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WHICH HOTEL ATTRIBUTES MATTER FOR MASS TOURIST: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON TOURISTS' REVIEW ON TRIP ADVISOR

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Abstract

Development of Internet and especially Web2.0 technologies introduced numerous opportunities for tourism industry. Due to new web-based platforms where customers can buy, evaluate and comment the products and/or services, Internet has become an important source of data that can be used in academic research. Therefore, the researchers of this paper aimed to determine the most important attributes that affect hotel choice based on the comments on one of the world's most popular online travel platforms-Trip Advisor. In the scope of the research are reviews and comments on hotels found in touristic center of Belek in one of the most popular mass tourism destinations – Antalya. As a result of the content analysis, there are three groups of attributes

which matter for mass tourists in terms of their hotel choice: attributes regarding destination, service and hotel, with attributes under the service category representing the most dominant ones in terms of hotel choice. The results of this research may be useful to hotel investors and potential hotel guests as well contribute to the overall knowledge about online travel behavior and preferences.

Keywords

Hotel Attributes, Hotel Choice, Trip Advisor Reviews, Belek Region Antalya, Content Analysis

1. Introduction

The number of research on attributes that affect customer's hotel choice and purchase decision is rather excessive. Knowing these attributes is of great importance for hotel investors. By having insight into which attributes prevail in customers' hotel choice, hotel investing made into this sector will quickly be returned and profit increased.

Majority of academic papers regarding hotel attributes that effectively influence purchase decisions have used quantitative research methods. Thus, it is understandable why there are predominately research papers that use developed scale measurements to evaluate tourists' perception of different hotel attributes (Weaver & Oh, 1993; Anath et al., 1992). On the other hand, a small number of research papers tried using qualitative methods to reveal the hotel attributes that matters to customers. In order to determine the most important attributes affecting hotel preferences, in some of these researches a questionnaire that includes open-ended questions was used. Additionally, in some of the studies content analysis was used to examine expectation, satisfaction and complaint reports prepared by hotels, tour operators and travel agencies.

When analyzing current studies on this topic it can be noticed that important attributes that influence hotel choice differ according to tourist motivation, hotel type, demographic characteristic of customers etc. The aim of this study is to define which attributes are the most prevailing in customers' preferences regarding big hotel properties found on mass tourism destination. According to the aim of the research, the Trip Advisor, online platform for evaluation and reviews from travel users, was used to detect the most important attributes that customers appreciate. Current comments and reviews for the hotels found in Belek, a touristic center located in one of the world's biggest mass tourism destinations - Antalya, were examined

by conducting content analysis. The results of this research provide eminent information about which attributes are predominant for customers when it comes to choosing a hotel at mass tourism destination.

2. Literature Review

When looking at the academic literature on topic of hotel choice according to hotel attributes, it can be noticed that hotel attributes put forward are: hotel location, quality of the services provided, hotel rooms, quality of food and beverages, region and hotel image. In these studies, researchers included different tourist groups according to their travel motives (business, congress, holiday etc.). While some of the papers were dealing with regular guests, the others were concentrated more on repeated guests. One group of researchers found an important difference between tourist demographic characteristics and the importance certain hotel attributes have on their hotel choice.

Generally, service attributes are the most dominant ones in literature. It can also be noticed that one of the most interesting research topics in literature were attributes that affect tourist hotel purchase behavior and the level of satisfaction with these attributes. Questionnaire was the most popular method of collecting data (Tsaur & Tzeng, 1995; Hartline & Jones, 1996). According to the literature review, one group of hotel attributes was derived and customers' attitudes towards these were measured. In addition, one group of researchers analyzed tour operators and hotel evaluation reports about customers' complaints and compliments trying to derive the predominant hotel attributes (Schaefer, et al, 1995).

