturalism”* focused on the recognition and preservation of distinct ethnic identities by allowing immigrant groups to be culturally autonomous but it was quickly considered as social segregation. This is the reason why some cities also decided to emphasize integration and social cohesion (Entzinger & Scholten, 2014). For example, the role of the English language in the Netherlands is a good indicator. Dutch society is famous for producing very high English proficiency. According to the world's largest study on English skills integrating the results of 2.1 million people in 116 different countries and regions, the Netherlands ranked first globally and Amsterdam also ranked first in terms of Capital City Scores (EF, 2024). This bilingual education and socialization does not only come from the educational system but also from a high level of exposure outside of classrooms, in society, and through media especially (Verspoor et al., 2015). This exposition could be linked to the fact that most movies are released in their original language version. They are very rarely dubbed in Dutch. They only have subtitles, which already gives a strong exposure to foreign languages and English in particular as many blockbusters come from English-speaking cinema industries.

Amsterdam is not only a global and multicultural destination, it is a place where hospitality and hostels fit well. The city's vibrant, diverse, and youth-friendly atmosphere aligns perfectly with the social and experiential nature of hostels. With a strong flow of international visitors and a youth travel culture, hostels have become a key part of Amsterdam's hospitality landscape. In

this context, the way hostel staff verbally and non-verbally communicate can take a central role in shaping guest satisfaction and experience.

3.4 Amsterdam's Hospitality Ecosystem: a Fit for Hostels

With so many visitors roaming the streets, the hospitality industry's role is crucial to ensure that they have places to sleep and refuel. From the little café to the prestigious Hilton hotel, the panel is varied. It is as much part of the experience as its canals and cultural landmarks. Amsterdam possesses around 500 commercial accommodations: 41 991 rooms and 92 329 sleeping places (CBS, 2025). These extensive hospitality infrastructures include varied lodging options from hotels, motels, boarding houses, apartments with hotel services, bed & breakfasts to **hostels**. It also offers different price ranges from budget-friendly to luxury hotels. A landscape of accommodations helps meet the needs of all types of guests: business, leisure, families, students, etc.

Furthermore, the figures mentioned in a report gathering data collected on international visits to the Netherlands (NBTC, 2024) demonstrate where Amsterdam positions itself regarding the hospitality industry. Firstly, in 2022, 13.3 million international guests made 39.8 million overnight stays. 81% of these visitors chose regular commercial accommodation, which excludes privately rented accommodations, secondary residences, boats, and staying at acquaintances' houses. 77% of the overnight visits were located in the province of North Holland and a majority of these stays took place in Amsterdam. It highlights the high demand for accommodation and the need for well-developed infrastructures. Hospitality services are not just a bonus, they are essential to the city's tourism ecosystem because they can welcome high volumes. It does not only count places to sleep but also restaurants, bars, cafés as well as entertainment venues.

Economically speaking, hospitality and catering contribute directly and add economic value. The international visitors, mentioned above, spent 8.1 billion euros on their stay in the Netherlands and 2.0 billion euros was exclusively on hospitality and catering. Hence hospitality represents a substantial share of the total spent, a core component of the tourism economy. Beyond overnight stays, short-term visitors from abroad and neighboring countries who will most likely rely on catering services also participate in this additional economic value as 10.4 billion euros were

generated in 2023 (NBTC, 2024). Overall, 20.4 billion was the total international tourism receipts (UNWTO, n.d.). All these figures highlight the role of hospitality and hostels as vital in creating such revenue, they are key pillars in the tourist economy.

In addition, 75% of these overnight visits were motivated by holidays and recreation, 19% visited family or friends, and 5% came for business (NBTC, 2024). These percentages show that most travel motivations are recreational, and oriented towards enjoyment and pleasure. It aligns well with the guests and purpose of hostels: affordable, social, and designed for leisure travelers.

While no exact report or statistics are available on the hostel market of Amsterdam, Europe has been dominating this sector by possessing a market share of 35.98% in 2023 (Grand View Research, 2024). Given that this city is one of Europe's top tourist and holiday destinations (EBD, 2025), it suggests a strong presence and relevance of the hostel sector. Also, the majority of overnight visitors are quite young. 41% of them are between 18 and 34 years old (NBTC, 2024) hence the importance of these accommodation types. On the Hostelworld website, more than sixty places are listed under the "hostel" category. The most famous chains and brands are: ClinkNOORD, The Flying Pig Downtown, Generator Amsterdam, or even Stayokay Amsterdam Vondelpark.

In short, it can be said that Amsterdam possesses a diverse and well-developed hospitality landscape. At the same time, it also supports the growth and presence of hostels as a key accommodation option for many travelers. They are particularly well-suited to the city's predominantly young and recreationally motivated visitors. This environment sets the stage for exploring the role of hostel staff's verbal and non-verbal communication and its influence on guest satisfaction. It provides a unique context and lens to study this important aspect of the hospitality industry.

To conclude, this third chapter aimed at reducing the scope of studying verbal and non-verbal communication during staff-guests face-to-face interactions in a specific context: from hostels in general to the ones located in Amsterdam. The first subpart helped present the general definition of hostels as well as their historical story. Then, their layouts and characteristics were proven to foster a truly social environment where everyone can and is

pushed to interact and communicate with each other. It led to the exploration of what makes verbal and non-verbal communication in hostels so singular and distinctive. The second section studied the growth of hostels in the tourism industry. It was and is still driven by economic factors but not only. Travelers' motivations have deeply evolved towards experiences that encouraged hostels to develop. Their typical definition and core concept is also increasingly modernizing and it attracts a wider range of travelers. The role of the staff's verbal and non-verbal communication is all the more relevant in a hospitality landscape that evolves and keeps growing. The third and fourth sub-parts of this chapter reduced the scope to a precise location and city where tourism and hostels can thrive: Amsterdam. It appears to be a global and multicultural destination where hospitality as well as hostels are key players. This city sets the stage for exploring this topic in a dynamic and diverse real-world setting.

General Conclusion of Part 1 & Reformulation

The very first part of this Master's first-year dissertation constitutes a literature review that directly explores the core concepts present in my topic. The first chapter defined communication in its verbal and non-verbal forms, showing how these channels are essential in hospitality settings where interpersonal interaction contributes to the guest experience. Then, guest satisfaction was examined not only as a marketing outcome but also as a dynamic and co-created social process where communication is a key driver. In addition, the literature highlighted that when communication is tailored to the needs, expectations, and varied backgrounds of guests, misunderstandings are reduced, and the experience is improved. Hence elements like emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and active listening emerged as strategies for obtaining more effective staff-guest interactions. After building these foundations, the review explored hostels as a unique form of commercial accommodation with sociability, communication, affordability, and evolving travelers' expectations.

Furthermore, the literature made it clear that hostels in Amsterdam represent an interesting context for the study of the staff's verbal and non-verbal communication dynamics in depth. Therefore, Part One establishes a solid basis for the empirical aspect of this study. It linked together communication, hospitality, hostels, and the precise setting of Amsterdam. It prepares the ground for analyzing: *How does the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication used by hostel staff during face-to-face interactions in Amsterdam influence guest satisfaction?*

This research question has not always been exactly formulated this way. Indeed, the initial and very first formulation of the research question was: “How do verbal and non-verbal communication used by hostel staff in Amsterdam influence guest satisfaction?”. It provided a broad foundation for the study but the literature review and exploration helped see that refinements were needed. First, communication can have different forms (digital, written, spoken, etc.) and not being more specific about the one I want to study can create confusion. I chose to concentrate specifically on face-to-face interactions, the spoken verbal language, and non-verbal communication of the staff. This is why the mention of “during face-to-face interactions” was added to bring more clarity. The second modification was to add “the quality” before mentioning verbal and non-verbal communication. The literature explored that not all communications have the same impact because some cues matter more than others. Hence, integrating the “quality” helps examine how the effectiveness and nuances of communication influence guest satisfaction.

Building on the insights from this literature review and exploration, the next part of this dissertation will present the problem statement by identifying the gaps in the literature, the contributions, and potential outcomes. Then, the different theories chosen to constitute the blueprint and framework of this study will be defined and explained in relation to the topic. Finally, all the hypotheses to be tested will be introduced in detail.

PART 2: PROBLEM STATEMENT, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, HYPOTHESES

After reviewing the literature, it appears even clearer to me that studying the role of verbal and non-verbal communication on guest satisfaction in hostels is important and would bring an addition to the world of hospitality, sociology, and research.

Chapter 4: Setting the Scene - The Problem Statement

Hostels have been gaining more and more popularity. They have been showing cultural and touristic importance. Even with this evolution academic research continues to focus mainly and mostly on hotels while leaving the interpersonal richness of hostels in the blind spot. The role of verbal and non-verbal communication remains underexplored even though it has been proven to have a crucial role in shaping guest experiences. Therefore, the goal of this study is to explore how the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication by hostel staff in Amsterdam influences guest satisfaction. It contributes to enriching the understanding of staff-guest interactions as well as offering practical improvements in training and management.

4.1 Gaps in Literature

First, it seems that hostels do not share the same spotlight as traditional hotels or luxury ones. Despite the rapid growth and global expansion of the hostel sector in recent years, the interest of researchers in questions related to the specific characteristics and dynamics feels limited. It could be as if it was the black sheep of commercial accommodations. As a result, there is a lack of in-depth studies that explore staff communication in the hostel industry which truly limits the understanding of the factors that influence guest satisfaction in budget accommodations. The non-verbal cues such as body language or facial expressions in the hostel environment do not have detailed analysis.

Many academic papers tackle hostels by mostly referring to the primary tourists going there as “backpackers”. It perpetuates a stereotype that limits the scope of research. Nowadays, the term “hostel” has become an umbrella concept that attracts many people from different age groups, travel motivations, and backgrounds who prefer this type of budget accommodation. Such a narrow lens does not fully capture the expectations of modern hostel guests. In addition, hostels

welcome a highly diverse clientele yet there is still a gap in the literature reviewing how cultural differences influence communication and guest satisfaction.

In most of the studies, guest satisfaction is looked at in star and prestigious hotels but it lacks an angle focusing on the budget category of hospitality. When the different factors of satisfaction are being measured verbal and non-verbal communication are under-highlighted compared to price, cleanliness, and location. Marketing and numbers take over the actual guests' emotions and perceptions. Usually, the staff is mentioned as a key factor but what makes the staff stand out is not dug out, the studies stay at the surface.

These examples show that there are existing academic blind spots which raises the problem and proves why this study is needed.

4.2 Contributions to Sociology and Hospitality

Sociological studies are all about being curious about social phenomena to understand how societies function, how they come into being, how they live, how they build relationships, and how they evolve. As humans we are socialized, we belong to a society. We are also sociable, meaning we aspire to communicate with people around us. Having this in mind, it can be said that this study will contribute to deepening the understanding of interpersonal communication in service environments, especially when it comes to guest-staff dynamics, in the under-studied setting of hostels.

Choosing a sociological lens will build a new bridge between the hospitality sector and social interactions. It will demonstrate that the service delivered by the staff goes beyond the mere completion of operational tasks. Each hotel or hostel has a culture, an identity that defines them. Looking in detail at the way staff communicates can help understand the means used to share and maintain this identity in an extremely competitive landscape.

Guest satisfaction and experience have mostly been looked at in a market where numbers take the lead, where everything is more black or white. It leaves behind any emotional or rational

dimension. It stays at the surface without digging deeper into a very social phenomenon and context.

4.3 Possible Practical Outcomes

Answering the question: *How does the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication used by hostel staff during face-to-face interactions in Amsterdam influence guest satisfaction?*
Can bring a significant contribution to the world of hospitality and service industry.

Studying such a topic could bring interesting findings to hostel managers who wish to enhance their staff communication as well as their guests' experience. In the end, a higher satisfaction related to verbal and non-verbal communication would help polish the hostel's reputation through more favorable guest-staff interactions leading to word-of-mouth recommendations, customer reviews, and loyal guests.

Furthermore, focusing on verbal and non-verbal communication could be a way to enrich, and tailor **training** to help the workforce of hospitality, the actors of service. Employees working in budget accommodations deserve as much importance and meticulousness applied to their soft skills and competencies as any other type of hotel. Even if the atmosphere that emanates from hostels may appear to most people as relaxed and casual, it does not mean that certain communication codes and rules cannot be applied and followed to contribute to a better level of guest satisfaction. In practice, it can allow the creation of staff training programs to focus on the most impactful communication methods in terms of body language, tone of voice, and clear language. These programs can also address cultural differences in communication styles to raise awareness and sensitivity while reducing potential miscommunications. It would constitute a true opportunity to ameliorate intercultural contact. Many training programs focus exclusively on technical service skills. But thanks to such social skills training, employees could personalize even more their communication style depending on the guests they have in front of them. The emotional and relational aspects of guest satisfaction will not be neglected. This can help create a welcoming atmosphere where staff and guests can connect. They would be ready for any eventuality with a more positive and empathetic attitude while not letting stressful or conflictual

situations make them lose their countenance. With proper training, staff's well-being could be drastically improved, avoiding risks of burnout and turnover.

In an industry so tense under the pressure of **competition**, standing out is crucial. Hence hostels that work on bettering their communication practices could positively impact their reputation for service delivery and guest experience. It would lead to higher reviews, bookings, and later potential loyalty. Good interactions between staff and guests could give hostels a true competitive advantage.

This problem statement has highlighted critical gaps in the literature concerning the role of verbal and non-verbal communication in shaping guest satisfaction in the hostel industry. Investigating this topic appears very relevant to deepen the understanding of staff-guest interactions in sociology while offering practical implications for the hostel industry. To move forward, the next chapter will present the theoretical framework that can underpin this research.

Chapter 5: Theoretical Lenses

To further understand the role of verbal and non-verbal communication used by staff in guest experience during interactions, it is essential to establish a theoretical framework. It serves as a lens and advocacy perspective, meaning that it supports what is being said (Creswell, 2018). It can be considered as the “*blueprint*” that draws the foundations that will guide any researchers along the way (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). This being said, the theoretical framework is one of the most important aspects of writing a dissertation, linking all the parts together. This is why choosing the most adapted one is critical.

To begin with I would like to enumerate my hypotheses. They are designed to guide my investigation into the specific communication strategies used by hostel staff in Amsterdam and their influence on guest satisfaction. By mentioning these hypotheses here, I can provide reading clarity and understanding of the link that will be made with the theories.

H1: Guests’ pre-existing travel imaginaries shape their expectations of hostel staff

communication, and when these are met or positively transformed, satisfaction increases.

H2: Clear, polite, and friendly verbal communication, combined with positive non-verbal cues like smiling and open body language, help meet guest expectations and increase satisfaction.

H3: Adapting communication to align with guests' backgrounds and social identities increases satisfaction.

Then, the theories that were selected for this study are the following: Amirou's and t'Felt's Imaginaries of Travel, Goffman's Dramaturgy, Symbolic Interactionism, and Communication Accommodation Theory. Below I will carefully define each theory one by one and link them to my three different hypotheses and research topic.

5.1 Imaginary Travel vs. Real Travel (Amirou, 1995; t'Felt, 2018)

When people travel they usually have preconceived ideas of what their journey will look like. They dream about it, fantasize, and build expectations until their trip actually starts and becomes real.

5.1.1 Core Definition

The core definition of travel imaginaries that will be developed below is drawn from a combination of three key writings: Amirou (1995). *Imaginaire touristique et sociabilités du voyage*; Amirou (2000). *Imaginaire du tourisme culturel*; and t'Felt (2018). *Le voyage des Danois et le tourisme des Chinois. Mobilité : entre l'imaginaire et le réel*. They delve into how these mental constructs shape the traveler's experiences and expectations.

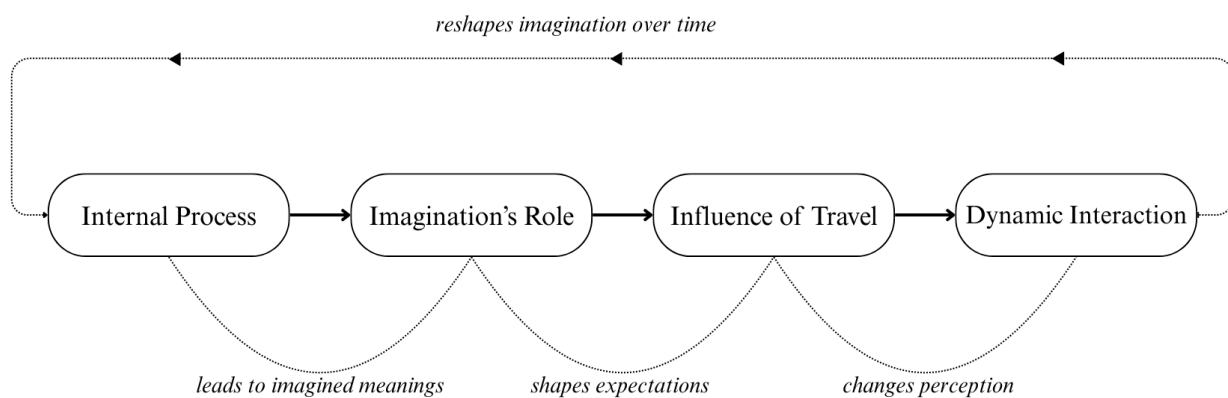
The **imaginaries** are the mental images, symbols, and figurative representations created in travelers' minds (Amirou, 1995). They are the blueprints, the foundations that guide expectations and perceptions. Imaginaries are composed of **images** that can be individual or collective (t'Felt, 2018). The collective ones are shared by a group of people, a society, or a community. For

instance, when travelers come to visit France they will usually have visual or non-visual stereotypical symbols anchored in their minds: wine, cheese, romanticism, sophistication, etc. These are often shaped by media, popular culture, tourism marketing, or historical narratives. They are transmitted, like a legacy, from one culture to another, crossing social classes and societies (Amirou, 1995). Groups' identities are created through these communal representations, which also affect how people view and perceive others and themselves.

