

Customer Preferences toward Hotel Facilities and Service Quality: A Cross-Cultural Analysis

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The objectives of this study are to identify and compare customers' preference toward hotel facility and service attributes depending on their travel purpose. Therefore, vacation and business travelers staying in participating hotels were asked to rate important attributes of hotel facility and service. Based on ANOVA results, significant differences were found between hotel guests (survey respondents) in Canada, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates in the importance of some hotel attributes.

1. Introduction

Customers from different cultures have different preferences for hotel facilities and services and these differences influence consumer behaviour (Loudon and Bitta, 1993). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourism was accounted for US\$ 1.5 trillion in export earnings in 2015 and international tourist arrivals are expected to reach 1.8 billion in 2030 (UNWTO, 2016). Therefore, it is time for hotels to increase their competitiveness through understanding important factors for their customers' satisfaction from various cultures. For these reasons, this study was conducted in three different countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that are located on three different continents.

The tourism industry is considered as one of the most important industries in Canada, New Zealand, and the UAE. According to Supporting Tourism Canada, the tourism industry is very important in all regions of Canada. Tourism activity produced over \$34.4 billion in revenues and directly employed over 620,000 Canadians. Approximately 2% of Canada's gross domestic product (GDP) is generated by the tourism industry (Supporting Tourism Canada, 2014). The tourism industry in New Zealand was worth NZD 24 billion in 2013 contributing 5.7% of the total workforce in New Zealand (New Zealand Government, 2016). The UAE also has a large tourism industry with 5.3% of the jobs associated with the industry in 2014 (Abbas, 2015).

Hotel customers' preference toward hotel facility and service attributes has yet been explored in terms of cross-cultural context. The objectives of this research are to identify factors that are considered important to customers, to measure expectations, and to compare customer needs when traveling for different purposes. Furthermore, this study examined differences and similarities of needs among Canada Guest Respondents (CGR), New Zealand Guest Respondents (NGR), and UAE Guest Respondents (UGR).

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The rest of the paper is organized as follows- first a brief overview of past research is presented and two important hypotheses that is to be investigate in this research is introduced. Then, there is an extensive discussion around the methodological underpinning the research and how the research was conducted. The method section is followed with analysis of the results and findings. In the conclusion section, there is a discussion of the importance of the results of the research and some of the limitation of the research is presented.

2. Literature Review

Consumers from different cultures may perceive the importance of product attributes differently according to the culture they belong (Hirschman, 1983). The connection between cultural context and product attributes were investigated with different products and attributes among different cultural groups. Most of the studies selected a nation as a basic unit to be analyzed. For example, consumers in Korea, Spain, and France indicated the significantly different importance of car attributes (Du Preez, Diamantopoulos, & Schlegelmilch, 1994). In this research, Korean consumers were found to be the most environments friendly, while Spanish were found to be the least environments friendly among three groups of consumers. It also revealed that consumers in these three countries regarded country-of-origin attribute differently, which may be due to different prices and penetration ratios. Finally, this research discovered that the gap between Korean and European consumers was greater than the gap between French and Spanish consumers. However, some studies selected ethnic groups as basic units of the cultural group. For example, in a study of Hispanic and Anglo groups in U.S., the prices for nondurable goods and availability of credit for durable goods were found to be the most distinct attributes to Hispanic group compared to Anglo group and acculturation level had impact on their choices (Faber, et al., 1987).

A business traveler is defined as a customer who is utilizing the product because of a need to conduct business at a particular destination (Lewis, Chambers, & Chacko, 1995). Furthermore, the business travel market segment is known not only as the largest segment but also the least price-sensitive one. Several studies investigated business travelers' needs and satisfaction. Gundersen et al. (1996) showed that the performance of reception, housekeeping and food and beverage departments explained the variation in overall satisfaction among business travelers. Housekeeping and reception had the strongest effect on their overall satisfaction. Mattila (1997) found that the typical frequent business traveler might act as a cognitive miser and therefore be unwilling to devote their mental effort to redundant evaluations until faced with an external request or actual repurchase choice. As well, Mattila (1999) suggested that the physical environment might play a prominent role in determining customers' value perceptions of luxury hotels.