It is a very small number of studies that included qualitative research design, based on one-to-one interviews with the customers and open-ended questions in collection of data that will help determine important hotel attributes (Dube & Renaghan, 2000). Nowadays, potential travelers are heavily relying on Internet in finding information about tourist destination and accommodation. Due to the fast and up-to date information flow, reviews on the Internet are important source of information for potential travelers (Pan et al., 2007) allowing research on impact that these reviews have on consumers' behavior (Black & Kelly, 2009; Vermilion & Seegers, 2009). Therefore, Internet can be used in defining which hotel attributes are important in choosing a hotel.

Online platforms where travelers can share their experience, evaluations and comments about tourism products and services are accepted as an important data source. The evolution of e-trade in tourism industry started with development of Internet and especially Web2.0 technologies which introduced numerous opportunities. Therefore, the new web-based platforms where customers can buy, evaluate and comment the products and/or services have become an important source of data which can be used in academic research as well. According to Black & Kelly (2009), with a large number of online booking web sites providing different types of information and prices, an increasing number of travelers are using travel review web-sites such as Trip Advisor as the main criteria in decision making process.

3. Research Goal, Scope and Method

The aim of this research is to define which hotel attributes are emphasized in customers' hotel choice of big hotel properties found on mass tourism destinations. According to the aim of this research, Trip Advisor online travel review platform was used to detect the most important attributes that customers put forward. With advices from millions of travelers and a wide variety of travel choices and planning features, Trip Advisor can be considered as one of the largest travel sites. Trip Advisor branded sites make up the largest travel community in the world, reaching 340 million unique monthly visitors, and more than 225 million reviews and opinions covering more than 4.9 million accommodations, restaurants and attractions (Trip Advisor, 2015).

Trip Advisor travel review web site is one of the most frequently used online platform for examination of traveler's reviews (Au et al., 2014; Ekiz et al., 2010; O'Connor, 2010) with content analysis being the dominant path in examining the traveler's attitudes about hotel properties. The same analysis was used in this study in order to examine the current comments and reviews about the hotels which can be found in touristic center of Belek which is one of the most important parts of one of the world's best known mass travel destinations - Antalya. Since 2/06/2015, total of 32.585 customers' comments and reviews of 81 Belek hotel categorized with 5-star, 4-star and first class holiday village status were examined.

In order to condense and make systematically comparable information after data collecting process, researchers applied an objective coding scheme reached through content analysis (Berg, 2007, p.238). The text extracted from the reviews was first synthesized and

coded by two researchers whose main research interests is travel behavior in e-tourism context. Then each of the researchers independently categorized the data into different categories. The categories researchers used in this content analysis were determined inductively with the ‘‘researchers "immersing" themselves in the documents (or in case of this case, travel reviews) in order to identify the dimensions or themes that seem meaningful to the producers of each message’’ (Abrahamson, 1983, p. 286). Differences in categorization between the researchers were discussed until a consensus was reached and final category and sub-category were then derived.

4. Results

Results of data analysis about hotel attributes in the form of categories and sub-categories are given in the table below. Figure 1 show the percentage of each attribute which is found in the reviews and comments.

As the results of the analysis show, three main categories of attributes regarding destination, hotel and service are derived from mass tourists’ reviews regarding hotel choice. Attributes related to service category are the predominant ones. The most important attribute for customers regarding the hotel choice is quality. On the second place are comments regarding hotel staff. These two attributes are followed by diversity of products and services, hospitality, food-beverage and free service 24/7, respectively. As for the hotel category, hotel location is on the first place. This is followed by cleanness, animation and rooms. Sea and ease of transportation are the top attributes found under the third derived category - destination.

Service quality is being recognized as the most important attribute for the customers concerning hotel choice. It is not surprising that service quality takes the first place in a labor intense industry such as tourism. Attributes under service category such as diversity of product and services, food and beverage and 24/7 service, can be evaluated in the context of the hotels found in Belek region and board type typically used in these hotels. Generally, hotels located in this tourism center are operating under ‘‘All Inclusive’’ board type. Attributes derived after the data analysis may be evaluated as synonymous with the board type offered in these hotels. When evaluating hotels, customers are commenting about diversity of food and beverages and quality with praise. While positively evaluating diversity of products and services, they had negative comments about service speed. Hospitality, which is known as general and distinguishing part of

Turkish culture, was also being highly positive rated in customers' reviews as an important part of service quality. This is why hospitality has found its place among top five effective attributes during hotel choice. Service quality preserves the top rank in creating tourist attitudes.

