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## Hotel Satisfaction: An Exploration in Tourist Preferences

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### **Hotel Satisfaction: An Exploration in Tourist Preferences Introduction**

Hotels and hospitality businesses have been around since the beginnings of civilization; records are shown of accommodations that offer guests hospitality since the Middle Ages and the times of the great Greek and Roman empires (Levy-Bonvin 2003). Since then, businesses have been gathering as much information as possible on how to improve the quality of their hotel and how to stand out among the hundreds of thousands of hotels worldwide. As time goes on, the tourism and hospitality industries are predicted to continue increasing as individuals strive for a better quality of life in this ever-changing world (Haljevaca, 2003; Rauch, Collins, Dwain, Nale & Barr, 2015). Hotels have no choice but to keep in tune with their customers' demands and change to meet the evolving expectations of the next generations of guests.

### **Literature Review**

To understand which factors contribute to guest satisfaction, Rhee and Young in a 2014 study found that one must identify a guest's travel purpose and background. Though other scholars argue that to understand guest satisfaction, one must examine what star level of experience the guest is looking for (Li, Liu, Chee-Wee & Hu, 2020; Rajaguru & Hassanli, 2018; Rauch et al., 2015). Once these initial identifiers have been considered, satisfaction is usually measured by examining the response to different hotel attributes which in themselves are also perceived differently by guests. From basic attributes that one looks for in any hotel like room, value, and cleanliness to exciting factors like special services and luxury care (Bodet et al., 2016).

### **Measuring Satisfaction**

When examining material goods, it is clear how these goods can be evaluated on a standard scale. However, when it comes to measuring the quality of service through customer satisfaction, the lines of the scale are not so clear (Limberger, Anjos & Meira, 2014). To define

how the industry perceives customer satisfaction, it is essential to compare the priori expectations with the posteriori perceived performance of the service received. In addition to this, quality is everything that the guest requires and expects, which is measured through the different attributes that a hotel provides. The scale lines blur as hotel attributes and customer satisfaction often has an asymmetric relationship (Li et al., 2020; Bodet, Anaba & Bouchet, 2016).

Li and colleagues also highlight this asymmetry by explaining how most guests are loss-averse, “They are more sensitive to and give greater weight to losses than gains” (2020, p.4). A customer is more likely to note the absence of a certain amenity even if they would not have been overly satisfied with its presence. According to Bodet et al., these certain amenities can be considered basic attributes in that they only slightly contribute to satisfaction but have a strong contribution to dissatisfaction (2016). Therefore, aside from these basic attributes, a hotel must add on excitement factors that satisfy guests when present but have no effect when absent as well as performance factors which have a linear and symmetric influence on customer satisfaction (Li et al., 2016).

Given that customer satisfaction concerns only the perceived value or quality, “hotels may add value by lowering the perceived price or raising perceived value” (Rauch et al., 2015, p3). This is done by adjusting the different attributes or amenities that are provided. With this perspective, it is argued that providing a perception of high service quality breeds loyalty which allows hotels to raise prices without much change in business. Guests are unable to consider every little attribute when reviewing their experience, so they usually take the overall impression of the most important and basic factors to them. These basic attributes that are graded for most hotels are value, rooms, cleanliness, sleep quality, location, and service (Rhee et al., 2014;

Limberger et al., 2014; Li et al., 2020). Each of these attributes concerns several amenities and has different factors that can be seen differently. Value, for one, is not always measured the same way, some see it as value for how much they spend while others consider the value to be the quality of service more than the monetary price (Rajaguru et al., 2018). The room includes bathroom amenities and cleanliness applies to several parts of the facility. Service is considered a basic attribute as it holds high importance in luxury hotels, though the level of importance decreases as the star rating of a hotel goes down (Rauch et al., 2015; Li et al., 2020; Rajaguru et al., 2018).

### **Differing Expectations in Star Ratings**

Among online research and discourse, a large focus is placed on evaluating the satisfaction of four- and five-star luxury hotels over mid-grade facilities, even though three-star locations are often the most highly sought after (Rauch et al., 2015). In a 2018 study, Rajaguru and Hassanli found that guests are less satisfied with five-star hotels than they are with mid-grade hotels. This can be explained by the difference in expectations that come with these different businesses. In mid-grade and budget hotels, regardless of other factors, customers are looking for the most value for their money and the presence of basic factors. These take precedence over customized services, luxury recognition, or loyalty (Rahimi & Kozak, 2016). On the other hand, with upscale luxury hotels, those same basic amenities and tangible goods are the bare minima, and therefore do not carry much weight in terms of customer satisfaction. Instead, other intangible factors that don't matter as much in mid-grade hotels make all the difference in these luxury stays, such as check-in efficiency, staff courtesy, brand recognition and loyalty, and reservation accuracy (Rahimi et al., 2016; Rajaguru et al., 2018).