The leisure market is comprised of travelers who -- individually, in couples, in families, or in small groups -- visit a hotel or restaurant for non-business purposes (Lewis et al., 1995). According to Shifflet and Goldstein (2000), leisure travel continues significant growth with most segments benefiting, while complex change is occurring in the business segment. The business segment has been consistent with increasing satisfaction and service ratings, however, value ratings levelled off in 1999 after an increase from 1997 to 1998. Wuest, Tas, and Emenheiser (1996) studied the mature travelers' segment. They found that the knowledge and courtesy of employees and the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately were highly valued. Most hotels serve guests from different segments and each segment assigns different importance weights to the hotel's various

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benefits. A study by Dube and Renagham (1999) found that all travelers sought a smoothly functioning hotel that was also comfortable. Leisure travelers, however, placed more emphasis on comfort, while business and convention travelers were more concerned with the hotel's smooth functioning.

Some studies have compared both business and vacation travelers (Lehto, Park, & Gordon, 2015; Rhee & Yang, 2013; Liu, Wu, Yeh & Chen 2015). In a study of hotel switching behaviour, past switching behaviour and variety seeking are identified to have positive influences on hotel switching intentions of both business and leisure travelers (Lehto, Park, & Gordon, 2015). Rhee and Yang (2013) researched consumer reviews from the TripAdvisor website to investigate important hotel attributes based on five different travel purposes (business, families, friends, couples, and solo) and found sleep quality as the most important attribute to business and solo travelers. On the other hand, room was the most important for couples and value was the most important attribute to travelers with families and friends (Rhee & Yang, 2013). A study of equity-based consumer loyalty suggested that leisure travelers are more concerned about brand equity and business travelers are more concerned about relationship equity (Liu, Wu, Yeh & Chen 2015).

H1: Perceived importance of attribute of business guest respondents is influenced by cultural differences.

H2: Perceived importance of attribute of vacation guest respondents is influenced by cultural differences.

3. Methodology

A previously developed self-completed questionnaire was used to obtain customers' attitudes toward hotel facilities and services¹. The participants were asked to answer questions about the importance of various hotel facilities, room facilities, and hotel services for when on a business trip and when on vacation trip were included. The hotel facilities section included items on the hotel's location, available transportation, reputation, cleanliness, amenities, and atmosphere. The room facilities section included attributes such as bedroom and bathroom amenities, comfort, safety, and atmosphere. The hotel services section dealt with items like attitude, responsiveness, and reliability of staff. For the three categories of attributes (hotel facilities, room facilities, and overall service attributes), respondents were asked to use the Likert scale of 1 for 'no importance' to 5 for 'very important'.

This study collected data from customers staying at 4-star hotels located in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada, New Zealand, and the UAE². A total of 261 hotel customers (82 of CGR, 115 of NGR, and 64 of UGR) completed the questionnaire. Descriptive analysis was used to identify respondents' demographics. The data for the entire sample were examined and then split into Vacation travel and Business travel to compare responses between the two groups on the importance of attributes. ANOVA was conducted to examine the differences in means among CGR, NGR, and UGR.

4. Findings

A total of 261 samples from three countries including Canada, New Zealand, and UAE were analyzed. The sample of overall travelers consisted 32.4% CGR, 41.1% NGR, and 26.5% UGR. The proportion of females and males were overall 41.9% females and 58.1% males.

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CGR showed a higher number of males (64.6%) than female (35.4%) compared to NGR and UGR. The research analysis suggests that the respondents perceive the majority of attributes of hotel facilities, room facilities, and hotel service as a medium-to-high level of importance. The questionnaire contained a total of 71 attributes including 24 attributes for hotel facilities, 28 attributes for room facilities, and 19 attributes for hotel services. Survey results indicated the overall mean values for the 41 attributes in the scale ranged from 1.79 to 4.69 for vacation travelers and 1.49 to 4.83 for business travelers out of the scale 1.0 to 5.0. A total of 22 attributes resulted with overall mean values over 4.0 for vacation travelers. All vacation travelers tend to prefer tangible attributes (i.e. cleanliness, telephone, etc) and intangible attributes (i.e. attitude of staff, courtesy and friendly of staff, etc.). Cleanliness of hotel and room were the most important attributes to overall respondents with mean values of 4.69 and 4.65. Attitude of staff, room temperature control, and courtesy and friendliness of staff were followed with mean values of 4.63, 4.57, and 4.56. For business travelers, 26 attributes were scored with mean values of more than 4.0 and cleanliness of hotel and room were the most important attributes with means of 4.83 for both. Room temperature control, responsiveness of staff, and courtesy and friendliness of staff were 3rd, 4th, and 5th the most important attributes with overall mean values of 4.64, 4.64, and 4.58 respectively.

4.1 Comparative Analysis of Importance of Attributes for Vacation Travelers

Table 1 shows 10 of the most important attributes selected by each country surveyed for Vacation travel. Cleanliness of room and hotel were the 1st and the 2nd most attributes for CGR and UGR, while attitude of staff and safety/security devices or measures were the 1st and the 2nd for NGR.

