REFEREE'S REVIEW

Program:	MIB
Student:	Ekaterina Geta
Title of thesis:	Online relationship marketing development: case of 4- and 5-star hotels in Russia and Austria

Justification of the topic choice. Accuracy in defining the aim and objectives of the thesis. Justification of the topic choice; accuracy in defining the aim and tasks of the thesis; originality of the topic and the extent to which it was covered; alignment of the thesis' topic, aim and objectives.	**5**	4	3	2
Structure and logic of the text flow. Logic of research; full scope of the thesis; alignment of thesis' structural parts, i.e. theoretical and empirical parts.	**5**	4	3	2
Quality of analytical approach and quality of offered solution to the research objectives. Adequacy of objectives coverage; ability to formulate and convey the research problem; ability to offer options for its solution; application of the latest trends in relevant research are for the set objectives.	**5**	4	3	2
Quality of data gathering and description. Quality of selecting research tools and methods; data validity adequacy; adequacy of used data for chosen research tools and methods; completeness and relevance of the list of references.	**5**	4	3	2
Scientific aspect of the thesis. Independent scientific thinking in solving the set problem/objectives; the extent to which the student contributed to selecting and justifying the research model (conceptual and/or quantitative), developing methodology/approach to set objectives.	**5**	4	3	2
Practical/applied nature of research. Extent to which the theoretical background is related to the international or Russian managerial practice; development of applied recommendations; justification and interpretation of the empirical/applied results.	**5**	4	3	2
Quality of thesis layout. Layout fulfils the requirements of the Regulations for master thesis preparation and defense, correct layout of tables, figures, references.	5	**4**	3	2

Each item above is evaluated on the following scale, as applicable: 5 = excellent, 4 = good, 3 = satisfactory, 2 = poor.

Additional comments:

Please, elaborate on the above mentioned criteria (about 500 words)

The thesis aims to investigate relationship marketing practices in hotel industry in Russia and Austria. The main objective is formulated as development of empirical recommendations for online relationship marketing development for the hotel managers of 4- and 5-star hotels in Russia and Austria. Internationalization aspect is reflected in the topic since hotels are mostly representing a very international industry, additionally country comparison is presented by comparing Russian and Austrian business practices.

The structure of the thesis is corresponding with the aims of the study. Theoretical part of the thesis is addressing existing research literature in the field of relationship marketing, including definition, evolution, levels of analysis and components of relationship marketing. Despite the literature addressed by Author is relevant for the topic, in most cases a better expressed own position of the Author would be a useful addition to the text. Since the focus of the study is online relationship marketing, Author is concentrating on the requirements to successful websites in the hotel industry. Existing research findings are analyzed in order to define key characteristics of successful websites, as well as email communications in hotel industry. Additionally, the specifics of the hotel industry is investigated in order to derive industry-specific hypotheses. The latter are used as a foundation for the empirical study. Most hypotheses are formulated on the base of selected criteria, as size, chain vs individual hotels, country effects.

Empirical part of the thesis is devoted to hypotheses testing and comprises three main steps – secondary data website analysis, mystery shopping and secondary data reviews analysis on the booking.com website. A combined approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, secondary and primary data is a strong advantage of the thesis. Another advantage is a detailed methodology description and justification of criteria for analysis on the base of existing research literature.

Certain limitation of the method is that Author was using a multi-step sampling method, limiting the number of hotels included in the sample.

For the purpose of web sites analysis, Author is introducing a coding system as a foundation for the analysis.

The results presented, for example, in Tables 8 and 9 (pp. 39-40) provide interesting insights, but can be characterized by lack of Author's comments and interpretation. Generally, results description might be more detailed and could be better structured. Probably the most confusing aspect is that Author is firstly referring to three separate stage in research process, but the results of empirical study are presented in an aggregated form, combining results of three stages without proper linkages between them explained. An introduction to presenting each part of the results would be very valuable and helpful. As well, it would be interesting to see, how results of one stage of analysis have influenced the next stage of analysis. Another point that would be a valuable addition is an overview on the results of hypotheses testing.

The research itself represents a complete, independent study, conducted in accordance with the requirements and representing an original approach to the research question under study. Author has selected appropriate research methods and has demonstrated appropriate methods of data analysis. The results and conclusions have high practical importance.

There are some slight errors, as for example, the significance results may contain typos (compare results on p. 38 and in Appendix 1 on p. 60).

Master thesis of Ekaterina Geta meets the requirements of MIB program, and deserves an "excellent" grade, thus the author can be given the desired degree.

Date June, 16th 2011

Referee: *Associate Professor Maria M. Smirnova*