On the other hand, individual mental images are subjective and vary from one person to another. They are usually shaped by personal experiences and emotions. It also depends on the contextual background and the cultural values created during socialization and throughout life in general. One person might see Paris as romantic and magical while others may see it as too crowded and overpriced. Then, it can be said that imaginaries are formed through the combination of both shared cultural or societal perceptions (collective imaginaries) and personal, subjective experiences (individual imaginaries).

The travel imaginaries are the link between an individual and the outside world. It does not only correspond to an external stimulus but it is an actual poetic creation that transforms neutral elements, and places into true destinations (Durand, 1992; Amirou, 1995). Things that seem ordinary or mundane in reality are transformed into meaningful and exciting destinations in the mind through imagination. It means that imaginaries let people travel mentally since they build and experience whole journeys in their minds without physically moving. Furthermore, this mental exercise of creation can be divided into three temporal moments: past, present, and future (t'Felt, 2018). Indeed, the past corresponds to everything before the trip, the present is the moment when the trip takes place, and the future underlines all that come once the journey ends. Before travel starts, people will build their expectations on the individual and collective images already formed and integrated inside their minds. During the trip, when it becomes real, people will go through a sensory experience that will reshape their preconceived ideas. Lastly, they will collect images or objects in anticipation of their return to construct the narrative and memories. This ongoing process illustrates that imaginaries are not static but are constantly fractured, reshaped, and redefined throughout the travel experience. The following diagram illustrates this dynamic relationship. It highlights how individuals mentally construct their expectations, how these are influenced by physical travel, and how new experiences reshape future perceptions.

Figure 4: A Dynamic Representation of Travel Imaginaries⁴



This model confronts imaginary travel and “*real*” travel, expectation and reality. This happens once the physical body moves away from its natural habitat. Every time it happens new images are created, “*lived images*”. These new creations or re-creations come in contact with the imagined ones. Two options are possible, either these images are associated or opposed. In the first case, the traveler will feel a deep sense of fulfillment because what they had imagined aligns perfectly with the physical reality, what they had in mind is reinforced by real-world perception. This alignment can amplify a feeling of understanding, or emotional satisfaction. On the contrary, if the reality is contradictory it can create an effect of surprise, disillusionment, or even a reevaluation of the expectations. “*Knowing stabilizes*” and “*not knowing destabilizes*” (t’Felt, 2018). This can lead to a feeling of discomfort. Of course, not everything has to be negative. People could also see it as a new opportunity to integrate news insights while reshaping their perception. When the imagined and the real clash the traveler will be forced to construct a new meaning. In short, it can be said that travel becomes not just a physical activity but also an emotional and intellectual experience, a playground for the imagination. Touristic destinations have an allegorical dimension (Amirou, 2000). They turn into a combination of tangible physical interaction and symbolic narratives, myths, representations, and social expectations.

Now that the core definition of imaginary travel versus real travel has been explained, I will link this model back to the topic of verbal and non-verbal communication in hostels to justify why it is a coherent choice to integrate into the theoretical framework.

⁴ Own elaboration based on Amirou (1995) and t’Felt (2018)

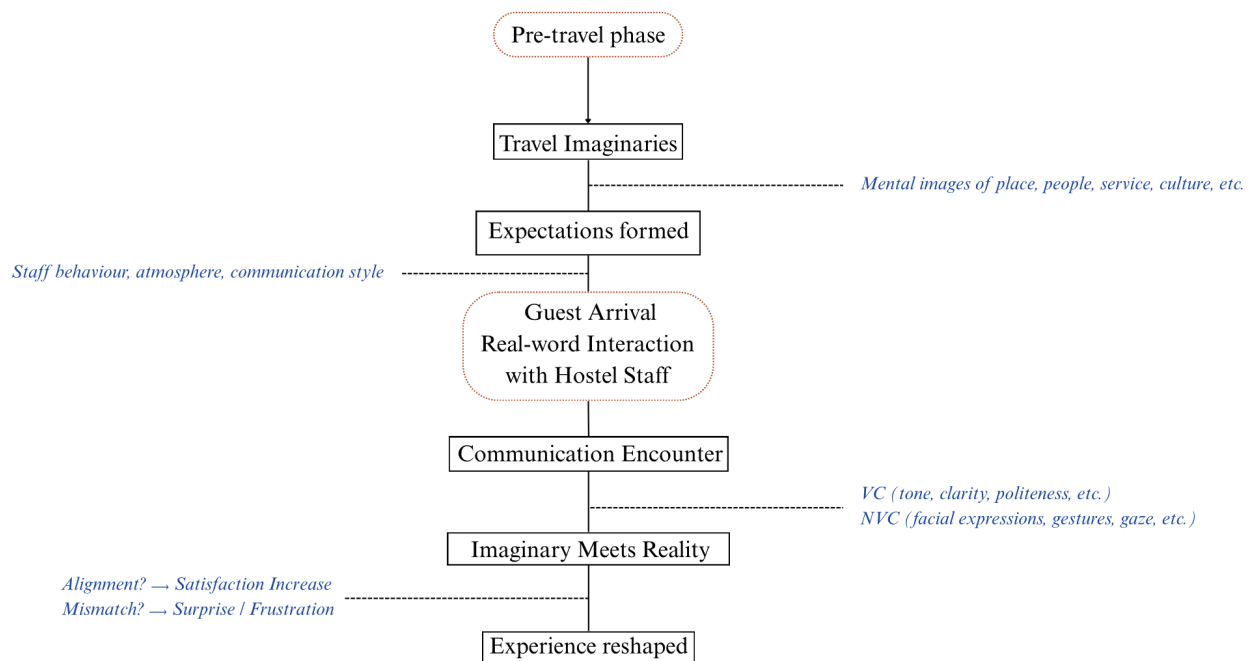
5.1.2 Link to research & Practical implications

First, the Travel Imaginaries Theory is coherent through the way pre-existing expectations are studied. Indeed, when guests arrive in hostels, in Amsterdam, or anywhere else, it can be considered that they arrive with preconceived mental images, individual and collective, of what their hostel experience would look like. It corresponds to a mind map that builds up their anticipation beforehand. These images could be shaped by past experiences in other hostels, by word-of-mouth from a friend, by paid advertising on Instagram, by what one's cultural background makes them think about, etc. It can influence how guests perceive the destination (Amsterdam), the accommodation (hostel), and the interactions they will have with the staff (verbal and non-verbal communication) or the way they will be treated. Moreover as mentioned earlier, the internal process that leads to the creation of images will directly shape guest expectations. For instance, a visitor coming to Amsterdam could have collective thoughts about the city's vibrant tourist scene combined with personal images of an open-minded place with freedom. This might create expectations of a welcoming atmosphere with friendly communication.

When these pre-existing mental images, leading to expectations, align with reality it might result in a positive reaction and emotional experience. If a tourist coming to Amsterdam receives the interaction they expected with the staff it might increase their satisfaction level and enhance their overall experience in the hostel. However, if the opposite phenomenon takes place and the guest receives a service they did not imagine at all it might lead to two scenarios: a pleasing surprise that reshapes their mental images or a feeling of disappointment and frustration. This reflects how expectations can affect the guest's experience and the interpretation of their interactions with the staff.

Furthermore, as verbal and non-verbal communication are part of the interactions, part of the service delivered, it might also come into this equation. Indeed, the communication style can also be part of the symbolic reality guests build before starting their trip.

Figure 5: Interplay Between Travel Imaginaries & Hostel Communication⁵



This diagram offers a visual representation of how the Travel Imaginaries Model could be applied to the question of the positive role of verbal and non-verbal communication used by staff during interactions on guest satisfaction in Amsterdam's hostels. During the pre-travel phase, guests mentally construct images of their future destination and accommodation. It also implies how the staff will communicate and act. It could be shaped by collective cultural imaginaries and personal past experiences. Then, once they arrive at the hostel, what they imagine is confronted with reality during interpersonal interactions. It constitutes the moment when expectations are tested against real life. Verbal and non-verbal communication can contribute to this evaluation making them central in shaping the guest experience. Tone, language, gestures, and eye contact could act as symbolic indicators helping the visitors to know whether what they imagined is being met. Furthermore, when reality confirms the imaginary, satisfaction might increase. On the other hand, if they are unmet, it might lead to surprise, confusion, or frustration which may impact the overall experience.

Amirou and t'Felt not only offer an idea or a concept, but they also offer a way to practically explore pre-travel expectations and identify collective imaginaries of guests coming to hostels in Amsterdam. During interviews, guests can be questioned about their pre-trip

⁵ Own elaboration based on Amirou (1995) and t'Felt (2018)

imaginaries: “Was it what they expected before arrival? What did they hope for? Were they surprised or disappointed by something?”. It could also be interesting to discover which sources shaped what they had in mind, whether it is Instagram, past hostel stays, or even word-of-mouth. Once these pre-constructed images and expectations are collected they can be contrasted with post-stay opinions to check for any alignments or misalignments. In addition, while analyzing guest reviews, narrative patterns can emerge to help identify emotional keywords: “friendly”, “welcoming”, “rude”, etc. Some might also leave reviews that include references to what they expected before arriving: “I thought...”, “It looked...”. Gathering this type of data helps define the collective imaginaries that are built around hostels in Amsterdam. Overall, travel imaginaries can be easily integrated into the study of hostel guest experiences. It will help understand how verbal and non-verbal communication could be a strong tool capable of confirming, disrupting, or transforming a guest's pre-made expectations.

This dialogue between the imagined and the experienced makes the Travel Imaginaries Theory a powerful framework and blueprint to explore how communication practices influence guest satisfaction and perception in Amsterdam hostels. After examining how mental expectations are formed before and during the journey, it is now essential to turn to a complementary, parallel theory, one that focuses on how staff and guests interact in real time. Goffman's theory offers insights to understand how staff and guests “*perform*” in front of each other, through words, gestures, and behavior. It contributes to the revelation of another hidden part of the iceberg while showing how these real-life interactions can confirm or challenge what guests imagined before their trip, further influencing their overall experience.

5.2 Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory & Symbolic Interactionism

To fully understand the dynamics of staff communication, guest satisfaction, and experience in hostels, it is essential to take into consideration the mental framework guests bring with them and also the actual interactions that take place during their stay. Erving Goffman's Theory of Dramaturgy offers a precious lens through which these interactions can be carefully analyzed. The core definition of this theory developed below is drawn from Goffman's key writing: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). In short, he suggests that life is like a play, and we are all actors performing different roles depending on the social context. The way we present ourselves changes based on the audience, setting, and expectations.

5.2.1 Symbolic Interactionism

Before going further with the definition of Goffman's approach it is important to mention the bigger picture, the theory in which it takes part: **Symbolic Interactionism** (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969) Indeed, it is a sociological framework that studies how social interactions create meaning, shape and maintain societies through the use of symbols. It focuses on the micro-level of face-to-face interactions, emphasizing the subjective meaning rather than the objective structure (Carter & Fuller, 2015). In other words, this theory is all about understanding, in detail, how people use language, gestures, or even objects to create and communicate meaning. Then these meanings are analyzed to understand how they shape our perception of the world and our place in it.

For example, when one greets a friend, they might use symbols like a handshake and kind words. These symbols create meaning, which is interpreted by the friend. In turn, the friend responds using their own symbols, which are also interpreted to understand the social meaning of the interaction. This process is a continuous exchange of social meanings and interpretations.

The core concept was first introduced by George Herbert Mead (1934) when he explored how the “*self*” is not something fixed but something built through interaction. He made the difference between the spontaneous self and the social self. But it was only later that the term “*symbolic interactionism*” was coined by Herbert Blumer (1969). He gathered Mead's ideas to put them into a concrete theory and additionally focused on how meaning is created through language and gestures. Then, Erving Goffman (1959) built and developed his own theory on those foundations, using a more metaphorical approach.

5.2.2 Goffman's Social Interactions as Performances

First things first, according to Goffman, social interactions are considered theatrical “*performances*” displayed on the “*front stage*”. They correspond to all the things a person does while they are in front of others which at the same time influences how they are perceived. The way people present themselves while performing is called a “*social front*”, it is what will be

displayed to observers, to their audience. Indeed, this front can be divided into two sub-categories: setting and personal front. The “**setting**” corresponds to all the elements that constitute the physical environment where the interaction happens. Everything identified with the performer themselves is the “**personal front**”. For instance, it can be gender, cultural background, facial expressions, gestures, or even speech patterns. Some are fixed, and do not vary, such as one’s cultural background and others may be more variable like verbal and non-verbal communication. Inside the personal front itself, a distinction is made between appearance and manners. “**Appearance**” is the display of visible traits that give clues about one’s social status, identity, and role in a particular situation. It could be where they work, which event they attend, what is being celebrated, etc. It is generally shown through clothing, physical traits, and grooming.

On the other hand, “**manners**” underlines how the performer behaves or acts interpersonally. For example, it could be how they manage their face, tone, and overall expressions to manifest respectfulness, politeness, and friendliness. All these elements are here to convey signs and meaning. They are the signals that people use to create a certain impression of themselves and interpret others’ roles, status, and intentions in social situations, during these so-called performances.

Goffman (1959) states that an effective and successful performance happens when the setting, appearance, and manners harmonize and align. It creates a seamless interaction that matches societal expectations and creates a positive experience. But when they do not align, when there is a disruption or a mismatch, it will catch the attention of the audience which can lead to a state of confusion or discomfort.

To be the most effective possible and match the potential expectations of its audience, the performer will use a range of strategies that will be part of the “**idealization**” and “**dramatic realization**”. Indeed, as interactions are molded to fit societal norms, standards, and expectations, the person speaking will try to present the best version of themselves possible to be appropriate in context. To do so, they may have to intensify or exaggerate certain behaviors (tone, gestures, gaze, facial expressions, etc.) to make sure they convey what they want to in the context, and physical environment in question. In addition, Goffman (1959) defines the “**expressive control**” that performers must follow. As many social interactions are codified and structured by

standards, some people may be obliged to maintain the same social front, and the same role in certain situations. For that they have to find the balance between the emotions they are feeling inside, “*backstage*”, and the role they take on the front stage. If they do not control these emotional expressions they might break the illusion, and be out of character. All these efforts correspond to what Goffman (1959) refers to as “*impression management*”. People try to control the image they project during social interactions.

Furthermore, the Dramaturgy Theory (1959) highlights what happens when there are discrepancies in the performances, during social interactions. Sometimes the front stage and backstage can clash. If an individual acts in an inconsistent way that does not match with what is expected from them they will fail to manage the impression they wanted to create in the first place. If this is the case, the audience, the observer will lose trust in the performer. They might think it is an inauthentic interaction that does not align with what is normally expected. The audience might feel awkwardness, confusion, or discomfort and it can also lead to misunderstandings. It can be linked to the concept of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), an uncomfortable state where the information received by the audience does not match reality.

5.2.3 Symbolic Interactionism and Dramaturgy with study in Hostels and Practical implications

After laying out the foundations of Symbolic Interactionism and Goffman’s Theory in particular, it is clear that they offer more than a theoretical lens. They also provide a practical framework to help understand interactions in real life. It appears to be very relevant to the question of verbal and non-verbal communication in hostels.

Before narrowing the focus with Goffman’s Theory, it is important to highlight how Symbolic Interactionism relates to the research topic. Hostels are special social settings that foster significant interactions. People from different cultural backgrounds and social environments come together. They use communication as a key tool to interpret one another’s actions, negotiate meaning, and develop their understanding. Symbolic Interactionism highlights how meanings are created via constant interaction. In addition to service delivery-related tasks, the staff will engage in symbolic interactions through their language, gestures, and other indicators.

The guest experiences will be shaped by their real-life interpretations of these signals and messages. In this light, interactions between staff and guests are more than functional, they are full of social and symbolic meaning that Goffman's metaphorical theory very well underlines.

Indeed, hostel staff can be considered as "*performers*" on the "*front stage*" when they interact with guests, their "*audience*". Whether at the reception during check-in or in the lobby after check-out, staff will have occasions to interact with their clients. It corresponds to the "setting", the physical space. It also includes elements that might seem insignificant but that are in reality critical such as music, lighting, or the global atmosphere in the hostel. If there is a relaxed, informal, and vibrant ambiance it might influence expectations towards friendliness; but if it is quieter and strict they may be awaiting more politeness and professionalism. This explains once again that the combination of pre-existing images, context, and setting will completely shape the perception guests have of their experience.

Furthermore, staff members present themselves to their clients, they take on a role and adjust their behavior to try and meet the expectations visitors built prior-arrival. Across the stage, the guests will be the judges who assess this performance. As mentioned above with the Imaginaries Theory (Amirou, 1995; t'Felt, 2018), their interpretation will be based on previous hostel or traveling experiences, cultural expectations, or even the emotional state they are in. Outside these interactions, staff members will drop their roles "*backstage*". They will maybe be more authentic and themselves when no guest is here to see them when they are in break rooms or stock rooms that are hidden from plain sight.

In addition, when they come on stage to perform, receptionists will use their "*social front*" split into appearance and manners to set the tone during the interaction. They will display different visual characteristics depending if they are wearing uniforms or casual clothes, and how they groom themselves. Their body modifications such as piercings or tattoos can also affect perception. For example, a clean-looking and smiling staff who is wearing their hostel brand clothing might suggest professionalism, approachability, and clarity about the role. These elements that fall into the appearance category could influence the guest's perception. Then, the tone of voice, the gestures, the gaze, and the use of space can be considered as the receptionist's manners. These behaviors will also send signals and messages to the observers. If a staff member asks a client to help them with their luggage using a warm tone and eye contact the message will

be perceived one way. On the contrary, if they use a flat tone and avoidant gaze, the interpretation may be completely different.

People working in hostels will also actively manage their behaviors to fit into the role they were given. They have to maintain a certain image by using strategies to design a positive experience, avoid conflict, and meet unspoken guest expectations. These strategies could be linked to their communication style. To do so, they can adjust their verbal and non-verbal language to control how they express themselves. It is all the more important when they are facing complaints, conflicts, and high-pressure tasks. Even if they feel bored, irritated, frustrated, or stressed they have to remain consistent with their role and limit as much as possible all negative emotions. It is part of their tasks, turning it into emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983). If they do not manage their emotional attitude, the performance might break and guests will potentially lose trust and comfort around them, which will later impact their overall experience.