Table 1: Top 10 attributes by country (Vacation Travel)

Rank	CGR		NGR		UGR	
	Attributes	Mean	Attributes	Mean	Attributes	Mean
1	Cleanliness of room	4.86	Attitude of staff	4.73	Cleanliness of hotel	4.68
2	Cleanliness of hotel	4.78	Safety/security devices or measures	4.72	Cleanliness of room	4.64
3	Room temperature control	4.74	Responsiveness of staff	4.71	Discount prices	4.50
4	Attitude of staff	4.66	Courtesy and friendliness of staff	4.69	Room temperature control	4.45
5	Non-smoking option	4.60	Cleanliness of hotel	4.63	Attitude of staff	4.44
6	Responsiveness of staff	4.59	Housekeeping and maintenance	4.57	Courtesy and friendliness of staff	4.43
7	Telephone	4.53	Room temperature control	4.53	Safety/security devices or measures	4.36
8	Courtesy and friendliness of staff	4.48	Cleanliness of room	4.51	Bathroom amenities	4.35
9	Housekeeping and maintenance	4.46	Telephone	4.41	Quietness of hotel	4.34
10	Quietness of hotel	4.45	Discount prices	4.39	Responsiveness of staff	4.27

CGR indicated room temperature control and non-smoking option as very important attributes compared to NGR and CGR. Discount price and safety/security devices or measures were

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more important attributes to NGR and UGR rather than CGR. Also UGR indicated bathroom amenities as the 8th most important attribute and telephone was not as included to the top 10 differently from CGR and NGR. The results may imply that CGR are less price-sensitive and more sensitive about non-smoking option than NGR and UGR. NGR tend to be concerned about safe and security and UGR are more price-sensitive and value intangible service attributes.

Findings for vacation travelers, ANOVA results, means, and ranks of attributes, are further presented in table 2. According to the ANOVA results, attributes were marked as “different”, “more different”, and “most different” with significance at 0.05, 0.01, and 0.001 respectively. A total of 10 attributes out of 22 attributes did not show significant difference between the data sets of these three countries.

Table 2: Attributes and ranking with a mean of greater than 4.00 (Vacation Travel)

Rank	Attributes	Overall	CGR	NGR	UGR	Sig.	Difference
1	Cleanliness of hotel	4.69	4.78	4.63	4.68	0.159	
2	Cleanliness of room	4.65	4.86	4.51	4.64	0.006	**
3	Attitude of stuff	4.63	4.66	4.73	4.44	0.016	*
4	Room temperature control	4.57	4.74	4.53	4.45	0.039	*
5	Courtesy and friendliness of stuff	4.56	4.48	4.69	4.43	0.040	*
6	Responsiveness of staff	4.56	4.59	4.71	4.27	0.001	***
7	Safety/security devices or measures	4.51	4.34	4.72	4.36	0.003	**
8	Housekeeping and maintenance	4.42	4.46	4.57	4.15	0.002	**
9	Discount prices	4.37	4.22	4.39	4.50	0.200	
10	Quietness of room	4.35	4.45	4.28	4.34	0.466	
11	Speedy check-in/out procedures	4.29	4.45	4.23	4.20	0.177	
12	Telephone	4.29	4.53	4.41	3.82	0.000	***
13	Bathroom amenities	4.28	4.25	4.27	4.35	0.799	
14	Quality of food and beverage	4.23	4.34	4.20	4.14	0.524	
15	Comfortable furnishings	4.22	4.42	4.17	4.05	0.012	*
16	View	4.19	4.13	4.28	4.11	0.407	
17	Room size	4.10	4.13	4.01	4.21	0.313	
18	Advance reservation service	4.08	4.31	3.97	4.00	0.040	*
19	Nearby dining	4.06	4.30	4.02	3.83	0.006	**
20	Quietness of hotel	4.04	4.23	3.86	4.12	0.064	
21	Room decor and ambience	4.02	4.23	3.94	3.89	0.075	
22	Non-smoking option	4.00	4.60	3.70	3.78	0.000	***

*= significance at 0.05 ("Different")

**= significance at 0.01 ("More Different")

***= significance at 0.001 ("Most Different")

Responsiveness of staff, telephone, and non-smoking option were the preference attributes “most differently” stated by CGR, NGR and UGR on vacation travels. Cleanliness of room, safety/security devices or measures, housekeeping and maintenance, and nearby dining

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were indicated at “more different” level preferences by CGR, NGR and UGR on vacation travels as well. The results showed that CGR indicated stronger preferences for non-smoking option, comfortable furnishings, and advance reservation service compared to NGR and UGR. NGR indicated that they pay more attention to safety/security devices or measures than CGR and UGR. UGR revealed significantly lower preference toward responsiveness of staff, housekeeping and maintenance, telephone, and nearby dining compared to CGR and NGR.