When referring to basic attributes compared to performance and excitement factors, the star rating of the hotel in question is an important factor to be considered. For a low to a mid-grade hotel, a pool, spa, or restaurant could be considered excitement factors. However, for a five-star luxury hotel, these are expected and are therefore considered basic as their presence does not add to the satisfaction though their absence would certainly be noted (Rauch et al., 2015; Rahimi et al., 2016; Li et al., 2020). In determining methods to maximize customer satisfaction it is also important to consider the kinds of people who stay in different types of hotels.

Customers can be divided into three categories: neutral, demanding, and non-demanding (Manolitzas, Glaveli, Palamas, Talias & Grigoroudis, 2021). This study found that non-demanding guests who are likely to stay in mid-grade or popular vacation spot hotels are satisfied with only a small portion of their expectations being fulfilled. On the other end of the spectrum, demanding customers who are more likely to frequent five-star hotels are only satisfied with the best quality of service that goes above and beyond their expectations. While in the middle, neutral customers have a linear relationship between satisfaction and expectations fulfilled (Manolitzas et al., 2021).

### **Visitor background**

Though most hotels measure satisfaction by evaluating the same attributes, Rhee and Yang in a 2014 study clearly marked the differences in how different groups of people value each attribute. They found that on average most people put the most importance on value and rooms when it comes to overall satisfaction. For general travel vacation groups, in order from most to least important the attributes were value, rooms, sleep quality, service, cleanliness, and location. Meanwhile, those going on trips for purposes aside from leisure on average placed the

greatest value on sleep quality followed by also found that domestic hotel guests in the US did look for rooms more than value, followed by all other factors holding similar importance levels. While international guests looked for value more than rooms, sleep quality, service, and cleanliness all held similar importance, but location compared to the other factors held little importance. In a separate 2016 study conducted by Bodet and colleagues, they separated hotel attributes into key factors, basic factors, and secondary factors. They found that across eight different countries, no single attribute held the same contribution to all countries. Some even proposed that they had more secondary factors than others, while some claimed that they had none.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate hotel satisfaction among tourists attending their most memorable travel event. The following questions guided this study:

RQ1: Is there a difference between men and women in satisfaction with hotel value, rooms, service, cleanliness, sleep, and location?

RQ2: Is there a difference in satisfaction with hotel value, room, service, cleanliness, sleep, and location between old and young?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between the length of a trip and the satisfaction with hotel value, room, service, cleanliness, sleep, and location?

RQ4: What are the top 5 most important hotel attributes among the sample?

### **Methods**

#### **Sampling**

An online snowball sample was conducted by creating a link to the survey instrument on UNCO Qualtrics. The study invitation and link to the questionnaire were posted online using

Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram from October 20, 2021, to November 1, 2021. The invitation and link were also sent to classmates at UNC on October 20, 2021. Respondents were encouraged to share the questionnaire link with anyone they could who has had an experience staying at a hotel. In all, 154 responses were recorded in this study; however, 51 participants failed to complete the questionnaire in its entirety and were eliminated from the analysis. The remaining participants (n=103) were analyzed.

Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 74 with the mean age being 28.4. Of the participants, 50% were female, 48% male, and 2% other, 3 participants declined to provide information regarding their gender. The demographics for the race included 52.5% White or Caucasian, 37.4% Hispanic or Latino, 5.1% Asian or Pacific Islander, 2% Black or African American, and 3% other. Of the total study participants, 4 declined to provide information regarding their race. Of the participants in the sample, 3% claimed to stay in hotels very often, 24% claimed to stay in hotels often, 46% claimed to stay in hotels sometimes, and 27% said they rarely stayed in hotels.

## **Measures**

The instrument for this study was a 35-item questionnaire assessing hotel satisfaction by dividing the hotel experience into attributes of value, rooms, service, cleanliness, sleep, and location. These attributes were evaluated by a series of statements that participants would rate their level of agreement with on a 4-point scale with 1 being the lowest level of agreement and 4 being the highest level of agreement. Then additional amenities (Wi-Fi, pool, continental breakfast, exercise area) were evaluated by the level of importance on the same 4-point scale.