It leads me to the risks of failing the performance and communication. First, if there is a mismatch between VC and NVC, two elements that should work together, clients might get lost or confused by the mixed signals given to them. This inconsistency could lead to cognitive dissonance, and reduce guest satisfaction while affecting reviews, loyalty, and likelihood of recommending the hostel.

Thus, using the Symbolic Interactionism theory through Goffman's Dramaturgy provides a deeper understanding of the social performances of hostel staff in front of their guests. It also gives a structured way to analyze the influence of verbal and non-verbal communication on guest experience. It is all the more relevant in the highly interpersonal and multicultural context of Amsterdam's hostels.

This theory does not only provide an understanding of communication and personal interactions through a very strong conceptual basis, but it also carries practical implications. The different tools and methodology planned to be used will be developed in detail in the last part of this dissertation but it can be interesting to see some examples of how this theory could be used in practice.

Key elements of Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory can form the core of the observational framework. Indeed, the setting, appearance, and manners constitute areas to focus on. It would be all about observing live performances on the front stage, and analyzing how the staff uses verbal and non-verbal communication. As mentioned above, it could be interesting to measure the mismatch between all these characteristics to determine a rather effective or ineffective communication performance from the staff. Hence, interpreting the field notes through this theoretical lens would allow the emergence of behavioral patterns and symbolic practices that constitute the hostel's performances.

Furthermore, the staff and guests' interview questions can be shaped around this theory. It would help understand how employees prepare for social interactions, manage impressions, and navigate emotional labor. Guests' interviews, on the other hand, can uncover their perception and how they read and interpret the signs they receive.

Finally, Dramaturgy can guide the coding process during the guests' review analysis by following those same key categories: setting, appearance, manner, etc. There might be descriptions of how the staff's performance was perceived, and how the symbols were interpreted. It would help create a thematic map showing which exact verbal and non-verbal cues created a positive guest experience and increased satisfaction.

To conclude, it can be said that Symbolic Interactionism through Goffman's Dramaturgy approach offers a strong theoretical framework to study the complex staff-guest communication within the hostel setting. It truly helps highlight how language, tone, gestures, and symbols create meaning and also shape our understanding of the world, of others, and of ourselves. Goffman offers a metaphorical yet very applicable framework. It is a necessary foundation for analyzing how communication, verbal and non-verbal, operates not simply as a functional and transactional exchange of information, but as a performance shaped by context, perception, and meaning.

After exploring the role of travel imaginaries in shaping guests' expectations prior-arrival, and how Goffman's theory helps dissect the staff performances during interactions, it is now essential to consider a third dimension: adaptability. The dynamism and cultural

diversity offered by Amsterdam's hostels give the floor to the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed in 1973 by Howard Giles. It offers a final shift towards the understanding of how the staff strategically adapts to everyone and the different social cues. To better connect with guests from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, receptionists might have to adapt their verbal and non-verbal communication behaviors: the tone, the proxemics, the gaze, etc. This will allow us to go deeper into flexibility and intercultural sensitivity to help overcome the major challenges of obtaining effective communication in the socially complex environment of hostels, especially in Amsterdam.

5.3 Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

5.3.1 Core Definition and Principles

In a world where everyone has to communicate with each other, it is crucial to understand the various strategies that can be consciously or unconsciously adopted to navigate the mosaic of differences. Many challenges arise during interpersonal communication. It can be linguistic, cultural, generational, social, etc. This is why reasoning on the way to overcome them is a must. One way to do so could be **adaptability**. And this is the one chosen here.

The **Communication Accommodation Theory**, also known as CAT, was developed by Howard Giles in the 1970s. It can be defined as the adjustments people make to their behaviors during communication, to converge or diverge from their partners (Giles et al., 1991). In easier words, it means that people might, consciously or unconsciously, change how they talk or express themselves depending on the person they have in front of them. Initially, it was called the Speech Accommodation Theory and focused only on verbal language through accents and dialects (Giles, 1973). It was limited to the changes of "*language and speech*" without taking into account everything related to non-verbal communication. However as the focus on NVC became more important, Howard Giles decided to rename it as CAT in 2008 to open the scope and not limit it to only one aspect of communication studies.

But an important question arises: Why would people want to adjust the way they communicate?

Three main reasons are usually highlighted (Giles & Ogay, 2007). First, people want to **gain** a form of **approval** from their conversational partner or partners. They want to be liked, appreciated, accepted, and seen in a positive way during a conversation. For example, when a French person speaks with an older individual or a person they do not know, they might address them as “vous” to display more politeness and respect to try and gain their approval. Then, they might try to **reduce social distance** to feel closer, more connected, or more similar to them. They want to break and overcome any barriers to be more equal. It is like trying to step closer emotionally rather than physically. Finally, people might try to adjust their behavior to **meet expectations**. People want to make sure they fit in and they also want to avoid misunderstandings as much as possible. When someone has a professional interview they will usually try to adopt more seriousness in the way they communicate verbally and non-verbally because they know this is what is expected from them in that particular context and setting. When expectations are met it can reduce discomfort or conflict. Overall, these motivations often influence how people adjust their communication.

But it's important to note that not all adjustments are made to bring people closer. Sometimes it can be done to accentuate differences and assert one's identity (Giles, 1977). This can be a way to stand out, protect their identity, or show they are in charge. It might be used to create more distance in the conversation or to make a point about power or authority.

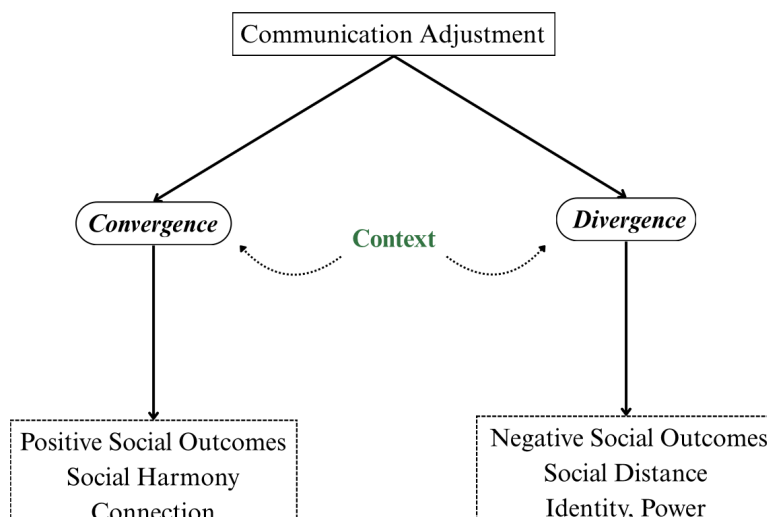
The adjustments described in the Communication Accommodation Theory can take different forms. The most important ones are “**convergence**” and “**divergence**”. Convergence, as mentioned above, consists of adapting the communication style, consciously or not, to become more similar to the person they are interacting with (Giles, 1973). On the other hand, divergence is about accentuating and exaggerating speech and behavior differences (Giles, 1977). These are the most general adjustments that can be made but accommodation can also manifest in other forms, in sub-categories. “**Non-accommodation**” corresponds to the choice of the speaker not to adjust anything and maintain their original communication style (Giles et al., 1991). In other words, the speaker makes a conscious or unconscious decision not to change their speech, tone, or behavior to match the other person. As explained, it can be motivated by the want to assert one's identity or it could simply be considered not necessary by the speaker. “**Over-accommodation**” is the extreme of adjustments. In this scenario, the speaker is excessive and exaggerates the communication style which can even become inappropriate (Giles et al.,

1991). The speaker goes too far in their attempt to adapt their speech or behavior to the other person. Even if it often comes from good intentions, it can lead to misunderstandings or make the other person feel talked down to and not respected. “*Under-accommodation*” is the opposite. It is when the speaker tries to adjust and accommodate their communication style but the attempt fails. It can be considered insufficient and ineffective (Giles et al., 1991). In summary, these various forms of accommodation demonstrate how communication adjustments can range from fitting in with others to creating distance, with each reflecting different motivations and outcomes.

Furthermore, the CAT theory appears to be highly dependent on **situation** and **context**. Indeed, communication will vary depending on social identities like age, gender, and cultural background. It can also be closely linked to group relationships (Gallois & Giles, 1998). For instance, during intergenerational interactions, between younger and older adults, the young ones might over-accommodate their behavior and speak very slowly which could make the conversational partner feel underestimated. Also, in group-based interactions, the speaker can alter their communication behavior and style based on the other person’s group identity, such as their political views, religion, or culture. This is explained by the fact that people have to navigate multiple social identities at the same time, also called “*intersectionality*”. These will deeply influence social interactions with others.

Finally, the effort of accommodating one’s verbal and non-verbal communication can have both positive and negative social outcomes (Giles, 2016). An effective accommodation often leads to more harmony, cohesion, and understanding. On the other hand, missteps like non-accommodation, over-accommodation, and under-accommodation can cause social clashes and alienation. This is why the effort of adapting a behavior takes a lot of energy and strategic thinking, whether it is emotionally or cognitively.

Figure 6: Simplified representation of CAT⁶



This diagram helps in building a visual representation of Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory. It explains that people adjust their communication by either converging or diverging. How people communicate is deeply influenced by the social context and by the motives, the underlying reasons, and the why. They can either want to build a connection, gain approval, assert an identity, or even create distance.

5.3.2 CAT in Hostel Communication study and Practical implications

Going from theory to practice is very important and applying the Communication Accommodation Theory to hostels, especially in Amsterdam, is all the more relevant. People from diverse backgrounds and cultures interact daily which means that the ability of the staff to be flexible and adapt could significantly impact the quality of the guests' experience.

As explained in the literature review, hostels appear to be communal spaces that foster a large variety of interpersonal interactions where very dynamic real-world communication takes place. CAT can explain that hostel receptionists or staff may adjust their communication style, verbal and non-verbal, depending on the guest's social context, the expectations, or the situation they are facing. This would constitute, consciously or not, the strategy they choose to use to make their clients as happy as possible. For VC, employees could change their language, and tone

⁶ own elaboration adapted from Howard Giles' work

based on the guests' needs. For example, they could speak slower and articulate strongly with clients who do not have a good level of English. Also, if a guest seems tired, the staff might try to adjust to a more quiet and calm tone. For NVC, gestures, body language, and gaze could be carefully decided. To display a welcoming and friendly atmosphere they might adopt a relaxed posture and eye contact. But on the other hand, in conflictual situations, they may keep a more formal attitude. Each social identity that staff members will encounter might have different communication expectations and the way they navigate could make the difference.

Furthermore, as defined above, these adjustments can take different forms, and understanding them in relation to hostel communication is crucial for this study. Staff members may try to use convergence to adapt as much as possible to the communication style of their guests. The conversation will then become more personal and inclusive. If a receptionist speaks in a friendly, relaxed, informal way with a young solo-traveler it could create a connection between them and reinforce a pleasant atmosphere. On the other hand, if divergence is the strategy, they will try to exaggerate, and accentuate their own communication style to emphasize differences. If the client is older or comes from another cultural background, the receptionist may keep a more professional tone and attitude to display a strong sense of respect. The challenge will be to try and find the right balance for everyone to answer all the needs and expectations while facing different situations. During check-in, they could converge more to highlight the sense of welcome but during complaints or conflicts, they need to assert their authority and professionalism.

In addition, if the accommodation strategy is not carefully thought about there are risks of having an outcome that contradicts the original intention which could negatively affect the guest's experience. If a staff member over-accommodates their communication style by being overly simple or extremely slow when a client does not need it, they might feel infantilized or embarrassed. On the contrary, if they under-accommodate and fail to adjust by speaking too fast or using overly complicated terms, then it could lead to frustration, confusion, and alienation from the tourist. Overall, any misstep in accommodation could lead to conflict or dissatisfaction in the hostel setting. The employees need to recognize when to adjust and which adjustments have to be made or not.

CAT is not only a theoretical framework it can also be a practical framework to guide the content of the different research methodology tools planned to be used and developed in part three. Just like Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory, CAT can help observe the adjustments made by the staff during verbal and non-verbal interactions. The goal would be to identify when and why they try to adapt their speech, gestures, or behavior to match the guests they have in front of them. Moments, where they fail their attempt, can also be highlighted to understand what happened. This angle, lens can be crucial in understanding the role VC and NVC play in the guest experience in Amsterdam's hostels.

Then, during interviews, CAT could help understand the adjustment strategies adopted by the staff and how they were perceived by the guests. For the employees, it could mean asking them: how they assess the guest's expectations, whether or not they consciously change their communication based on the social identities they have in front of them, and also examples of situations they try to converge or diverge. For the guests, it can be about analyzing: how the staff communication style made them feel, if they noticed any changes, or even what impact it had on their experience.

Finally, CAT can also steer the review analysis by looking for mentions of any changes or strategies that might have had a positive or negative impact on their experiences.

To conclude, the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) offers a clear and dynamic theoretical framework to understand the adjustments people make during interpersonal communication. As explained, these accommodation strategies reflect deeper motivations such as social closeness, identity assertiveness, or matching expectations. This theory also emphasizes the role of setting, situation, and social context as a true factor impacting the communication style chosen. It is especially relevant in multicultural and diverse environments that hostels, especially in Amsterdam, constitute. CAT becomes particularly useful in this context of study. Overall this conceptual tool helps understand: how staff members adjust their communication strategies to meet guest expectations, which missteps could lead to negative experiences, and finally how the context affects these social interactions.

General Theoretical Framework Conclusion: How do these three theories complement each other?

In order to create a rich and complementary theoretical framework to study verbal and non-verbal communication in Hostels, three theories were chosen: Amirou's and t'Felt's Travel Imaginaries, Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory, and Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory. It is not a trivial decision, it is a strategic choice.

To begin with, Travel Imaginaries (Amirou, 1995; t'Felt, 2018) bring to this study what guests and tourists carry in their backpacks: their expectations. It explains which collective or personal mental images they would place in their suitcases and how these will later bring color to their experience. Goffman's Theory draws a powerful blueprint to analyze in detail interpersonal interactions between staff members and their guests. It guides the decoding process of these performances, impression management, and the role played by employees. It also studies how guests, as the audience, will receive and interpret based on context and setting. Finally, CAT adds another very relevant lens which focuses on adjusting verbal and non-verbal communication, especially in the multi-cultural and dynamic setting that Amsterdam hostels constitute. It helps understand how and why they would adapt their communication style depending on the person or the context they are facing. It also emphasizes these successful or failed accommodation strategies which can impact the guest's experience.

Together, this triad can offer a comprehensive and holistic way to explore the question: *How does the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication used by hostel staff during face-to-face interactions in Amsterdam influence guest satisfaction?*

After laying out the theoretical pillars that will guide this study, it becomes possible to move toward the empirical inquiry. These theories are not only here to be interpretive tools, but they also serve as a robust foundation for the formulation of this research's hypotheses. Hence, the following chapter tackles the three hypotheses that emerged from the review of literature, the problem statement as well as these key theoretical insights.

Chapter 6: The Hypotheses - Three Axes of Research

Hypotheses are clear and specific predictions about what the researchers think will happen in a study. The problem starts the research and the hypotheses offer a possible solution. It can be considered as an “*educated guess*” that is based on what the researchers already know (Binoy, 2019). Overall, it is a valuable tool to help discover reliable and trustworthy knowledge. It paves the way for the next steps which keeps the study organized. Hence, these elements prove the importance of developing this specific chapter. During the early beginnings of this research, I came up with three initial hypotheses. After reading more and more on the topic and different theories I reformulated them because they appeared clearer to me. Let’s now dive into those three hypotheses.

6.1 H1: Guests’ pre-existing travel imaginaries shape their expectations of hostel staff communication, and when these are met or positively transformed, satisfaction increases

First, breaking down this hypothesis is important to understand it properly. It starts by stating that guests have “**pre-existing travel imaginaries**”. It considers the fact that travelers have mental images before they arrive on site and before the travel becomes real. In the case of hostels, some guests might imagine the staff as extremely friendly and relaxed while others may expect them to be very professional and polite.

Then, these imaginaries “**shape**” the guests’ “**expectations**” of “**hostel staff communication**”. In other words, this part considers that the pre-existing travel imaginaries influence the kind of communication clients expect coming from the employees.

Thirdly, “**when these are met or positively transformed, satisfaction increases**”. If what the guest expects matches what they are actually experiencing during their trip then they are more likely to feel satisfied. In addition, it can also result in positively surpassing them. In short, if the staff’s actual communication matches with, or pleasantly exceeds the certain pre-made expectations guests have, they will be happier and eventually feel satisfied.

This hypothesis is anchored in the theories developed earlier. Explaining how pre-existing travel imaginaries are formed, and why they matter before the trip, is explicitly linked to Amirou's and t'Felt Theory. The way guests will interpret reality and the “*performance*” of the staff in comparison with their “internal script” also echoes Goffman's Dramaturgy. Also, the employees' verbal and non-verbal communication might converge or diverge from what the clients had in mind, hence CAT also plays a role here.

In addition, those expectations will have a large part of personal images and subjective expectations meaning that what satisfies one guest might dissatisfy another. Applying this hypothesis to the multicultural context of hostels in Amsterdam makes it even more challenging and interesting to study. Multiple imaginaries will collide and the staff has to navigate through it.

During the research on the field, hypothesis number one can be easily connected to the methodology. For the interviews, I will be able to ask the guests what they expected and whether or not the communication they received matched. While analyzing guests' reviews, I can look for mentions of: “I expected...”, and “just like I imagined”; to see which factors were important.

Overall, this hypothesis directly responds to the main research question: *How does the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication used by hostel staff during face-to-face interactions in Amsterdam influence guest satisfaction?* It highlights that satisfaction is shaped by the alignment between what the guests expected before they arrived, their mental imaginaries, and the encounter with the quality of the service delivered. This is a strong starting point to understand the relationship between perception, communication, and satisfaction before looking deeper at how the staff communicates, adapts, and manages emotions in the next two hypotheses. It will eventually help understand what guests expect to have the best experience possible.