4.3 Comparative Analysis of Importance of Attributes for Business Travelers

Table 3 displays 10 of the most important attributes to CGR, NGR, and UGR for business travel. Cleanliness of hotel and room were the 1st and the 2nd most preferred attributes to all respondents. Again, there were similar tendency as vacation travel were shown. For example, NGR considered safety/security devices or measures and in-room safe as the 3rd and the 5th most important attributes, while CGR preferred telephone and non-smoking option as the 3rd and the 9th attributes. UGR favoured quietness of hotel and room as the 7th and the 8th most preferred attributes. The results may imply that CGR tend to be sensitive with non-smoking option, NGR are generally concerned with security and safety issues, and UGR prefer intangible services attributes.

Table 3: Top 10 attributes by country (Business Travel)

Rank	CGR		NGR		UGR	
	Attributes	Mean	Attributes	Mean	Attributes	Mean
1	Cleanliness of room	4.84	Cleanliness of room	4.91	Cleanliness of hotel	4.69
2	Cleanliness of hotel	4.82	Cleanliness of hotel	4.91	Cleanliness of room	4.65
3	Telephone	4.79	Safety/security devices or measures	4.91	Room temperature control	4.49
4	Room temperature control	4.77	Responsiveness of staff	4.78	Attitude of staff	4.44
5	Speedy check-in/out procedures	4.7	In-room safe	4.74	Responsiveness of staff	4.41
6	Attitude of staff	4.7	Courtesy and friendliness of staff	4.74	Speedy check-in/out procedures	4.38
7	Advance reservation service	4.69	Room temperature control	4.65	Quietness of hotel	4.37
8	Responsiveness of staff	4.6	Telephone	4.65	Quietness of room	4.37
9	Non-smoking option	4.59	Quietness of room	4.65	Courtesy and friendliness of staff	4.35
10	Housekeeping and maintenance	4.58	Speedy check-in/out procedures	4.61	Safety/security devices or measures	4.35

Findings for business travelers, ANOVA results, means, and ranks of attributes, are further presented in table 4. Only 6 attributes out of 26 attributes did not show significant differences in terms of preference level among CGR, NGR, and UGR. ANOVA results showed 10 attributes were the “most different”, 3 attributes were “more different”, and 7 attributes were “different”. NGR showed significantly high preference toward safety/security devices or measure, in-room safe compared to CGR and UGR. On the other hand, CGR seemed to prefer less for in-room safe, safety/security devices or measures, and room service than NGR and UGR. Interestingly, UGR indicated significantly lower preference toward several attributes including telephone, responsiveness of staff, wake-up call service, availability of work space, and availability of nearby airport than CGR and NGR. This may be because

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hotel customers in the UAE can easily find various restaurants near hotels and can reach Dubai and Abu Dhabi airports in a few hours from anywhere in UAE. The results show that more business functional attributes were preferred for business travel, for example, speedy check-in/out procedure, wake-up call service, airport service, etc.

Table 4: Attributes and ranking with a mean of greater than 4.00 (Business Travel)

Rank	Attributes	Overall	CGR	NGR	UGR	Sig.	Difference
1	Cleanliness of hotel	4.83	4.82	4.91	4.69	0.004	**
2	Cleanliness of room	4.83	4.84	4.91	4.65	0.001	***
3	Room temperature control	4.64	4.77	4.65	4.49	0.034	*
4	Responsiveness of staff	4.64	4.60	4.78	4.41	0.001	***
5	Courtesy and friendliness of staff	4.58	4.52	4.74	4.35	0.001	***
6	Speedy check-in/out procedures	4.58	4.70	4.61	4.38	0.021	*
7	Safety/security devices or measures	4.57	4.18	4.91	4.35	0.000	***
8	Quietness of room	4.56	4.57	4.65	4.37	0.050	*
9	Attitude of staff	4.55	4.70	4.52	4.44	0.090	
10	Telephone	4.51	4.79	4.65	3.94	0.000	***
11	Housekeeping and maintenance	4.43	4.58	4.48	4.18	0.007	**
12	Advance reservation service	4.41	4.69	4.35	4.22	0.002	**
13	Quietness of hotel	4.36	4.38	4.35	4.37	0.963	
14	Wake-up call service	4.33	4.46	4.48	3.90	0.000	***
15	Comfortable furnishings	4.31	4.49	4.30	4.13	0.024	*
16	Availability of work space (desk)	4.30	4.53	4.43	3.81	0.000	***
17	Quality of food and beverage	4.29	4.37	4.30	4.18	0.499	
18	Bathroom amenities	4.28	4.28	4.26	4.33	0.861	
19	Appearance of staff	4.11	4.11	4.22	3.90	0.097	
20	Room service	4.11	3.63	4.43	4.02	0.000	***
21	Courtesy airport service	4.09	3.79	4.26	4.10	0.020	*
22	In-room safe	4.07	3.12	4.74	3.83	0.000	***
23	Type of door lock	4.06	4.04	4.22	3.79	0.076	
24	Free newspaper	4.03	4.13	4.13	3.72	0.032	*
25	Local transportation	4.02	3.79	4.22	3.90	0.025	*
26	Availability of nearby airport	4.00	4.08	4.22	3.51	0.000	***