Respondents were also prompted to provide basic information on their trip hotel used including age, gender, race, and frequency of hotel stays.

### **Procedures**

To answer the first two research questions, two independent sample t-tests were conducted using the hotel attributes of value, rooms, service, cleanliness, sleep, and location as scaled variables. The grouping variables for t-testing included men vs. women and younger vs older participants. The young and old were determined by a median split of the distribution of scores for respondent age. To determine the difference in attribute satisfaction between men and women, the mean score of each attribute was calculated. To answer the third research question, a correlation matrix of trip length and hotel satisfaction was calculated to determine potential patterns between each measure. Last, the mean scores of all hotel attributes were calculated to determine the top five most important attributes in choosing a hotel.

### **Results**

For the first research question, an independent sample t-test was conducted to assess mean differences between men and women in satisfaction scores with hotel value, rooms, service, cleanliness, sleep, and location. Results indicated that there were no significant differences in satisfaction with hotel attributes except location satisfaction. See table 1 in the appendix for mean comparisons between men's and women's hotel attribute satisfaction. There was a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between men ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ) and women ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) in satisfaction with hotel location. These results indicate that men were more satisfied with their hotel location than women were with their most memorable travel experience.

For the second research question, an independent sample t-test was conducted to assess mean differences between younger (18-21 yoa) and older (22-74 yoa) study participants in satisfaction with hotel value, rooms, service, cleanliness, sleep, and location. See table 2 in the appendix for mean comparisons between young and old hotel attribute satisfaction. Results indicated that Hotel Satisfaction 9 showed no significant differences between the younger and the older groups in satisfaction with any of the hotel amenities.

For the third research question, to assess the relationships between the length of a trip and satisfaction with hotel value, rooms, service, cleanliness, sleep, and location, multiple Pearson correlation coefficients were computed. See Table 3 (in appendix) for trip length and hotel attribute satisfaction correlations. Visual inspection of the matrix revealed that sleep satisfaction had a weak negative correlation with the length of a trip at the .05 level of significance.

For the fourth research question, to assess the top five most important hotel attributes among the sample, the means of all attributes were calculated and assessed. Wi-Fi (m=3.54) was found to be the most important hotel attribute on a 4-point scale, followed by cleanliness (m=3.44), location (m=3.24), room satisfaction (m=3.22) and service (m=3.19). See Figure 1 (in Appendix) for the 5 most important hotel attributes

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate hotel satisfaction among tourists attending their most memorable travel experiences. Analysis of the differences between men's and women's satisfaction revealed that regarding hotel value, rooms, service, cleanliness, and sleep, men and women mostly did not differ. Authors have observed significant differences between men's and women's perceptions of service quality (e.g., Stafford, 1996; Graham, et al., 2002). However, others have found no significant relations between sex and service quality perceptions (e.g.,

Ndhlovu & Sengunder, 2002). Sanchez-Hernandez and Martinez-Tur have held that men and women react to different kinds of service (2010). However, one overarching theme among hotel satisfaction evaluations is that the basic attributes that are used to evaluate the overall satisfaction with hotels are value, rooms, sleep quality, cleanliness, and location (Rhee et al., 2014; Limberger et al., 2014; Li et al., 2020). Based on these basic standards, this study has shown that men and women do not differ in satisfaction in every attribute except for location. The data showed that men are significantly more satisfied with the location of a given hotel than women are. In a previous study, data showed that women reported greater amounts of concern about safety and had poorer perceptions of aesthetics as well as a lower overall neighborhood satisfaction than men (Trumpeter & Wilson, 2013). This is an important factor to consider when understanding why men tend to be more satisfied with the location of a hotel than women are.

Analysis of the differences between younger and older study participants in satisfaction with the attributes of hotel value, rooms, service, cleanliness, sleep, and location revealed no significant differences. Scholars have argued that guests can be split up into three categories; non-demanding, neutral, and demanding (Manolitzas et al., 2021). Younger generations have tended to be more non-demanding or neutral while older generations on average are more demanding. This would predictably lead to older generations being less satisfied than younger generations as non-demanding guests on average are more satisfied even when all their expectations aren't fulfilled. On the other hand, demanding customers are only pleased with the very best service that goes above and beyond (Manolitzas et. al, 2021). Results from this study on hotel satisfaction between older and younger participants have refuted this claim, however as the older half of this study included individuals as young as in their twenties, it could still hold merit.