6.2 H2: Clear, polite, and friendly verbal communication, combined with positive non-verbal cues like smiling and open body language, help meet guest expectations and increase satisfaction

To begin with, this second hypothesis focuses on identifying specific verbal communication qualities: “**clear, polite, and friendly**”. Clarity focuses on the staff being easily

understood, avoiding any complicated jargon, or preventing confusion. Politeness is the use of courteous language or displaying respect towards the guests. Friendliness echoes warmth, openness, and a positive tone. These traits, often central to guests' satisfaction in hospitality, can be checked in the context of hostels in Amsterdam.

Then, as VC and NVC are rarely considered and analyzed separately, identifying specific “**non-verbal cues**” as part of communication is crucial. “**Positive**” cues can refer to smiles, relaxed posture, active listening, use of space, etc. This part underlines the quality and style of communication from the hostel staff. The second part of this hypothesis makes a direct link with the expectations that will be discussed in H1.

Finally, the last part states that when staff communicates verbally and non-verbally this way, it “**aligns with guest expectations**”. It means that they would be getting the type of interaction they imagined:

a friendly tone + welcoming gestures = greater emotional comfort = positive experience

This hypothesis is again anchored with the theoretical framework. Goffman's Dramaturgy helps explain how the staff uses their appearance and manner on the front stage to perform and achieve what the audience expects of them. The Communication Accommodation Theory can add another layer by showing how employees adapt their communication style to be more friendly and more respectful. Also, Travel Imaginaries play a role here as guests interpret the verbal and non-verbal cues depending on their pre-existing mental images.

During observations, this hypothesis guides me to focus on how the hostel staff welcomes and interacts with guests through their tones of voice, facial expressions, vocabulary, gestures, etc. With interviews, the perceptions of the guests and the strategies of the staff can be unveiled. And with the review analysis, the factors directly linked to satisfaction can be gathered.

H2 directly builds on H1 by moving from the concept of expectations to actual communication behaviors. It suggests that clear, polite, and friendly verbal communication, combined with positive non-verbal cues, is not just an expectation but a key factor in meeting guest needs and increasing their satisfaction. It tackles the practical aspects of communication that contribute

directly to a positive guest experience. Overall, H2 moves toward the real-time performance of the hostel staff, while making a logical progression from H1. It moves one step closer to understanding the communication dynamics that influence guest satisfaction in hostels.

6.3 H3: Adapting communication to align with guests' backgrounds and social identities increases satisfaction

This third and last hypothesis extends the ideas introduced in H1 and H2 by adding the core aspect that concerns the guests' “**backgrounds**” and “**social identities**”. Indeed clients and tourists will come from different social, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. These social identities (age, culture, gender, political views, religions, etc.) affect the way people communicate and how they perceive verbal and non-verbal cues.

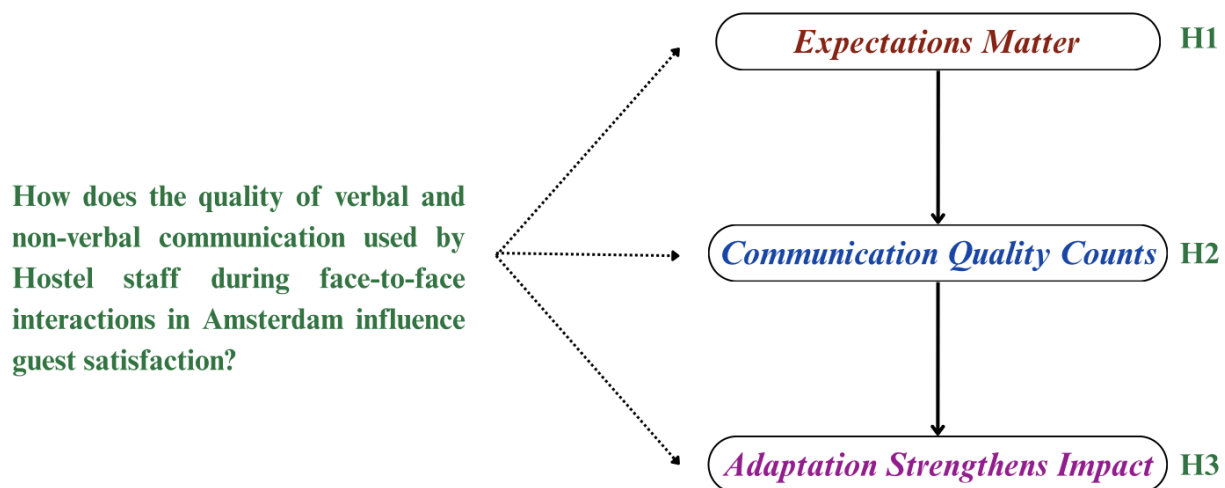
If the hostel staff is strategically and carefully “**adapting**” their communication through an acknowledgment and respect of diversity and inclusion, then it contributes to their experience and increases their level of “**satisfaction**”. Indeed when they perceive that the staff respects their unique background and social identities their overall experience is more positive.

Communication Accommodation Theory is central to this third hypothesis. It is stated here that the hostel staff needs to carefully converge their communication style to match the social identities of their guests. CAT corresponds to a true framework to understand the benefits of adapting verbal and non-verbal communication. Goffman's Dramaturgy also highlights the roles played by the staff. It explores how they use impression management, and how they control their emotions depending on the setting and on who is in front of them. These elements contribute to the creation of a more authentic and effective interaction.

H3 directly answers the research question by focusing on how adapting verbal and non-verbal language is an effective way to communicate with guests who have diverse backgrounds and social identities. It does not only consider the impact on the client's perception of the interaction but also increases their overall satisfaction by focusing on a personalized, tailored, and more inclusive communication style. This last hypothesis truly adds a very important layer after H1 and H2. While H1 introduces important foundations to understand how expectations impact the

experience, H2 moves towards a more concrete analysis of the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication, and H3 recognizes that the guests come from very diverse backgrounds that need to be taken into account. It brings a logical flow and progression to answer the research question.

Figure 7: Logical Pathway Linking Hypotheses to the Research Question⁷



To conclude this chapter, and tackle the formulation of my three hypotheses, I would like to use this diagram. It offers a simplified visual representation of the logical progression while linking them back to the main research question. As explained above, H1 introduces the notion of expectations and the role they play in determining if an experience is considered good, and if a level of satisfaction is reached. They link the pre-built mental images and the quality of the service delivered in real life. In addition to forming general expectations concerning a hostel stay, these same expectations also shape how they hope the staff will communicate. Satisfaction would then depend on whether or not these expectations are met or if they are transformed positively. This is why “expectations matter”. To go further, H2 brings the actual guests-staff interactions to life and to light. It goes from the imagined trip to the actual and concrete verbal and non-verbal communication. The goal is to understand how the quality of communication counts. It will be about looking into the strategies employed by the staff to perform on stage. If friendliness and positivity align with the guests’ expectations it will reinforce satisfaction. Finally, H3 adds a complex but interesting layer to the answer. It aims to show how the influence of verbal and non-verbal communication on guest satisfaction can be strengthened. By

⁷ Own elaboration

considering the variety of backgrounds and social identities in the context of Amsterdam hostels, the lens moves towards a more inclusive understanding of communication. It examines how adjusting verbal and non-verbal communication to fit guests' backgrounds can boost satisfaction.

Together, these hypotheses create a progression to answer the main research question: from what guests expect, to what they experience, and how staff can adapt. It builds a solid foundation for the methodology and data collection.

General Conclusion of Part 2, moving towards Part 3

In this second part of the first-year dissertation, key elements that create the foundation of this study have been outlined, starting with the problem statement. Some gaps in the literature, contributions as well as practical outcomes have been given. The role of verbal and non-verbal communication in influencing guest satisfaction in the hostel industry seems to remain in an academic blindspot. Hence, studying such a topic appears relevant and full of contributions.

This led to the exploration of a theoretical framework combining: Travel Imaginaries (Amirou, 1995; t'Felt, 2018), the Dramaturgy Theory (Goffman, 1959), and the Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973). Together, they offer a multilayered lens to explore how verbal and non-verbal communication plays a central role in shaping guest experience.

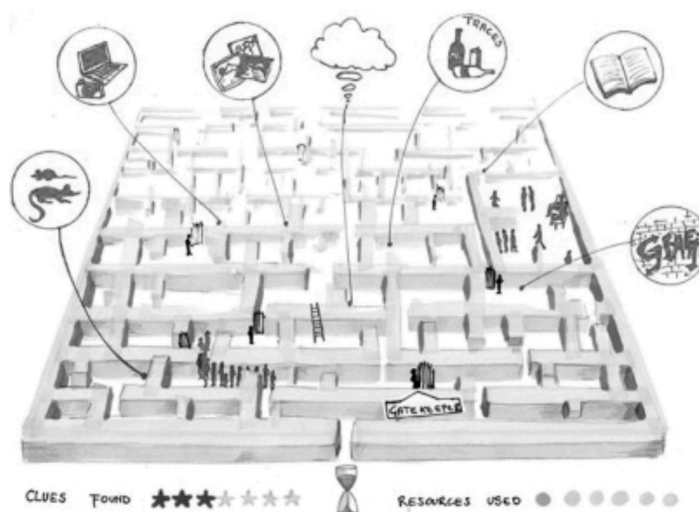
Finally, the three hypotheses were broken down and linked back to the research question, the theory, and the methodology. They were designed to address how pre-existing travel imaginaries shape guest expectations, how verbal and non-verbal communication quality affects satisfaction, and how adapting communication to diverse guest backgrounds can enhance the overall experience.

After exploring the key points that will draw the blueprint of this study, it is now important to think about a methodology plan that will enable me to collect precious data and test the hypotheses. This is why the next part will detail the research approach chosen, the field of study where data can be collected, and the different analytical tools.

PART 3: PROPOSAL OF A METHODOLOGY AND FIELD OF APPLICATION

As mentioned earlier, this study aims to examine the positive influence of verbal and non-verbal language on guest satisfaction in the hostel industry of Amsterdam. To collect precious and valuable data, a methodology has to be constructed and a field to apply it has to be defined. The first step of any research is to find something to question and bring a new light or vision to a topic, avoiding the risk of “déjà-vu”. After this, the topic needs to be explored through already existing documentation and literature. Then raw data has to be gathered. It is crucial, it is a backbone holding all the pieces together, giving scientific strength to all the findings that will be made. Finally, what has been found has to be described and analyzed (t’Felt, 2018).

Figure 8: The maze-running qualitative scholar⁸



Starting a research can be intimidating, like entering a maze full of clues, hints, and leads; however, building a strong design will be the key to navigating and finding the way forward (Hannes et al., 2022). The figure above, used in the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design, represents the societal labyrinth, our ever-changing society where norms and trends follow complex pathways that evolve through time. As this study is anchored in sociology, it is essential to navigate carefully this societal maze; and understanding social behavior, and social interaction involves looking at different factors like language, communication, and context.

⁸ Artwork by Chloé Dierckx, SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design (2022)

Each research is unique hence a generic methodology could not be applied to all. This is where the reflection toward a tailored approach comes into play. The methodology will build a bridge between my hypotheses and reality. My plan is to follow a **qualitative approach** through **observations**, **interviews**, and finally **document analysis**. I will now present the reasoning behind this choice.

Chapter 7: The Choice of the Research Method

To start, a crucial choice had to be made between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Both approaches offer valuable ways to collect data but from different perspectives, each with its own limitations. The method chosen will have to be the most appropriate to the question I am asking: *How does the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication used by Hostel staff during face-to-face interactions in Amsterdam influence guest satisfaction?*

7.1 The case of the quantitative approach (rejected)

The quantitative approach relies on collecting numerical data with tools such as surveys for instance. Afterward, these numbers are analyzed statistically to identify recurring patterns, highlight relationships between variables, and test hypotheses (Neuman, 2014). This method typically seeks to answer questions such as “how much” and “how many” using tangible, and quantifiable figures. The goal is to reach a sample containing as many respondents as possible to interpret generalized results that will be transferable to a broader group (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). This method is commonly used in healthcare, finance, or business, where numbers articulate the reasonings. The quantitative approach presents important benefits for the process of research. First, it allows an objective vision, reducing potential personal bias since each tool is structured with fixed questions and controlled variables. The researcher is placed backstage rather than actively on the front stage.

Furthermore, even if the process of creating a survey can be long and technical, once this step is achieved the data collection appears quicker as the questions can be answered in a few minutes. The results will appear directly as numbers to be analyzed. Moreover, limitations also have to be highlighted. If “how many” and “how much” can be identified, on the other hand, the “why”

remains in the shadows, details are not dug out, they stay at the surface. In addition, without a consequent sample and answers, the data collection loses all credibility and worth. The numbers would represent only a small reality that could not be applied generally. A receivable number of answers would not be under 250 people for a statistical analysis and not under 500 for a large-scale study. This can constitute a true challenge.

For my research topic of studying the influence of verbal and non-verbal communication on guest satisfaction, it would allow me, for instance, to measure precisely with tangible numbers the guests' level of satisfaction. However, the depth of human interactions through communication could be missed. Even if a guest rates their stay "5 out of 5", I would not be able to understand the underlying reason; if it was because of the cleanliness, the facilities, the staff's ability to communicate, etc. It would confirm a fact but not explain and justify it in depth. Another argument could be that not everyone has the same perception of the scores given. For some a "3 out of 5" might be neutral but for someone else, it could represent a level of dissatisfaction.

Thanks to these definitions and examples, it is clearer that the quantitative approach is not a suitable option. Then, it helped me decide that the data collected through this research should be qualitative.

7.2 The case of the qualitative approach (chosen)

The qualitative data collection aims to explore meanings, experiences, and social interactions without using numbers. Interpretation, depth, and context prevail over statistics as we try to understand how a reality is perceived and interpreted, and which story people want to tell with rich descriptions and pieces of information (Neuman, 2014). This approach is less strict and more flexible. To some, it might appear as an "*easy option*" or a "*collation of anecdotes*" but it is in reality a very complex and rigorous process that involves tools such as interviews, observations, focus groups, or even document analysis (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Just like quantitative methods, recurring patterns and themes are trying to be identified but the difference is that the insights will be deeper and will not be reduced to numbers. It is to be noted that the qualitative approach is mostly used for sociological, anthropological as well as psychological studies (Hancock et al., 2007). One of the strengths of this process is that it does not only take

into account the tip of the iceberg but also the aspects that are hidden underneath, the much larger and unknown parts.

Furthermore, as the tools are more bendable, adjustments can be made throughout the research, and new variables can be added. Not everything is predefined and fixed allowing more general freedom. Also, a qualitative approach gives a voice to human experiences. The researcher becomes an instrument, the participants are the melody and together they compose a symphony of valuable insights. Thanks to all the existing tools they are encouraged to share their own thoughts and ideas which contributes to giving a higher level of authenticity to the potential testimonies and findings. This allows for the collection of diverse, multicultural viewpoints, contributing to a more holistic understanding.

Verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as satisfaction, are not something easy to grasp and quantify. They are complex sociological phenomena deeply influenced by real-world settings, behaviors, and cultural norms. They happen during human interactions which are real-life experiences that will vary from one person to another, from one nationality to another, from one generation to another. It makes it difficult to place them into closed boxes. Also, language and communication cannot be restricted to simply words and numbers, it goes beyond the surface. Hence a qualitative approach would be more suitable to explore in depth the factors influencing guest satisfaction rather than only stating whether or not they were content. This study is indeed digging into answering the “how”, and the “why” behind guest satisfaction in Amsterdam’s hostels, to determine whether or not verbal and non-verbal communication play an important role. My goal is to explore specific contexts or experiences rather than generalize across all hostels.

Unlike quantitative studies, qualitative studies do not require an enormous sample to be received and valid. The quality exceeds the quantity. This constitutes a point that cannot be ignored, especially when we collect data during the internships where our time to reach many people might be limited. As explained earlier, hostels do not share the same spotlight as hotels, not as much prior data was collected and the qualitative process could be useful to build strong foundations for future studies on this continuously growing industry.

Although the qualitative method is best suited for this research, there are limitations and risks to be aware of. It is important to list them to try and reduce them as much as possible during the research. The first element to take into consideration will be my own **subjectivity** and personal bias. It means I will have to be very careful with my interpretation not to muffle the participants' voices. I will always have to think about where I position myself in this study. Then, **time management** will become an enemy. Qualitative data collection and analysis are very long and can overwhelm me with large amounts of information. My time cannot be extended since I have strict deadlines to respect. The different tools adopted have to be thoroughly constructed, tested, and organized to be as efficient as possible in the process. Thirdly, there are very important **ethical guidelines** to be respected. If they are not followed it will be a risk to the participants' privacy and confidentiality. Those risks are the most frequent ones that come with adopting a qualitative approach. While other limitations will likely be met on the way, it is my responsibility to address them and ensure they do not interfere with the integrity of my study.

Choosing the right research method is crucial. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches offer valuable insights, but the latter is better suited for exploring this complex sociological phenomenon. To apply this qualitative approach, I have selected a specific field site, where I can observe and analyze the dynamic interactions between staff and guests.

Chapter 8: Field of Study - Where & Why

After defining which method would be most suited to measure the role of verbal and non-verbal communication on guest satisfaction in hostels, I need to explore in detail the **field of study**. In this section, I will explain the real-world context in which my research on VC and NVC and guest satisfaction is planned to be applied. I will describe the two hostels selected for the study, as well as my personal experience, and link to my internship to justify these hostels as an ideal setting for the research.

8.1 The Two Hostels selected

To narrow the scope and focus my research I decided to choose two hostels located in the heart of Amsterdam: **THIS HO(S)TEL** and **Durty Nelly's**. They both belong to one of the leading hospitality groups in the city: RB Horeca. Founded in 2012, they own over 25 hospitality businesses, ranging from restaurants and clubs to bars and hostels. Their unique selling point revolves around the creation of singular brands and concepts located in unparalleled and strategic locations. Their key values are the following: *“offering top service, experiences, and a high-quality level”*.