Hotel location is the most important attribute under the hotel category derived after the analysis. After quality, it is the second most important attribute that affect hotel choice preferences. Mass tourists pay a great attention to attributes such as animation activities, cleanness and hygiene. Restaurants, sport facilities and pools are one of the often mentioned and important attributes in hotel choice. When looking at comments about hotels found in Belek, it may be noticed that most properties are labeled as "Family hotels" and "Honeymoon hotels". Environmental design works and aesthetic characteristics of the hotels found in this region are also highly rated by the tourists on Trip Advisor. After the review analysis, destination related attributes are among the dominant ones for hotel choice. The most important attribute under this category is the ease of transportation. The airport vicinity and transportation infrastructure are two characteristics of great importance in hotel choice decisions. Another two often mentioned attributes are natural beauties such as sea and forest found on destination.

Table 1: Important attributes for mass tourist regarding hotel choice

Category	Sub-category	Category	Sub-category	Category	Sub-category
Services	Diversity of products and services Service speed Food-beverage Quality Hospitality Personnel Value for Money Free Service 24/7 Management	Hotel	Rooms	Destination	Sea Forest Ease of Transportation Image
			Family hotel		
			Hygiene		
			Honeymoon Hotel		
			Cleanliness		
			Environmental design works		
			Aesthetic		
			Restaurant		
			Sport Facilities		
			Animation		
			Pool		
			Turkish Hammam		
Hotel location					