*= significance at 0.05 ("Different")

**= significance at 0.01 ("More Different")

***= significance at 0.001 ("Most Different")

5. Conclusion

The first step toward success in the hotel business is to understand the important factors influencing customer satisfaction (Poon and Low, 2005). After comparing vacation travelers

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and business travelers, results of this research suggest that basic attributes (i.e. cleanliness of hotel and room, attitude of staff, etc.) were the most important attributes for both vacation travelers and business travelers. This finding is inline with the findings of Wuest, Tas, and Emenheiser (1996). Their research showed customer services related to assurance and reliability were the most important factors for mature travelers. It seems that hotels when catering to their guests need to meet the basic needs prior to thinking and offering services beyond their competitors. Also, vacation travelers value similar tangible and intangible attributes despite their different locations and cultural background. On the other hand, business travelers value more business functional attributes (i.e. including speedy check-in/out procedures, wake-up call services, etc.) compared to vacation travelers. A study by Dube and Renagham (1999) also found that leisure travelers placed more emphasis on comfort, while business and convention travelers were more concerned with the hotel's smooth functioning.

The results discovered interesting differences depends on where the survey was conducted. The most significant difference was the fact that NGR focused heavily on safety and security measures compared to other respondents. This may have resulted from the increasing crime rate in New Zealand which was noticed by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (Grunwell, 2010). These findings for NGR is similar to the findings of Cheng and Sambath (2008). Their research also suggested that hoteliers should provide their guests with extra safety and security measures by offering or increasing security personnel, fire alarm systems, and security cameras. This study also offered strong findings such as the CGR paid more attention to the non-smoking option and advance reservation than NGR and UGR. In Canada, non-smoking environment is prevalent and this might translate into stronger attributes for the hotel guests survey results in Canada. It is also interesting to note that UGR for vacation travelers tend to be price-sensitive and preferred traditional tangible and intangible values such as attitude of staff, bathroom amenities, etc. NGR for vocational travels also tend to be price-sensitive. However, this was not true for business travelers in CGR or NGR or UGR. Thus may not follow the trend of Mattila (1997) findings that the typical frequent business traveler might act as a cognitive miser in evaluating services.

This study is not without limitations. First, it suffers from the general errors that pertain to such surveys, i.e., sampling, non-sampling, and non-response errors. The questionnaire's length (7 pages) may have negatively influenced the response rate. Hence, respondents may not be representative of the target population on relevant characteristics. Also, some respondents may have become bored or tired, increasing the likelihood of response bias, especially at the end of the questionnaire. In addition, the data indicated that regardless of the location of hotels, hotel guests' citizenships comprised of many different citizenships or country of origins. This indicates the possible impact of cultural differences of hotel guests and thus highlights the complexity of studying the needs of international and local hotel guests. There is also a possibility of other relevant factors such as different ethnicity, age, and gender offering additional complexity for this kind of study. Indeed, the impact of global travels and migration patterns has indicated a very complex scope for these types of studies. For this particular study, data analysis was conducted using the site of hotels and type of travelers as the criterion for comparing the needs of hotel guests. By using different criteria for analysis or using multiple dimensions including respondents' gender, ethnicity, and country of origin in conducting the analysis could still offer further insights and understandings.

Endnotes

1. Dr. Catherine E. Ralston, Dr. May Aung from the University of Guelph in Canada, and Dr. Ignaas van Kooten from Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam in The Netherlands developed the questionnaire.
2. Dr. Catherine E. Ralston, Dr. Gurvinder Shergill, and Dr. Laila Rohani and Dr. Khalil Rohani led the survey data collections in Canada, New Zealand and UAE respectively.

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