The first hostel, Durty Nelly's, is a **traditional dormitory-style hostel** (see figure below). There are six mixed dorms and one female-only dorm. Each dorm has between six and several single beds as well as lockers. Most of the dorms have capsule-like beds, top and bottom, meaning that there is a wooden structure and a curtain that gives more privacy. The female-only dorm has traditional bunk beds. All the bathrooms are shared, with some located on the floors and others inside the dorms themselves. The building is split in two: on one side there is the hostel and on the other side there is an Irish pub and restaurant with the same name. On the ground floor, after entering, you will find a small common area for guests to relax and gather with tables and plugs. This area leads directly to the reception desk and the staircase going up to the three floors. In addition, the reception is available 24/7. There is always at least one staff member available to welcome guests, assist them, and ensure smooth operations. Durty Nelly's overall atmosphere is youthful and party-oriented. For example, pub crawls are organized, and live music and party events are regularly held in the Irish pub downstairs, where hostel guests can enjoy a 20% discount.

Figure 9: Reception & Dorms Area, Durty Nelly's Hostel⁹



⁹ Images provided by RB Horeca (2025)

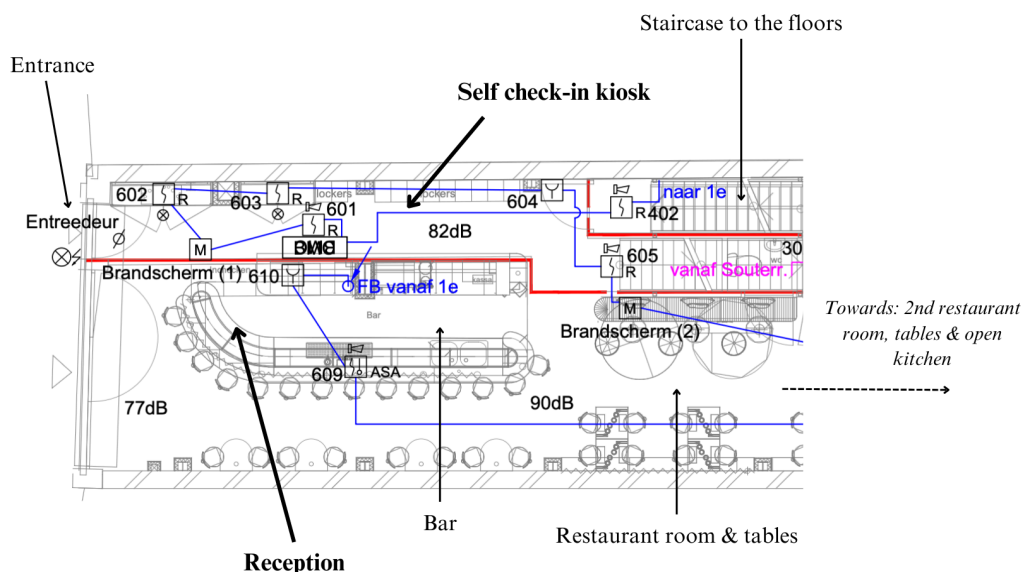
On the other hand, THIS HO(S)TEL is a “cube” **concept hostel** (see Figure 10). These so-called “cubes” are 5m² private spaces with a queen-size bed and a shelf. In practice, it is a room that was split in two and partitioned to create a private cube on the top and a private cube on the bottom. In total, there are 110 cubes meaning that the hostel has the capacity to accommodate a maximum of 220 guests. The bathrooms are shared between all the guests on all six floors of the hostel. THIS HO(S)TEL shares the same building and jointly covers the rent with Fiona, a Mexican cocktail bar and restaurant that also belongs to RB Horeca. They operate as separate businesses within the same property. This space-sharing organization gives a very peculiar layout to the reception and common areas (see Figure 11). Indeed, one corner of the bar counter serves as the hostel reception, and when the restaurant is closed, guests can use the space as a common area. In addition to a physical reception, THIS HO(S)TEL offers a self-check-in kiosk with two screens. Just like the first hostel, the reception is available 24/7. In the morning two receptionists are present to handle operations and serve the guests their free morning coffee or tea. Throughout the rest of the day, there is always one receptionist present.

Figure 10: Cube rooms in THIS HO(S)TEL¹⁰



¹⁰ Images provided by RB Horeca (2025)

Figure 11: Annotated building plan of THIS HO(S)TEL & Fiona restaurant, key areas of guest interaction¹¹



Both hostels are located in Warmoesstraat, one of the oldest and most popular streets in Amsterdam, only a few minutes walk from Centraal Station. This boosts their popularity and occupancy to an ever-high level.

In terms of communication, staff are required to speak English, but they often master a second and sometimes more languages, usually Spanish, Italian, or French. Dutch is not a requirement, they seem to prioritize multilingualism, customer service skills, and adaptability over the proficiency of the local language. English is also the lingua franca of the hospitality industry and an international common ground.

8.2 The Reasoning Behind

The choice of the two hostels was made for different reasons but I would like to start by emphasizing the link to my past experience and future internship. Indeed, during a very enriching professional gap year of 8 months, I worked as a full-time front desk receptionist at THIS HO(S)TEL. At the same time, I was also trained to work in Dirty Nelly's where I completed multiple shifts as a receptionist as well. While working there I have been exposed first-hand to the question of verbal and non-verbal communication and its impact on the guests I

¹¹ Own adaptation from plan provided by RB Horeca (2025)

accompanied there. I have encountered and witnessed many miscommunication issues, language barriers, and cultural misunderstandings, which today show me the importance of raising awareness on such a topic. It deeply shaped my research as I have seen how subtle shifts in communication, verbal and non-verbal, can lead to significant changes in guest satisfaction. Furthermore, this experience has given me in-depth knowledge and familiarity with the facilities, operational structure, and organizational dynamics of both hostels. It allows me to provide a detailed explanation of their main characteristics, their layout, and the specific environments in which staff-guest interactions take place.

Furthermore, I plan to return to RB Horeca and these two hostels for both my internships during this Master's degree. For my study, this choice will provide continuous access to valuable research sites for observations, participants for interviews, and essential data for review analysis. This is an ongoing opportunity that can help me refine and deepen my understanding of communication practices.

Other elements make choosing THIS HO(S)TEL and Durty Nelly's an ideal fit to apply my study on verbal and non-verbal communication and guest satisfaction. With very different layouts, the two hostels offer varied environments and clientele. One has a more social, party-oriented atmosphere, which may generate a unique form of interaction between staff and guests. On the contrary, the other one has rather private, "cube-style" rooms, which might result in quieter, more individualized guest interactions. Studying both hostels will allow me to capture a broader spectrum of communication behaviors in different contexts. Due to their different atmospheres and layouts, staff-guest interactions may vary, ultimately influencing guest satisfaction and the perceptions tourists develop of these hostels.

Having established the relevance of THIS HO(S)TEL and Durty Nelly's as a relevant setting for this study, the next step is to outline the tools that will allow me to analyze verbal and non-verbal communication in these environments. To examine how communication impacts guest satisfaction, I will rely on a **combination** of non-participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and guest review analysis. The following section details the methodological tools used to gather and interpret data, ensuring a comprehensive approach to answering my research questions and verifying my hypotheses.

Chapter 9: The Presentation of the Different Tools

After analyzing which research approach would be the most suitable, and where to conduct it exactly to collect rich data, the tools I am planning on using should be defined and explored.

9.1 The Non-participant Observations

The first tool I plan on using for this study will be the **non-participant observations**. Even though observations have not always been accepted and recognized as a valuable source of information compared to journalism for instance, they still have been for years at the heart of sociological studies. Indeed, some of the most famous sociological researchers have used this method such as Goffman or Roy. Observations, in the broadest sense, can be defined as a way for researchers to witness, listen, and record social behaviors and interactions right away, when they happen in their natural and authentic environment to understand them (Bryman, 2016; t'Felt, 2018). Observations are usually described as part of a "*field work*" meaning that the researcher will have to spend a period long enough on site, where the social phenomenon takes place and where it can be frequently observed. The researcher's job is to be present and involved in a social situation to record and interpret it while trying not to change it. The final goal is to find a sociological meaning for the data collected, to categorize them, and to measure their degree of generality (Peretz, 2011).

For my topic on verbal and non-verbal communication, it makes a lot of sense. They are spontaneous and instinctive acts. It means that witnessing the staff and guests' interactions right away when they happen, when the words come out, and when the gestures occur can give an authentic picture. By observing in natural settings such as the reception (during check-in, check-out, conflict resolutions, etc.), I can ensure that the data reflects real experiences. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, communication is a highly contextual phenomenon. Indeed the settings or even the background music can make communication completely different. Observations can help me analyze the subtleties of communication within these dynamic scenarios. In addition, non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice are very subtle. Sometimes verbal and non-verbal language do not always align. Even if positive verbal feedback is given by a guest, their facial expressions or gestures might

tell a completely different story about their actual emotional satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Observations will potentially help me get a holistic picture of both human communication channels working together or against each other and it will be crucial for testing my hypotheses.

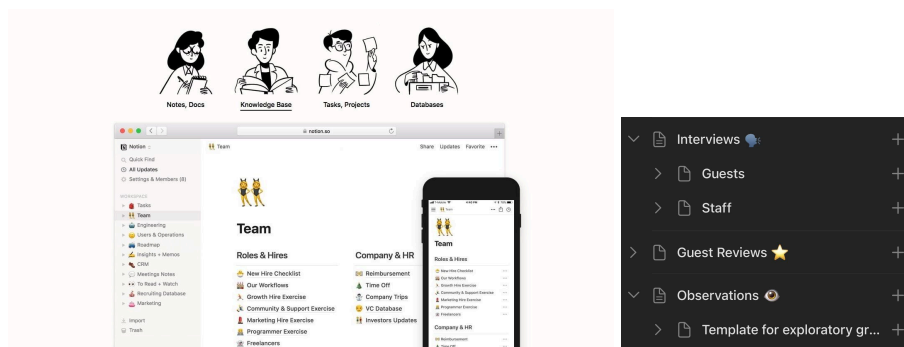
Peretz (2011) divides direct observations into four main moments and steps to accomplish. First, I will need to be on-site, immersed among the subjects being observed, and try to adapt to this environment as much as possible. This immersion, possible through my first and second-year internships, is part of an **ethnographic fieldwork** model. It is defined by a deep engagement with the community or setting under study (Peretz, 2011). I will have to observe the normal course of events, and day-to-day interactions. Finally, the data collected has to be interpreted and summarized.

The method of conducting observations involves the researcher taking on a **role**. My first choice is to be a **fully non-participant** observer. Indeed I will remain outside of the social interaction taking place between the receptionists and the guests. This way I will be able to carefully observe subtle elements without interfering, letting the actions naturally unfold. To do so I will be sitting near the reception of both Durty Nelly's and THIS HO(S)TEL, at an angle allowing me to simultaneously see the two or more participants. Then, being **incognito** will be the second characteristic defining where I position myself in the observations. It means that my role as a researcher is not revealed and hidden as much as possible. The goal is to make sure that the subjects are not aware that I am actually observing them and taking notes about their verbal and non-verbal communication. My main alibi will be my status as a student and intern. Guests seeing a staff member near the reception is not something extraordinary, it is pretty mundane. My colleagues, who know I am writing a Master's thesis, would not be intrigued to hear me type on my keyboard while they are working. While my personal identity might not be one hundred percent incognito, what I am actually doing will be. If the fact that I am observing were to be revealed to the subjects it would compromise the authenticity of the data collected. The staff might not act naturally, they might force their verbal and non-verbal communication to achieve the best performance possible. The same can happen with the guests, they could change their instinctive behavior.

To take down notes I plan on using either my **phone** or **computer**, depending on the situation. Those two tools are so common nowadays that they will help me stay undercover while I am in

reality conducting observations and collecting data. A computer will give me structured tools adapted to note-taking but also considering my phone as a second option will give me more flexibility and convenience in moments when I would not be able to carry my laptop with me. Also, It will be done at the same time as the observation. I would not want to leave during the interaction to go take notes in the bathrooms and risk missing out on something crucial. Moreover, I would like to use a software very well adapted to note-taking. *Notion* (see Figure 12) seems to be a strategic choice. It allows me to create different sections. I can also tag observations based on things like the time of day, guest background, or staff role, making it easier to spot patterns later. Since *Notion* works on both my phone and laptop, I can take notes quickly without drawing attention. This will help me keep my data well-organized and easy to compare with my other tools, like interviews and online reviews.

Figure 12: Notion's organizational interface¹²



A researcher cannot simply write down everything they witness without any structure. In practice, when observing, I will follow a **chronological format**, where I write down detailed descriptions of interactions as they occur, action after action, word after word. Once this is done and I want to work on the organization and the structure of my observations I will analyze them by following an **observation grid**. As a master's student writing a study for the first time, I believe the adoption of a two-phase approach could be more strategic. The first phase would be to follow a **direct** and **semi-structured observation grid** before refining it into a more structured tool, closer to a **structured** and **systematic grid**. Building my observation plan this way would help me to, first, identify verbal and non-verbal patterns during interactions without imposing rigid categories too early (see Annex 1 for the semi-structured observation grid). If the grid has a strict coding system from the very start I might overlook findings. This initial stage

¹² Screenshot from: OuiFlow (n.d)

will allow me to identify recurring themes, define relevant categories, and structure my data collection more effectively.

Once patterns emerge and I become more comfortable, I can adjust my focus to capture more structured data on communication and guest satisfaction. This progression follows classic ethnographic fieldwork methodologies, where researchers gradually develop their analytical categories based on real-world observations rather than imposing them from the beginning (Goffman, 1961; Peretz, 2011).

Hundreds of people walk around the hostels every day. I will have to strategically select the interactions to be observed, the **sample**. It has to stay large enough not to miss anything or something I might not have thought about from the start. The first criterion is to make sure that many different types of interactions will be observed, the main ones will be: check-in, check-out, inquiries or complaints, and lastly casual exchanges. Also, the overall context of the interaction has to be integrated. This means that different times of the day should be observed: morning, afternoon, high-traffic periods, and quieter moments. The second variable will concern the guests. They will come from different backgrounds, age groups, travel motivations, etc. It will leave space for cross-cultural and other kinds of communication differences. Then, the other main actor in the interaction will be the staff member. I should observe more than one to generalize the findings and spot different communication behaviors. To sum up, I will use **purposive sampling**, meaning I will intentionally select interactions that align with my predefined criteria.

After having gathered raw and direct information with the field notes the goal will be to transform everything I collected with my senses and perception into more stable, more organized data (Peretz, 2011). Without this step, all the large amounts collected would become extremely overwhelming. For that, I need to identify patterns, compare them with existing sociological concepts, and explain why certain communication behaviors emerge in specific contexts and how they connect to guest satisfaction. I will then **cross-check** the findings with the other tools I plan on using: the interviews and online reviews.

Non-participant observations are not without risks and **challenges**. One of the most important ones is the observer bias. My expectations or my background may directly influence what will be witnessed. Acknowledging it will be very important. Also, even if all the measures are being taken to be as discreet as possible it is not without the risk that my role could be revealed which would affect people's behaviors and distort the results. In addition, observations are extremely time-consuming which is why a meticulously prepared strategy is a must. Even if there are challenges, these are part of the study and have to be navigated and overcome to obtain a successful data collection.

To ensure that my observations are conducted responsibly and do not compromise the integrity of the research, it is essential to consider the **ethical implications** of this method. As I would like to conduct non-participant and incognito observations, asking for consent from every participant would compromise my status and might alter any natural behaviors. This is why I will ensure that my research does not invade anyone's privacy. Anonymity and confidentiality are crucial, I must avoid collecting identifying information about the staff or the guests. To do so, I will use general descriptors or nicknames to organize my notes while ensuring that individual identities remain protected. Also, if I ever witness too sensitive or personal conversations I will make sure to omit anything confidential to respect people's privacy and trust in the staff. By prioritizing anonymity, confidentiality, and discretion, I aim to conduct my observations responsibly and ethically.

Observations will be a cornerstone of my study by letting me see the behaviors and actions of guests and staff directly. While interviews will help me gather their opinions and views on what happened. By witnessing these interactions in their natural context, I will be able to identify and document data that align with higher levels of guest satisfaction. These findings will provide direct evidence to either support or challenge my hypotheses.

9.2 The Individual Interviews for the Staff and the Guests

Whether on social media, on television, or on radio, individual interviews have always been an important way to access valuable and precious pieces of information. It gives direct, face-to-face, access to people, their experiences, and emotions. Through this questions and answers format, the interviewer can dive deeper into a topic but keep at the same time a humane

and authentic exchange. Indeed, in sociology,- it is defined as the gathering of data through direct interactions with the participants. The researcher asks questions to explore their thoughts and perspectives on a specific topic. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of subjective experiences, often providing detailed and comprehensive data about social behaviors, attitudes, and norms (Bryman, 2016). Each interview is unique and can take several forms, not one model can be applied to all the studies, it must be adapted. Interviews usually follow three main models: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. They differ primarily in terms of formality, flexibility, and control over the conversation.

My study aims at answering the following question: *How does the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication used by hostel staff during face-to-face interactions in Amsterdam influence guest satisfaction?*, the interviews will come as a complementary tool to cross-check data with the other tools being used. I believe that **semi-structured interviews** would be the best fit as they provide the desire to explore or deepen opinions. A list of questions is prepared but can be adapted during the interviews. The exact wording of the questions, the order in which they are asked, and the approach used to explore the topic are not fixed. On the contrary, the interviewer adapts dynamically to the conversation, allowing a deeper exploration of relevant themes while maintaining consistency (Bryman, 2016). This approach offers flexibility. It will be crucial in gathering rich data about how guests and staff perceive and experience communication in the hostel settings. It can help me uncover unexpected insights I might not have anticipated in a more strict and structured format.