Visual inspection of the correlation matrix revealed that the length of an individual's trip had a weak but significant negative correlation with the quality of sleep received. Research has shown that sleep quality is one of the most critical components contributing to overall guest satisfaction. Hotel guest sleep has been revealed to be associated with uncomfortable bed linen, pillows, and noisy AC/Heaters (Robbins, Grandner, Severt, 2020). Also, continuous nights of unrest lead to a higher level of dissatisfaction with an experience thus leading to individuals with longer hotel stays having a lower quality of sleep and therefore a lower overall satisfaction with a hotel.

While examining the top five most important attributes in the study, it was observed that Wi-Fi was the most important factor contributing to guest satisfaction. Followed by cleanliness, which was the most important of the main attributes used to measure satisfaction with hotels. These were followed by location, rooms, and service. These findings refute those of Rhee and Yang in a 2014 study where they found that on average people put the most importance on value when it comes to overall hotel satisfaction. In contrast to this, participants of this study have offered that they are willing to pay more for a hotel with a higher standard of cleanliness.

### **Recommendations**

In future studies regarding hotel satisfaction, it would be advisable to secure as equally varied the age range of participants as possible. Deeper research on the difference between generations could give a different perspective on the preferences and overall satisfaction of individuals of all ages. Further, for studies focused on the differences between men and women in hotel satisfaction, delving deeper into the facets of each main attribute could shed some light on the discussion of how men and women react to different kinds of service. Using this

information, one could determine more clearly how it is that different studies have shown varying results on this topic.

Hotels around the world could benefit from a more detailed inspection of what factors exactly contribute to guests receiving a bad quality of sleep during their stays as it has shown to be a large contributor to one's overall satisfaction with a hotel. Research on what kind of pillows or linens the majority of guests seem to favor, a heating and cooling system that is not as loud, or even the best curtains to block out light. This information could be of great interest to hotels looking to increase their guest satisfaction and create a better stay that makes guests want to come back again.

The top five most important hotel attributes to most individuals from this 2021 study should be of great interest to hotel owners. This study found that Wi-Fi is the most important attribute contributing to hotel satisfaction, this should tell hotels that if they don't already, investing in free guest Wi-Fi with good service can play a major role in improving their guests' experience. Also, it was shown that guests are more inclined to pay more for a hotel with a higher standard of cleanliness. If other aspects of the hotel experience are not satisfactory, a clean hotel will still be more likely to receive better reviews and more satisfaction from its guests.

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## Appendix

**Table 1***Mean Comparisons Between Men and Women Hotel Attribute Satisfaction*

Measure	Men		Women		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Attribute							
<i>Value</i>	3.06	0.39	3.08	0.56	-0.18	96	0.86
<i>Room</i>	3.28	0.57	3.18	0.63	0.80	96	0.42
<i>Service</i>	3.19	0.49	3.22	0.63	-0.24	96	0.81
<i>Cleanliness</i>	3.48	0.47	3.44	0.62	0.28	96	0.78
<i>Sleep</i>	3.24	0.56	3.13	0.65	0.94	96	0.34
<i>Location</i>	3.36	0.51	3.12	0.65	2.06	96	0.04

**Table 2***Mean Comparisons Between Young and Old Hotel Attribute Satisfaction*

Measure	Young		Old		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Attribute							
<i>Value</i>	3.06	0.49	3.08	0.48	-0.19	97	0.85
<i>Room</i>	3.28	0.53	3.15	0.66	1.10	97	0.27
<i>Service</i>	3.21	0.51	3.19	0.62	0.26	97	0.80
<i>Cleanliness</i>	3.53	0.49	3.40	0.60	1.15	97	0.25
<i>Sleep</i>	3.17	0.56	3.21	0.66	-0.30	97	0.77
<i>Location</i>	3.30	0.57	3.18	0.63	0.96	97	0.34

## HOTEL SATISFACTION

**Table 3**

## Trip Length and Hotel Attribute Satisfaction Correlations

Factors	M	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Attributes							
1. <i>Value</i>	3.06	1.00					
2. <i>Room</i>	3.22	-.57**	1.00				
3. <i>Service</i>	3.19	.45**	.51**	1.00			
4. <i>Cleanliness</i>	3.44	.51**	.59**	.60**	1.00		
5. <i>Sleep</i>	3.18	.38**	.69**	.55**	.63**	1.00	
6. <i>Location</i>	3.24	.19	.44**	.34**	.38**	.41**	1.00

Note: \*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$

**Figure 1**

*5 Most Important Hotel Attributes*