I constructed a first and initial version of the interview guides (see Annexes 2 & 3 for the full version with the questions included). I chose to structure it as presented below:

Figure 13: Structure of the interview guides¹³

Interview guide for staff			
Introductory phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank the participant for their time, knowledge - Mutual introduction (<i>If needed, If I don't know the staff interviewed</i>) - Announce the structure of the interview - Give a brief and global presentation of the topic (<i>make sure that the participant understood, offer to ask questions for clearance</i>) - Presentation of the Legal Considerations (<i>Confidentiality, Consent, etc.</i>) 			
Themes	Sub-themes	Questions	Sub-questions/Stimulus

Interview guide for guests			
Introductory phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank the participant for their time, knowledge - Mutual introduction (<i>also used to collect primary information: age, nationality, job, hobbies, ect.</i>) - Announce the structure of the interview (<i>can be shorter or longer depending on the guest availability</i>) - Give a brief and global presentation of the topic (<i>make sure that the participant understood, offer to ask questions for clearance</i>) - Presentation of the Legal Considerations (<i>Confidentiality, Consent, etc.</i>) 			
Themes	Sub-themes	Questions	Sub-questions/Stimulus

The interview questions will be organized into themes, each of which will directly correspond to my hypotheses. These themes are designed to explore the key aspects outlined in my research questions. Within each theme, I will break down the content further into sub-themes, which will focus on the different components and key terms critical to the formulation of the hypothesis. This will help ensure the questions are precise and targeted. The next section of the interview guide will list all the specific questions I plan on asking. These questions will be carefully crafted to address each theme and sub-theme. Finally, the last section of the interview guide will include stimulus. These prompts are designed to keep the interview dynamic, ensuring that the conversation continues even if there are any pauses or blanks and that it delves into sufficient detail to provide rich insights.

I plan on **pilot-testing** those guides during the first-year internship to refine and adjust them if needed. By doing so I will ensure the guides are tailored to the purposes of my study and eventually improve the quality of the data gathered.

As a **sample**, the two categories of people I chose to interview during this study are **staff members** such as receptionists and managers working at the hostels operated by RB Horeca, as well as **guests** themselves. The employees can provide insights into how they perceive their own verbal and non-verbal communication while they work in the hostel. They can be asked about

¹³ Own elaboration

how they globally consider the question of communication with guests' satisfaction. It will be a way for them to share valuable information on their own strategies and the challenges they face. As a complementary method to observations, it can help explain some behaviors witnessed, and undiscovered with another layer of meaning. Hearing about their own thought process can give further explanations and understanding. If possible, I would like to meet with at least ten receptionists and managers to ensure diverse perspectives.

As for the **guests**, I believe it could be a way to access an in-depth analysis of their satisfaction and how it was influenced by both verbal and non-verbal cues. It can be a way for them to share their emotions and the way the staff made them feel during the different interactions they had with them. Some of their reactions might not be visible during observations. If verbal and non-verbal communication do not align, it can distort my observations and the actual role communication plays in their satisfaction. Overall the respondents have a competence on the subject, they have value and they will bring a lot of insights. To conclude on this point, I believe that my sampling process should stay flexible enough and not too strict to remain open to diverse perspectives and unexpected findings. Reaching guests will constitute a bigger challenge as they would have to make time during their trip for research interviews. This is the reason why I plan to have around five exchanges, and if I manage more.

My role in the interviews has to be mentioned as the interviewer's bias is one of the main limitations and **challenges** of individual interviews. The researcher needs to maintain their role to better understand the interviewee and not influence them to obtain the answer they are expecting (Katulski, 2024). To do this I need to establish a distance by recalling the scientific goal and institutional side to avoid turning it into a friendly conversation. Another element to pay attention to is the way the questions will be asked. The respondents should not be influenced by formulations too answer-oriented because there is a risk of changing their responses or behaviors. When words can influence me, my body language and tone can also be a threat. It means that I will need to keep a neutral tone, a neutral posture, and strong active listening not to let any approval or disapproval show.

Moreover, a **practical description** of how I plan on conducting these interviews should be explored. In terms of **location**, and environment I need to choose a quiet and neutral place. For the staff members, I can offer to do it in a café. This informal atmosphere can help the

respondent feel more at ease than in the workplace. The guests will probably have very little time to devote to an interview and the hostel seems more adequate and practical. It constitutes a familiar environment for them. It can also make it easier for them to recall vividly their interactions with the staff. Then, in terms of **timing**, the staff members could be invited to participate in the interviews outside of work hours to avoid any disruptions. As for the guests, It would be at times that fit into their travel schedule, potentially offering shorter, more flexible interview slots to accommodate their limited availability.

Ethical guidelines have to be respected during any type of interview. Participants will be informed about the study's purpose, role, and how their responses will be used. Their participation must be voluntary meaning that they are free to stop the interview at any time. I will ask for written or verbal consent and if they allow me I will use my phone to record the conversations. Otherwise, I will take extended notes. The recordings and transcripts will be stored securely and deleted after the study is completed. In addition, all interview responses, including recordings, will be anonymized to respect privacy. For that, I will not use any names or identifying elements. Instead, I will use numbers or letters: guest 1, staff A, etc.

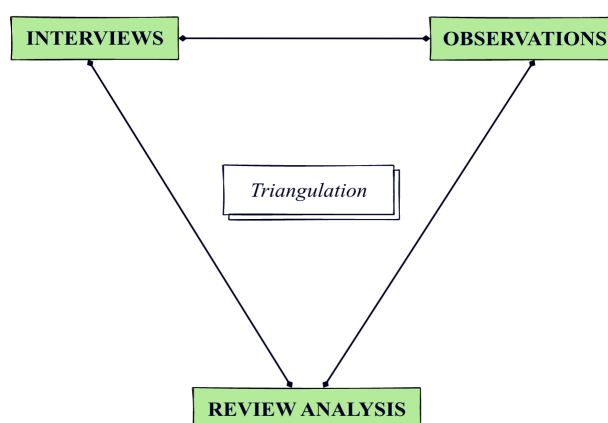
Conducting individual semi-structured interviews with both staff members and guests will provide my study with valuable qualitative insights into how verbal and non-verbal communication influences guest satisfaction and experience. By exchanging directly with interviewees, this tool will uncover perspectives that might be fully understood with observations alone. However, interviews also come with limitations and challenges that can be bridged with a complementary document analysis of online guest reviews.

9.3 The Review Analysis

As a complementary method, I plan on conducting a **document analysis**. It is defined as the review and investigation of material that can have different formats. It goes from paper to electronic. The goal is to find meaning, build understanding, and gain knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This method is rarely used alone, it is usually combined with other data collection tools to cross-verify findings and confirm reliability. It corresponds to the concept of **triangulation**: the *“combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon”* (Denzin, 1970). Denzin, an American university professor, adapted a military technique to

sociological studies. Also used in navigation, it consisted of locating a target by measuring angles from two or more known points. This explains why multiple viewpoints are being used. I believe that combining a document analysis with the interviews and observations could be beneficial in the process of studying the impact of verbal and non-verbal communication on guest satisfaction in Amsterdam's hostels (see figure below). In sociology, document analysis is very often used as a way to verify the findings that will be made with other methodological tools. If there are contradictions rather than corroborations I will have to investigate further and re-think some elements. But if there is harmony between the results it will bring more trustworthiness (Bowen, 2009).

Figure 14: A Visual Representation of Triangulation¹⁴



Besides, many types of documents could be chosen for this study but I would like to focus on the **online reviews** of Dirty Nelly's and THIS HO(S)TEL. During interviews, some guests might feel the need to be nicer than what they would have said behind a screen, where they can voluntarily say what they think without any filters. They have more anonymity which can lead to more honesty than during interviews where they are more influenced by the interviewer. Analyzing the reviews could allow me to contrast the interviews and observations with a complementary, unfiltered, and more objective approach. It could also be a way to spot elements that might have been missed during the other data collection processes. This triangulation process will not only help me in cross-verifying findings but it will also ensure a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon I am studying. Indeed, reviews testify to how guests construct narratives about their experience in the hostel. The meaning created through online platforms reflects social trends and communication.

¹⁴ Own elaboration

Moreover, the **sample** will be larger since guests from all over the world leave reviews. If the reviews are not in English I will use reliable translation tools to keep the multilingual and multicultural approach. This will give me access to more backgrounds. It will help capture a fuller picture of how communication impacts guest satisfaction in a multi-cultural context. This picture will represent guest narratives and social trends.

In addition, this method does not require me to be physically on-site, allowing me to collect precious information early on and during times when I cannot directly witness behaviors or interact with guests. For instance, I will be able to do it during the school year, when I am off work, or when the peak season limits my ability to organize interviews. This flexibility ensures I can continuously gather relevant and uninterrupted data, filling in the gaps when I am not on location and when direct observation is not an option (e.g., during university semesters, or academic holidays).

Practically speaking, I plan on listing and categorizing the potential recurring **keywords**, mentions of “staff” and the **themes** associated such as “friendliness”, “responsiveness”, etc. This could highlight trends in guest perceptions. A table can be used to help gather and organize the content collected. It could be presented as follows:

Figure 15: Review Analysis Table¹⁵

Review Analysis							
Review n°	Rating	Date	Review text	Staff Feedback	Communication Feedback	Key Themes	Other

I also needed to define a **period** to frame the analysis. Trying to check all the reviews would be infeasible or would maybe have to be the only methodological tool I adopt. To have a picture broad enough and take into account all the various contexts where communication can differ, I thought it could be interesting to choose a **one-year period**. I would like to conduct this review

¹⁵ Own elaboration

analysis from July 2025 to July 2026. This way I would witness reviews from stays happening in both peak and off-peak seasons. It ensures that I capture a comprehensive set of reviews, reflecting periods with higher guest turnover and off-peak days when interactions may differ. Also, this period will align with both my first-year and second-year internships allowing me to cross-check some review data with real-time observations and interviews during those months. This way I will be able to collect reviews in real-time rather than having to scroll back through an extensive backlog of past feedback. By checking new reviews regularly, I can ensure a more systematic and manageable analysis while also staying up to date.

Furthermore, as a **data source**, I plan on using the online platform Booking.com on the two hostels selected as a field of application: Durty Nelly's and THIS HO(S)TEL. It is a trusted platform in the world of tourism and hospitality. The two hostels have a large volume of reviews which provides a robust sample and more validity. Since I will also conduct observations and interviews in these hostels, keeping everything in the same context will align review feedback with interview responses and observational data, allowing me to capture the full guest experience.

One of the main **challenges** with document analysis, especially online reviews, is the large volume of data. Sorting through them all to identify relevant insights can quickly become overwhelming and time-consuming. The period chosen and the use of *Notion* software to gather, organize, and categorize, aims at limiting this. Also, the content found in the reviews can be biased or excessively subjective. Guests might have left a review after an over-positive or over-negative interaction and it would not reflect an overall guest experience. This limitation can be reduced thanks to the triangulation and the combination of various tools as explained above.

Finally, **ethical considerations** have to be taken very seriously. Even though reviews are made publicly available I need to respect privacy and consent matters. Guests voluntarily share their feedback online but I need to ensure that any data I use is handled responsibly. I will anonymize the data by not displaying any guest's personal information such as their names or anything making them easily identifiable. I can also summarize, and paraphrase the content of the reviews, and avoid direct quotes to further ensure anonymity.

Finally, using document analysis, in combination with interviews and observations, will allow for a more reliable and comprehensive understanding of how communication impacts guest satisfaction in Amsterdam's hostels. It will provide unfiltered, diverse insights into guest perceptions, which come as complementary, broader, and more multicultural. The results will be used to verify whether positive or negative feedback correlates with certain types of communication behavior, directly tying back to my hypotheses.

General Conclusion of Part 3

To conclude, the goal of this section was to propose a strong methodology plan and a field of application that would enable me to verify my different hypotheses during Master 2. As a first step, I decided to start at the core and justify the choice between a qualitative approach and a quantitative one. Unsurprisingly, for such a topic, the qualitative method was proven to be more adapted. Indeed, verbal and non-verbal communication is a complex process that cannot be fully understood with numbers, trends, and patterns. It requires a true exploration that forces researchers to go below the surface. Even if qualitative is the best fit, there are still challenges that will have to be carefully navigated. Once this important point was settled, I decided to present the field of application where the data collection is planned to be conducted. Two hostels with two very distinct layouts and atmospheres were chosen to bring in a larger context and a more holistic vision. This choice was directly linked to my future internships and my past experience working in Amsterdam which provides continuity in this study. Finally, the tools planned to be used were described and presented: the non-participant observations, the semi-directive interviews, and the guest reviews analysis. Each of them was defined and justified. Then, the sampling plan was introduced, and the way raw data would be analyzed was also mentioned. Some challenges and very important ethical guidelines also had to be explained.

General Conclusion

As a reminder, this research aims to explore how the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication used by hostel staff during face-to-face interactions in Amsterdam influences guest satisfaction. In other words, I am trying to understand how staff communication impacts the guest experience in Amsterdam hostels. It is an attempt to analyze how messages are delivered and interpreted during interactions taking place in a very social and intercultural setting. It makes this study a combination of communication studies, sociology, and hospitality management.

Since this was the first-year dissertation, the results of the study so far mainly concern what has been explored and established through the literature review. It is a preparatory and theoretical work because no data has been collected yet.

To begin, a foundational understanding of communication was given. It was shown that staff-guests verbal and non-verbal interactions are central but that there are also obstacles that can comprise it. Afterward, guest satisfaction was found to be a complex and socially driven process where expectations and reality rub against each other. Then, verbal and non-verbal communication were identified as key factors in shaping guest experience. Additionally, tailoring this communication to the guests' backgrounds can significantly enhance the level of satisfaction. It led to the exploration of these communication practices in the context of hostels, particularly in Amsterdam. The findings suggest that hostels, through their layout and main characteristics, offer a unique social environment that encourages staff-guests interactions and communication. It makes verbal and non-verbal communication very significant.

Furthermore, hostels were proven to have an evolving role in hospitality and tourism that goes beyond providing affordable accommodation. They developed in response to travelers' changing motivations towards experiences and human contact. It makes VC and NVC all the more important as the guest's expectations and satisfaction will be directed toward these elements. Finally, the findings made about the context of Amsterdam confirm the pertinence of studying communication in such a vibrant and multicultural hostel setting.

Further results and findings have been made through the theoretical framework. Indeed, the first theory helped us understand how guests arrive with pre-made mental imaginaries about their stay. These images shape the expectations that will lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction when reality comes into the equation. If verbal and non-verbal communication used by staff matches or positively transforms these expectations, guest satisfaction will increase. The second theory defended the idea that communication and interactions in hostels are performances that impact the guests' perception of their experience. The last theory showed that verbal and non-verbal communication can be adapted to match the guest's social identity and improve satisfaction.

In short, this first-year dissertation highlights that verbal and non-verbal communication significantly influences guest satisfaction. It shows that it is particularly the case in hostels, where social interactions are central. Then, guest satisfaction is shaped by expectations, which are influenced by personal imaginaries and real-life experiences. Hostels bring in a unique and distinctive environment where tailored communication from staff can further enhance the guest experience. All these primary results are hypothetical and do not have empirical validation yet.

As explained in the second part, this study brings contributions. First, it creates a clear link between communication and satisfaction. This link helps fill in an academic gap and creates a bridge with the specific context of hostels, in Amsterdam. In addition, it combines sociology, communication, and hospitality in one research. Then, it contributes to the creation of potential practical outcomes for hostel management and staff training, as well as hospitality in general.

The aim will now be to test the different hypotheses developed thanks to the literature review and theoretical framework. It will be done by using the methodology in real life. Indeed, the next step to continue this research will be to do pilot testing on my planned data collection. During the first year internship, I will check my tools with my field of application to refine or bring all the modifications necessary. This will significantly prepare the ground for the actual data collection of Master 2. The guest' reviews analysis will be started in June this year to spread out the large amount of data. Every week I will gather the new reviews posted. Then, during the next academic year and more precisely during the second internship, I will implement the other tools proposed in the qualitative methodology. To do so I will observe the staff of two hostels. I will interview them and also guests to learn about their perceptions.

Later on, this study could be extended by looking at hostels in other cities, comparing different types of hostels, or even comparing them to hotels. From bunks to suites, every setting speaks its own language.

References & Bibliography

Abercrombie, D. (1968). *The philosophy of language*. Oxford University Press.

ADE. (2024). *Amsterdam Dance Event*. Retrieved January 25, 2025, from <https://www.amsterdam-dance-event.nl/en/>

Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L., & Proctor, R. (2001). *Interplay: The process of interpersonal communication* (8th ed.). Harcourt.

Altman, I., & Taylor, D. A. (1973). *Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Amirou, R. (1995). *Imaginaire touristique et sociabilités du voyage* [Tourist imagination and travel sociabilities]. Presses Universitaires de France.

Amirou, R. (2000). *Imaginaire du tourisme culturel* [The imaginary of cultural tourism]. Presses Universitaires de France.

Ang, S., Van Dyne, L., Koh, C., Ng, K., Templer, K. J., Tay, C., & Chandrasekar, N. (2007). Cultural intelligence: Its measurement and effects on cultural judgment and decision making, cultural adaptation and task performance. *Management and Organization Review*, 3(3), 335–371.

Argyle, M. (1988). *Bodily communication* (2nd ed.). International Universities Press.

Bhatia, A. K. (2002). *Tourism development: Principles and practices*. Sterling Publishers.

Binoy, S. (2019). Significance of hypothesis in research. *Indian Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 10(1), 31–33. <https://doi.org/10.24321/2348.2133.201905>

Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity.

International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10(2), 179–196. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(86\)90005-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(86)90005-2)

Bennett, M. J. (2017). Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In K. B. Jensen (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of intercultural communication* (pp. 1–10). Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783665.ieicc0182>

Berger, J. (2014). Word of mouth and interpersonal communication: A review and directions for future research. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 24(4), 586–607. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.03.002>

Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. Wiley.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. University of California Press.

Bowen, G. (2009). *Document analysis as a qualitative research method*. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/ORJ0902027>

Borovskaya, I., & Dedova, M. (2014). *Creativity in hospitality industry: Study of hostels in St. Petersburg*. Santalka: Filosofija, Komunikacija [Santalka: Philosophy, Communication], 22(2), 137–144.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Cambridge University Press. (n.d.). *Cambridge dictionary online*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/communication>

Carter, M. J., & Fuller, C. (2015, January). *Symbolic interactionism*. *Sociopedia.isa*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/205684601561>

Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS). (2024). Hotels; capacity, type of accommodation, beds, star rating. <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/figures/detail/84040ENG>

Chen, Y.-L., Chen, J., Liu, W.-Y., & Sharma, T. (2020). Expected benefits of people interactions and guest experiences. *International Hospitality Review*.

CGS. (2019). 2019 CGS customer service chatbots and channels survey. CGS Inc. <https://www.cgsinc.com/en/company/newsroom/2019-cgs-customer-service-chatbots-and-channels-survey>

City of Amsterdam. (n.d.). Tourism policy. Amsterdam.nl. Retrieved February 9, 2025, from <https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/policy/policy-tourism/>

City of Amsterdam. (2025). King's Day. Retrieved April 10, 2025, from <https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/news/king-day/>

Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310–357. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.98.2.310>

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

Crîșmariu, O.-D., & Țigu, G. (2019). *Perception of the ambiance: Component of the tourist experience in the hospitality industry*. Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of*

Personality and Social Psychology, 44(1), 113–126. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.44.1.113>

Durand, G. (1992). *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire : Introduction à l'archétypologie générale de l'imaginaire* [The anthropological structures of the imaginary: Introduction to the general archetypology of the imaginary]. Paris: Bordas.

Denney, A. S., & Tewksbury, R. (2012). How to Write a Literature Review. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 24(2), 218–234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2012.730617>

Denzin, N. K. (1970). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Chicago: Aldine.

DeVito, J. A. (2015). *Human communication: The basic course* (13th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

DeVito, J. A. (2017). *The interpersonal communication book* (15th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

D'Iribarne, P., Segal, J.-P., & Chevrier, S. (2022). *Cultures et management international: Un nouveau paradigme* [Cultures and International Management: A New Paradigm] (1st ed.). Paris: Presses des Mines.

Disilva, X., & Arun, A. (2017). Communication barrier encountered by employees working in the hotel industry. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 4(14), 180-184. <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.414.3509>

EF Education First. (2024). *EF English Proficiency Index: A ranking of 116 countries and regions by English skills*. Retrieved January 26, 2025, from <https://www.ef.com/epi>

European Best Destinations (EBD). (2025). *Best cultural destinations in Europe*. Retrieved from <https://www.europeanbestdestinations.com>

European Travel Commission (ETC). (2020). *Study on Generation Z travellers: A handbook produced for the European Travel Commission (ETC) by TOPOSOPHY Ltd.* (ETC Market Intelligence.) Retrieved from <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/study-on-generation-z-travelers/>

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Fornell, C., Johnson, M. D., Anderson, E. W., Cha, J., & Bryant, B. E. (1996). The American customer satisfaction index: Nature, purpose, and findings. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(4), 7–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299606000403>

Gallois, C., & Giles, H. (1998). Accommodating mutual influence in intergroup encounters. In M. T.

Gemeente Amsterdam. (2024). *City of Amsterdam.* Retrieved from <https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/>

Gerritsma, R. (2019). Overcrowded Amsterdam: Striving for a balance between trade, tolerance, and tourism. In *Overtourism: Excesses, discontents, and measures in travel and tourism* (pp. 125–147). Wallingford, UK: CABI. <https://doi.org/10.1079/9781786399823.0125>

Giles, H. (1973). Accent mobility: A model and some data. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 15(2), 87–105.

Giles, H. (1977). Language, ethnicity and intergroup relations. In H. Giles (Ed.), *Language, ethnicity and intergroup relations* (pp. 307–348). New York, NY: Academic Press.

Giles, H. (2016). *Communication accommodation theory: Negotiating personal relationships and social identities across contexts.* Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316226537>

Giles, H., Coupland, N., & Coupland, J. (1991). Accommodation theory: Communication, context, and consequence. In H. Giles, J. Coupland, & N. Coupland (Eds.), *Contexts of accommodation: Developments in applied sociolinguistics* (pp. 1–68). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Giles, H., & Ogay, T. (2007). Communication accommodation theory. In B. B. Whaley & W. Samter (Eds.), *Explaining communication: Contemporary theories and exemplars* (pp. 293–310). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates.* New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Grand View Research. (2024). *Hostel market size, share & trends analysis report by accommodation type (dormitory rooms, private rooms, family rooms), by guest type, by booking mode, by region, and segment forecasts, 2024-2030* (Report No. GVR-4-68040-482-0). San Francisco, CA: Grand View Research. <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/hostel-market>

Grant, C., & Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, selecting, and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research. *Administrative Issues Journal: Education, Practice, and Research*, 4(2), 12–26. <https://doi.org/10.5929/2014.4.2.9>

Grusec, J. E., & Hastings, P. D. (2015). *Handbook of Socialization: Theory and Research* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Gumaste, R., Joshi, S., Shende, K., & Munghantiwar, C. (2024). Cultural sensitivity in hospitality: Enhancing cross-cultural competence among hotel staff for improved guest satisfaction. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Organizational Studies*, 19(1), 818–830. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386324169_CULTURAL_SENSITIVITY_IN_HOSPITALITY

Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Hammarberg, K., Kirkman, M., & de Lacey, S. (2016). Qualitative research methods: When to use them and how to judge them. *Human Reproduction*, 31(3), 498–501. <https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/dev334>

Hancock, B., Windridge, K., & Ockleford, E. (2007). *An introduction to qualitative research*. Leicester, UK: National Institute for Health Research.

Hannam, K. M., & Diekmann, A. (2010). *Beyond backpacker tourism: Mobilities and experiences*. Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications.

Hannes, K., Hendricks, L., Brgles, M., Dierckx, C., Gemignani, M., Huhnen, M., Vrebos, H., Swift, A., & Van Goidsenhoven, L. (2022). Being creative with resources in qualitative research. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research design* (Chapter 19). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278.n19>

Hart Research Associates. (2015). *Falling short? College learning and career success: Selected findings from online surveys of employers and college students conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges & Universities*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities. Retrieved from <https://dgm81phhvh63.cloudfront.net/content/u>

ser-photos/Research/PDFs/2015employerstudent_survey.pdf

Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Hennig-Thurau, T., & Hansen, U. (2000). Relationship marketing: Some reflections on the state-of-the-art of the relational concept. In T. Hennig-Thurau & U. Hansen (Eds.), *Relationship marketing* (pp. 3–27). Berlin, Germany: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-09745-8_1

Heskett, J. L., Jones, T. O., Loveman, G. W., Sasser, W. E., & Schlesinger, L. A. (1994). *Putting the service-profit chain to work*. Harvard Business Review, 72(2), 164–174.

Hildesheim, J. (2022). *The experience of young European travelers in connection to their Interrail trip* [Master's thesis, Dalarna University]. DiVA Portal. Retrieved from <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:du-42146>

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Jamal, A. & Naser, K. (2002). Customer satisfaction and retail banking: an assessment of some of the key antecedents of customer satisfaction in retail banking. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 20(4), 146–160. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02652320210432936>

Kamal Bahrain, N. N., Sakrani, S. N. R., & Maidin, A. (2023). Communication barriers in work environment: Understanding impact and challenges. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(11). <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i11/19498>

Kasiri, L. A., Guan Cheng, K. T., Sambasivan, M. & Sidin, S. M. (2017). Integration of standardization and

customization: Impact on service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 35, 91-97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.11.007>

Katulski, J. (2024). Beyond oral history: The application of semi-structured interviews to research in the overlapping fields of history, sociology, and political science. *Świat Idei i Polityki*, 23(2). <https://doi.org/10.34767/SIIP.2024.02.06>

Kirchmajer, L., & Patterson, P. (2003). The role of interpersonal communication in the development of client trust and closeness in a SME professional services context. In J. Lowe (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Small Enterprise Association of Australia and New Zealand 16th Annual Conference* (pp. 1-13). University of Ballarat.

Kılıçkaya, F. (2009). World Englishes, English as an International Language and Applied Linguistics. *English Language Teaching*, 2(3), 35–38. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v2n3p35>

Kueh, S., & Pengiran Bagul, A. H. B. (2013). The effects of nonverbal communication of hotel employees upon emotional responses of hotel guests. *IRACST-International Journal of Research in Management & Technology (IJRMT)*, 3(4).

Lam, R., Cheung, C., & Lugosi, P. (2021). The Impacts of Cultural and Emotional Intelligence on Hotel Guest Satisfaction: Asian and Non-Asian Perceptions of Staff Capabilities. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 17(3), 455–477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2020.1771500>

Lapum, J., St-Amant, O., Hughes, M., & Garmaise-Yee, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Introduction to communication in nursing*. Toronto Metropolitan University Pressbooks. <https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/communicationnursing/chapter/transaction-model-of-communication/>

Lima, R., & Vicente, P. (2016). *The effect of service quality on hostel guests' satisfaction*. *Revista Turismo & Desenvolvimento*, 15(1), 4–18.

Lolli, J. C. (2013). Interpersonal communication skills and the young hospitality leader: Are they prepared? *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 32, 295–298. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2012.06.004>

Maddern, S. W. (2013). *Melting pot theory*. In *The encyclopedia of global human migration*. Retrieved from <https://www.academia.edu/>

Magnini, V. P., Baker, M., & Karande, K. (2013). The frontline provider's appearance: A driver of guest perceptions. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 54(4), 396-405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965513490822>

Manusov, V. (2020). Interpersonal communication. In D. L. Worthington & G. D. Bodie (Eds.), *The handbook of listening* (Chapter 7). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119554189.ch7>

McCain, K. D., & Marsh, J. S. (n.d.). *Nonverbal Communication & Active Listening in Small Groups*. In *Developing Human Potential*. Pressbooks. Retrieved on April 03, 2025, from <https://pressbooks.nebraska.edu/developinghumanpotential/chapter/nonverbal-communication-active-listening-in-small-groups/>

McCarthy, E. J. (1960). *Basic marketing: A managerial approach*. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin.

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist* (C. W. Morris, Ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Min, H., Lim, Y., & Magnini, V. P. (2015). Factors affecting customer satisfaction in responses to negative online hotel reviews: The impact of empathy, paraphrasing, and speed.

Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, 56(2), 223–231.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965514560014>

Min, K. S., Jung, J. M., & Ryu, K. (2021). Listen to their heart: Why does active listening enhance customer satisfaction after a service failure? *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 96, 102956.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2021.102956>

Mohapatra, S. K., & Chatterjee, P. (2024). An analysis of the importance of effective communication and body language skills in India's hospitality industry. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 5(6), 3795–3801.

Moisa, C. (2010). The distinctiveness of the youth travel product. *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Oeconomica*, 12(2).

Muiri, A. (2024). Relationship between cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction: A cross-cultural study in Kenya. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 4(1), 46–56.
<https://www.ajpojournals.org>

Murphy, L. (2001). Exploring social interactions of backpackers. *Annals of Tourism Research* 28(1): 50–67.
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(00\)00003-7](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(00)00003-7)

Nederlandse Spoorwegen. (2024). *NS Annual Report 2023*. <https://www.ns.nl/jaarverslag>

Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (7th ed.).

NBTC. (2024). A focus on international visits. <https://www.nbtc.nl/en/site/knowledge-base/a-focus-on-international-visits>

Oliveira, B. S. de, & Sohn, A. P. L. (2025). Emotional intelligence in tourism and hospitality: A bibliometric analysis. *International Journal of Hospitality*

Management, 128, 104141.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2025.104141>

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A., & Berry, L.L. (1988). A conceptual model of service quality and its implication. *Journal of Marketing*, 49, Fall, 41–50.

Park, S., Woo, M., & Nicolau, J. (2019). Determinant Factors of Tourist Expenses. *Journal of Travel Research*, 59, 004728751982925.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287519829257>

Peretz, H. (2011). *Methods in sociology: Observation*. La Découverte.

Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The experience economy: Work is theatre & every business a stage*. Harvard Business Press.

Quadri-Felitti, D., Su, N., & Day, J. (2021). Consumer perspectives of boutique and lifestyle hotels: Is there a difference? *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 22(3), 314–327.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584211054605>

Ramgade, A., & Kumar, A. (2021). Emergence and development of hostels as alternative accommodation and their popularity amongst the millennials. *Vidyabharati International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 13(1), 642–646.

Rather, A. H., Najar, A. H., Bhat, A. A., & Najar, P. A. (2022). Perceived political risk and tourists' behavioural intention: The mediating effect of destination image. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 11(4), 1443–1458.
<https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.301>

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2020). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. SAGE Publications.

RB Horeca (2025). *Interior images & building plan.*

Rijksmuseum, Van Gogh Museum, & Anne Frank House. (2023). *Amsterdam's cultural heritage: Insights from annual reports and press releases (2022–2023)*
<https://www.amsterdamtips.com/top-10-amsterdam-museums>

Rocci, A., & de Saussure, L. (2016). *Verbal Communication.* De Gruyter Mouton.

Sadik, A. (2020). Factors affecting customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry: The case study of the Tamale Metropolis. *European Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 9(1), 1–11.

Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). *Emotional Intelligence. Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9(3), 185–211.
<https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG>

Scholten, P., & Entzinger, H. (2013). The interplay of knowledge production and policymaking: A comparative analysis of research and policymaking on migrant integration in Germany and the Netherlands. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 15(3), 257–274.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13876988.2013.834674>

Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language.* Cambridge University Press.

Seltzer, L. J., Proski, A. R., Ziegler, T. E., & Pollak, S. D. (2012). Instant messages versus human speech: Hormones and why we still need to hear each another. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 33(1), 42–45.

Simpson, D. M. (2017). *Richard Schirrmann: The man who invented youth hostels.* Self-published.

Singalen, Y. A. (2024). Hotel customer satisfaction: A comprehensive analysis of perceived cleanliness, location, service, and value. *Journal of Business and Economics Research*, 5(3), 352–369.
<https://doi.org/10.47065/jbe.v5i3.6016>

Stewart, C., Wall, A., & Marciniak, S. (2016). Mixed signals: Do college graduates have the soft skills that employers want? *Competition Forum*, 14(2), 276–281.

Stewart, J., Zediker, K., & Witteborn, S. (2005). *Together: Communicating interpersonally: a social construction approach* (6th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury.

Sun, X., Wang, P., Lepp, A., & Robertson, L. (2014). Symbolic consumption and brand choice: China's youth hostels for the international travel market. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 10(1), 51–68.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2013.870950>

Taskov, N., Dimitrov, N., & Metodijeski, D. (2014). A review of the hostel sector in the Republic of Macedonia. In *Proceedings of the Vth International Practical-Scientific Conference: Tourism Economics and Business* (pp. 168–172). Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University.

T'Felt, K. (2018). *Le voyage des Danois et le tourisme des Chinois* [The journey of the Danes and Chinese tourism]. In *Mobilité : entre l'imaginaire et le réel* [Mobility: Between the imaginary and the real].

UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (n.d.). *Seventeenth-Century Canal Ring Area of Amsterdam inside the Singelgracht.* UNESCO.
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1349/>

UNWTO. (n.d.). *UNWTO Tourism Data Dashboard.* Retrieved on February 9th, 2025, from
<https://www.unwto.org/un-tourism-data-dashboar>

Verma, D., & Waghela, L. (2022). A study on personalized service & its implication on guest satisfaction in 5-star hotels of Delhi. *International Journal of Research in Academic World*, 1(15), 18–23.

Verspoor, M., De Bot, K., & Xu, X. (2015). The effects of English bilingual education in the Netherlands. *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, 3(1), 4–27. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jicb.3.1.01ver>

Watt, P. (2007). 'I Need People That Are Happy, Always Smiling': Guest Interaction and Emotional Labour in a Canadian Downtown Hotel. *Just Labour*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1705-1436.94>

Willems, R. M., Özyürek, A., & Hagoort, P. (2007). When language meets action: The neural integration of gesture and speech. *Cerebral Cortex*, 17(10), 2322–2333. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cercor/bhl141>

Yun, W., & Hanson, N. (2020). Weathering consumer pricing sensitivity: The importance of customer contact and personalized services in the financial services industry. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 55, 102085. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102085>
[Peeref](#)

Yunita, W., & Wahyudi, R. (2020). The speech act of request and refusal in English as a foreign language: Hotel front desk's linguistic politeness. *ELSYA: Journal of English Language Studies*, 2(2), 54–60. <http://ojs.journal.unilak.ac.id/index.php/elsya>

Zhang, Y. (2018). Research on hotel industry personalized service from the perspective of experience economy. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 193. Atlantis Press.

Table of Annexes

Annex A: Semi-structured Observation Grid.....	105
Annex B: Staff Individual Interview Guide.....	106
Annex C: Guest Individual Interview Guide.....	109

Annexes

Annex A: Semi-structured Observation Grid

1) Observation Context

- Date:
 - Place/Hostel name:
 - Staff:
 - Guest: *1, 2, 3 (to stay anonymous) + (solo, couple, group, returning guest, etc.)*
 - Setting: *reception, common areas, check-in/check-out desk, bar, loud music or not? crowded or not? time of the day?*
 - Types of interactions observed: *Check-in/check-out conversations, informal chats, conflict resolution, complaints, etc.*
 - Use of space & movement: *How staff, guests occupy or move through space? common paths or changes over time?*
-

2) Verbal Language

- Tone & Manner: *Friendly, neutral, polite, rushed, loud, monotone, etc.?*
 - Language: *clear, fluent, hesitant, direct, indirect, informal, humor?*
 - Multilingualism: *which languages used? misunderstandings? confusion? how was it handled?*
 - Key phrases: *notable sentences, rehearsed, scripted? special to a hostel context?*
 - Informational content: *house rules, check-in/out, events, etc. ?*
-

3) Non-verbal communication

- Facial expressions: *smiling, frowning, neutral, forced expressions, etc. ?*
 - Gestures & posture: *open/closed posture, avoidant, using hands, neutral, signs of stress, etc. ?*
 - Eye contact: *avoidant, confident, natural, etc. ?*
 - Proxemics: *close, distant, leaning in/back, getting up from chair; staying behind the desk, etc. ?*
-

4) Guest response & behavior

- Emotional response: *happy, satisfied, impatient, annoyed, confused, neutral, etc. ?*
 - Body language & reactions: *relaxed, closed, tensed, nodding, avoidant, etc. ?*
 - Verbal feedback: *any expressions that show how the guest feels? reactions? compliments?*
-

5) Additional notes & unexpected findings

anything unplanned, interesting? unusual guest behavior? cultural influences? significant events?

6) Reflection & Adjustments to the Grid

What Needs More Focus? What stands out? Limitations?

Annex B: Staff Individual Interview Guide

Interview guide for staff			
Introductory phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank the participant for their time, knowledge - Mutual introduction (<i>if needed, especially if I haven't met the staff member before</i>) - Announce the structure of the interview - Give a brief and clear presentation of the topic (<i>make sure the participant understands and offer a chance to ask questions for clarification</i>) - Presentation of the Legal Considerations (<i>Confidentiality, Consent, etc.</i>) 			
Themes	Sub-themes	Questions	Sub-questions/Stimulus
Background questions for the participant	Age, Career, hostel work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could you please briefly introduce yourself? - Could you please describe your career in Hospitality? - Why did you choose the hostel industry? - How did you get this job, especially in Amsterdam? - What is your current role at the hostel? - What do you find the most fulfilling about your job? - How would you describe the work atmosphere/culture in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why Amsterdam? - What are your main responsibilities/tasks? How long have you been in this position? - How would you describe the part where you interact with guests in your job?
		hostel?	
Introduction to the topic	Guest interactions, Self-check-in Kiosk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does interacting with guests mean to you? - Are the first few moments of the interaction you have with a guest important for their entire stay? - In your experience, are guests more satisfied with self-kiosk check-in or staff-assisted check-in? Why do you think that is? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which kind of atmosphere are you trying to create when a guest checks-in? - When a guest uses the self-kiosk do you still try to interact with them? - Do you think the self-kiosk can fully replace the human interaction that happens during a traditional check-in? Why or why not?
H1: Guests' pre-existing travel imaginaries shape their expectations of hostel staff communication, and when these are met or positively transformed, satisfaction increases.	Hostel pre-existing travel imaginaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think guests arrive with specific images or ideas of what a hostel should be like? - What do you think travelers think about this hostel before they arrive? - Do you notice any differences in travel expectations based on where the guests are from? - How would you describe the "mental image" most travelers seem to have before they get here? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - About the atmosphere? About the staff in general? About communication? - Did it ever surprise anyone? Positively? Negatively? - Where do you think these expectations/images come from? Social Media? Previous experiences?

	VC & NVC expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you think a hostel guest coming to Amsterdam expects to be addressed verbally speaking? - Which non-verbal cues do you think a hostel guest in Amsterdam expects from you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you do anything in particular to make sure their expectations are met?
	Imaginaires vs. Reality - Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you often notice a difference between what guests expect and what they actually experience here? - Do you think that if you meet their expectations they will be more satisfied? - Do guests ever mention whether their time here was what they expected? - Or didn't match what they imagined before coming? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If yes, were they? Surprised? Shocked? Disappointed? Pleased? - How did you react? What did you do about it? - Were there times where they still loved it in the end?
H2: Clear, polite, and friendly verbal communication, combined with positive non-verbal cues like smiling and open body language, help meet guest expectations and increase satisfaction.	Clear, polite, and friendly verbal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you make sure that the way you communicate with guests is clear and easy to understand? - Do you think that polite language has a noticeable impact on a guest's experience? - What about a friendly language? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think it is important? - Do you adapt it depending on your perception of the guests' understanding? (<i>Going straight to the point, reduce it...</i>) - What do you do to create those effects?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you feel you have more freedom and flexibility in how you communicate because it's a hostel environment? - Can you recall a situation where your way of speaking or acting seemed to really impact a guest? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positively? - Negatively?
	Positive non-verbal cues like smiling and open body language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What non-verbal gestures do you think are most effective in creating a friendly and welcoming atmosphere in Amsterdam? - Do you think that your body language plays an important role in the quality of the service you deliver? - If a guest misunderstands your verbal instructions, how could non-verbal communication help clarify the message? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there specific non-verbal behaviors you think are most important during a guest's check-in process? - How would you describe the attitude a receptionist in a hostel in Amsterdam has to adopt? - Do you use eye contact to connect with guests? - What kind of posture or gestures do you use? - Do you consciously try to smile when speaking with guests?
	Influence on satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you share a situation where your communication (clarity, politeness, friendliness) directly influenced a guest's satisfaction or willingness to return to the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think that guests are more likely to leave positive reviews when communication is clear and friendly?

		<p>hostel?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is your strategy to handle complaints/conflicts? - Has polite verbal communication ever helped you resolve a conflict, a complaint with a positive outcome? - Have you received feedback from guests that specifically highlights how your communication enhanced their experience in Amsterdam? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you use communication to turn things around? - Do you try to control your emotions? To stay neutral?
H3: Adapting communication to align with guests' backgrounds and social identities increases satisfaction.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you try to adapt your communication for each guest? - Can you share an example where you adapted your communication to better connect with a guest from a different cultural background? - Do you believe that aligning differences directly contributes to higher guest satisfaction? Why or why not? - Are there any phrases or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you share a time when you adapted your non-verbal communication style to suit a specific guest's needs? - Do you think it made a difference on the guest's perceived service quality? - Do you change your body language, gestures, or facial expressions when interacting with guests from different backgrounds? - If so, how? - Do you think there is a higher level of satisfaction when you try to speak to the guest in their native language (even if it's only a few words)?
		<p>language styles you consciously adjust when interacting with guests of different nationalities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you think Amsterdam's multicultural environment influences the way you communicate with guests? 	
To open, to go further	Training in verbal and non-verbal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would be the idyllic conditions to receive guests at the hostel? - Do you think new staff should receive training in both verbal and non-verbal communication when they're hired? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think being taught about cultural differences in communication could help avoid misunderstandings and have a positive impact on the long run?
<p>Conclusion phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank the participant - Invite the participant to add any additional thought or experiences 			

Annex C: Guest Individual Interview Guide

Interview guide for guests			
Introductory phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank the participant for their time, knowledge - Mutual introduction (<i>also used to collect primary information: age, nationality, job, hobbies, etc.</i>) - Announce the structure of the interview (<i>can be shorter or longer depending on the guest availability</i>) - Give a brief and clear presentation of the topic (<i>make sure the participant understands and offer the chance to ask questions for clarification</i>) - Presentation of the Legal Considerations (<i>Confidentiality, Consent, etc.</i>) 			
Themes	Sub-themes	Questions	Sub-questions/Stimulus
Background questions for the participant (//social identities)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where do you come from? - How old are you? - Which languages do you speak? - What is your job? 	
Hostel stay Travel habits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What brought you to Amsterdam? - Are you a frequent traveler? - Do you often go to hostels when you travel? - Is it your first time staying in a hostel in Amsterdam? - What made you choose this hostel over others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leisure? Business? Something else? - Do you notice any differences in terms of atmosphere/experience compared to hostels in other countries?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you describe your overall experience staying at this hostel? - Globally, how would you describe the staff in this hostel? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What stood out?
Introduction		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you check-in on the self check-in kiosk or with a staff member? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What influenced your choice of check-in method? - How did that check-in go?
H1: Guests' pre-existing travel imaginaries shape their expectations of hostel staff communication, and when these are met or positively transformed, satisfaction increases.	Hostel pre-existing travel imaginaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What words come to your mind when you think of a typical hostel? - Before arriving, what did you think your stay would be like? - To you, what are the main ingredients to have a good stay in a hostel? - How did you picture the hostel staff before coming? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you see any pictures online? Any social media posts? Did you read any reviews? - What are your personal criteria? - Friendly? Polite? Relaxed? Professional?
	VC & NVC expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Globally, how do you expect to be welcomed and treated by the staff in a hostel located in Amsterdam? - Before arriving at the hostel, what 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which tone?

		kind of communication did you expect from the hostel staff?	Which attitude? What kind of tone? Any specific words?
	Imaginaires vs. Reality - Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was the communication you received from the staff what you expected? - If yes, how did that make you feel? - If not, how did that make you feel? - Can you think of anything that surprised you? - If yes, did it make you reconsider the perception you have of hostels? - How important was the staff communication in your experience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why or Why not? - Comfortable? - Welcomed? - Something positive? - Something negative? - In a good way? - In a bad way? - On a scale from one 1 to 10 for instance?
H2: Clear, polite, and friendly verbal communication, combined with positive non-verbal cues like smiling and open body language, help meet guest expectations and increase satisfaction.	Clarity, Politeness, and Friendliness in Verbal Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did the language and tone used by the staff make you feel when you interacted with them? - Were all the information/instructions given to you during your stay clear and easy to understand? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you feel welcomed? Respected? - Did you need to ask for clarification? If yes, how did that make you feel?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you have any communication issues with the staff? - In the way they speak, did you feel some kind of friendliness? - Is there anything that stood out in the way they spoke? - Overall, how did the way the staff spoke to you make you feel? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you had any inquiries/complaints, how were they handled? - How did that make you feel? - Did you feel surprised? In a good way? In a bad way? - If it was positive, does it have a big importance in your experience here?
	Positive non-verbal cues like smiling and open body language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What attitude were you expecting from the staff in a hostel in Amsterdam? - Did the staff smile or show other welcoming expressions during your stay? - How important is this behavior to your experience? - If you had any inquiries/complaints did you feel heard and seen by the staff? - Did you ever feel that a staff member's body language didn't 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Something quite friendly and relaxed maybe? - Was it pleasant? Comforting? - Through the way they were looking at you? Through the posture they had? - How did that make you feel?

		<p>match what they were saying?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compared to other places you stayed at, do you notice any differences in the staff non-verbal attitude/communication? 	
	Influence on Guest satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did the staff's overall verbal and non-verbal communication affect your overall stay? - Which importance would you give to the staff communication regarding your experience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was anything like you imagined before coming? - On a scale from 1 to 10 for example?
H3: Adapting communication to align with guests' backgrounds and social identities increases satisfaction.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you feel any cultural differences in communication while interacting with the staff? - Did you experience any misunderstandings while interacting with the staff? - Can you recall a moment when staff adjusted their communication to better suit you? - Did you feel respected and welcomed regardless of who you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If so, how did you react to it? - What about the staff's reaction? Did they change something? - If yes, how did that make you feel? - If not, would you have wished that they did? What kind of adjustments?
		<p>are (age, gender, culture, religion, etc.)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you feel more satisfied with your stay when staff communication matches your personal identity? - In your opinion, would additional cultural awareness or sensitivity training benefit hostel staff in Amsterdam? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why or why not?
To open, to go further		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you think constitutes a part of the "Amsterdam experience" you were looking for? - What improvements would you suggest for how the staff communicates in a hostel in Amsterdam? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could the verbal and non-verbal communication from the staff be part of it?
Conclusion phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank the participant - Invite them to add any additional thought about the topic 			

Table of Figures

Figure 1: A Model of Interpersonal Communication.....	14
Figure 2: Basic NV paradigm.....	15
Figure 3: The Transaction Model of Communication.....	19
Figure 4: A Dynamic Representation of Travel Imaginaries.....	47
Figure 5: Interplay Between Travel Imaginaries & Hostel Communication.....	49
Figure 6: Simplified representation of CAT.....	60
Figure 7: Logical Pathway Linking Hypotheses to the Research Question.....	68
Figure 8: The maze-running qualitative scholar.....	71
Figure 9: Reception & Dorms Area, Durty Nelly's Hostel.....	76
Figure 10: Cube rooms in THIS HO(S)TEL.....	77
Figure 11: Annotated building plan of THIS HO(S)TEL and Fiona restaurant, key areas of guest interaction.....	78
Figure 12: Notion's organizational interface.....	82
Figure 13: Structure of the interview guides.....	86
Figure 14: A Visual Representation of Triangulation.....	89
Figure 15: Review Analysis Table.....	90

Table of Contents

List of Main Headings.....	6
General Introduction.....	7
PART 1: LITERATURE REVIEW & EXPLORATION.....	10
Chapter 1: Beyond the Front Desk - Communication & Hospitality.....	11
1.1 General Definitions.....	11
1.2 Interpersonal Communication.....	14
1.3 The Importance of Communication in Hospitality.....	15
1.4 The Obstacles of Verbal & Non-verbal Communication in Hospitality.....	17
Chapter 2: From Words to Wow - Communication, Satisfaction & Guest Experience.....	19
2.1 Guest Satisfaction as a Social Process.....	19
2.2 Factors Influencing Guest Experience.....	21
2.3 Direct link between Communication and Satisfaction.....	22
2.4 Tailoring for a better Guest Experience.....	24
Chapter 3: Hostels & the Amsterdam Pulse.....	27
3.1 Hostels as a Unique Social Concept with a Distinctive Communication Style.....	27
3.2 The Changing Face of Hostels: Economic Drivers & New Travel Trends.....	30
3.3 Amsterdam as a Global Multicultural Destination.....	32
3.4 Amsterdam's Hospitality Ecosystem: a Fit for Hostels.....	34
PART 2: PROBLEM STATEMENT, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, HYPOTHESES	38
Chapter 4: Setting the Scene - The Problem Statement.....	39
4.1 Gaps in Literature.....	39
4.2 Contributions to Sociology and Hospitality.....	40
4.3 Possible Practical Outcomes.....	41
Chapter 5: Theoretical Lenses.....	42
5.1 Imaginary Travel vs. Real Travel (Amirou, 1995; t'Felt, 2018).....	43
5.1.1 Core Definition.....	43
5.1.2 Link to research & Practical implications.....	46
5.2 Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory & Symbolic Interactionism.....	48
5.2.1 Symbolic Interactionism.....	49
5.2.2 Goffman's Social Interactions as Performances.....	49
5.2.3 Symbolic Interactionism and Dramaturgy with study in Hostels and Practical implications.....	51
5.3 Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT).....	55
5.3.1 Core Definition and Principles.....	55
5.3.2 CAT in Hostel Communication study and Practical implications.....	58

Chapter 6: The Hypotheses - Three Axes of Research.....	62
6.1 H1: Guests' pre-existing travel imaginaries shape their expectations of hostel staff communication, and when these are met or positively transformed, satisfaction increases..	62
6.2 H2: Clear, polite, and friendly verbal communication, combined with positive non-verbal cues like smiling and open body language, help meet guest expectations and increase satisfaction.....	63
6.3 H3: Adapting communication to align with guests' backgrounds and social identities increases satisfaction.....	65
PART 3: PROPOSAL OF A METHODOLOGY AND FIELD OF APPLICATION.....	68
Chapter 7: The Choice of the Research Method.....	70
7.1 The case of the quantitative approach (rejected).....	70
7.2 The case of the qualitative approach (chosen).....	71
Chapter 8: Field of Study - Where & Why.....	73
8.1 The Two Hostels selected.....	73
8.2 The Reasoning Behind.....	76
Chapter 9: The Presentation of the Different Tools.....	78
9.1 The Non-participant Observations.....	78
9.2 The Individual Interviews for the Staff and the Guests.....	82
9.3 The Review Analysis.....	86
General Conclusion.....	91
References & Bibliography.....	94
Table of Annexes.....	102
Table of Figures.....	110
Résumé.....	113

Le rôle de la Communication Verbale et Non-Verbale sur la Satisfaction Client: Une étude des Auberges de Jeunesse à Amsterdam

Résumé

Ce mémoire explore le rôle de la communication verbale et non verbale entre le personnel des auberges de jeunesse et les clients. Il étudie plus spécifiquement la manière dont ces interactions influencent la satisfaction client. De plus, cette étude se concentre particulièrement sur les auberges qui se situent à Amsterdam. Pour commencer, la communication verbale et non-verbale est d'abord expliquée, puis son importance dans le milieu de l'hôtellerie est démontrée. Cette même communication est examinée à la lumière des interactions interpersonnelles pour montrer à quel point elle est essentielle pour façonner les attentes des clients et la perception qu'ils auront de leur séjour. Des problèmes de communication peuvent survenir et les clients peuvent être déçus lorsque leurs attentes ne correspondent pas à la réalité ou ne s'alignent pas avec elle. Ce travail présente également la satisfaction des clients comme un processus social, influencé non seulement par des éléments matériels, mais aussi par des aspects intangibles directement liés au personnel des hôtels ou auberges. Il est donc important d'adapter la communication verbale et non verbale aux attentes et à l'identité de chaque client pour contribuer positivement à leur expérience. Ensuite, les auberges de jeunesse sont étudiées pour montrer comment leur environnement social génère des interactions uniques entre le personnel et les clients. Des théories sont mobilisées afin d'approfondir l'analyse : Le voyage imaginaire, la théorie de la Dramaturgie et la théorie de l'Adaptabilité de la communication. Elles permettent d'expliquer comment les attentes se forment, comment la communication peut être considérée comme une mise en scène et comment l'adaptation au client peut améliorer l'expérience globale. Les résultats initiaux ou préparatoires de ce mémoire de première année suggèrent que la communication verbale et non verbale est un élément crucial dans la satisfaction client. Ces premiers résultats théoriques seront, par la suite, vérifiés de manière empirique par l'utilisation d'outils : l'observation non participante, les entretiens semi-directifs et l'analyse des avis clients.

Mots clés: Communication Verbale, Communication Non-verbale, Relations Interpersonnelles, Auberges de jeunesse, Amsterdam

The Role of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication in Guest Satisfaction: A Case Study of Amsterdam's Hostel Industry

Abstract

This paper explores the role of verbal and non-verbal communication between hostel staff and guests. It studies specifically how these interactions influence guest satisfaction. Additionally, it focuses on hostels located in Amsterdam. The research begins by defining communication and highlighting its importance in hospitality. It considers it in the light of face-to-face interactions to show how communication is central to shaping guest experiences and how challenges can arise when expectations and reality do not match or align. This work also presents guest satisfaction as a social process, not only influenced by material elements but also by intangible aspects coming from the staff. It highlights the importance of adapting verbal and non-verbal communication to every guest's background and identity. Then, hostels are explored to show how their social environment generates unique interactions between staff and guests. Furthermore, theories are used to deepen the analysis: Imaginary Travel, Dramaturgy Theory, and Communication Accommodation Theory. They help explain how expectations are formed, how communication can be seen as performance, and how adapting to the guest's identity can improve the overall experience. The initial and preparatory findings of this first-year dissertation suggest that verbal and non-verbal communication is a crucial part of guest satisfaction. Results will be, later on, empirically verified and checked through the use of non-participant observations, interviews, and guest' review analysis.

Keywords: Verbal communication, Non-verbal Communication, Interpersonal Interaction, Hostels, Amsterdam