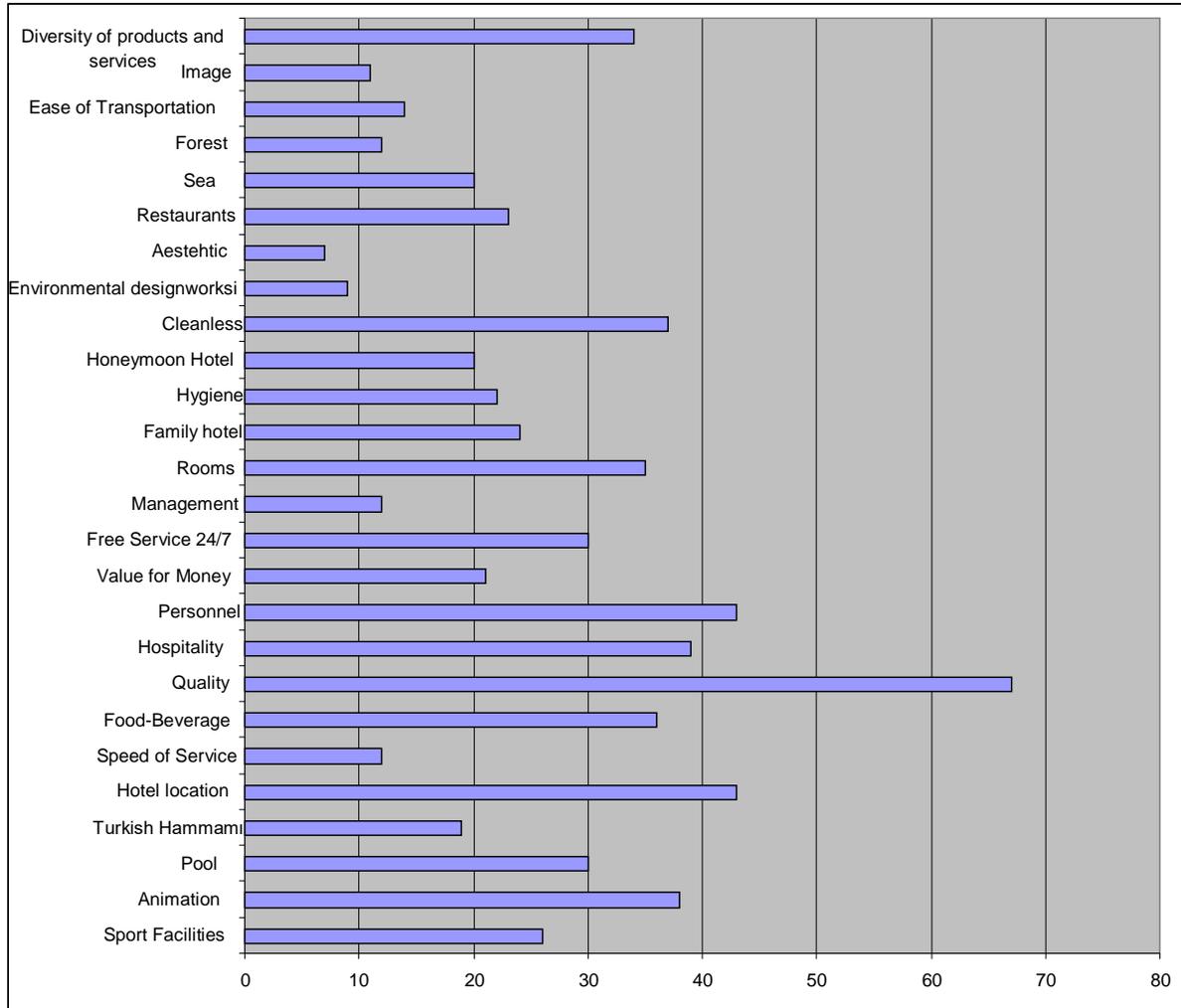


Figure 1: Item Ranking

5. Conclusion

In the context of mass tourism, this research aimed to determine the most important attributes that affect hotel choice based on the comments on one of the world's most popular online travel platform-Trip Advisor left by the customers who visited touristic center of Belek in Antalya region. As a result of the research, there are three groups of attributes which matter for mass tourists in terms of their hotel choice: attributes regarding destination, service and hotel. Research results showed attributes under the service category to be the most dominant ones in terms of hotel choice. The similar results may be found in the academic literature on this topic. The most important attribute that affects tourists' hotel choice is quality. This result is the indicator for the accommodation properties that operate under economies of scale in mass

tourism destinations, that it is necessary to devote special attention to quality. Results of this research are emphasizing the hotel staff as the second most important characteristic of the service. Once more it is shown that personnel represents the important element in the labor intensive industry such as tourism. Thus, regardless of how high the personnel expenses are, it is indispensable element of hotel business. In the comments made by repeated guests, it is emphasized that one of the main reasons for the repeated visit is the personnel itself. Staff competence together with warmth and hospitality that arises from the Turkish culture are attributes that stand out during hotel choice decision. It was also noticed that cleanness and hygiene are the important attributes for mass tourists. According to the customers' reviews, the cleanness is on the top of quality perception. In addition couple of attribute specific for the given destination (sea, forest, ease of transportation, image) were emphasized.

This research aimed at describing attributes of importance for the mass tourists regarding their hotel choice decisions. In this paper the list of important attributes is presented as well as percentage of frequency with which certain attributes were repeated in customers' reviews and comments. Additionally, during the tourists' evaluation of the hotels, positive and negative attributes were mentioned as well. In the future, with the measurement scale developed based on the attributes from this study, quantitative research on attributes affecting mass tourists' hotel choice could be conducted. Furthermore, correlation analysis between these hotel attributes and hotel guests' satisfaction and loyalty could be tested. Results of this research are of great importance for both hotel investors and potential tourists, as the prevailing attributes mentioned in the travelers comments and reviews are put forward. These results also contribute to the overall knowledge about online travel behavior and preferences.

This study provided definition of significant attributes in hotel selection of mass tourists in touristic center of Belek in one of the world's best known mass travel destinations - Antalya. Generalization of the research findings is hard to achieve due to the qualitative research design used. On the other hand, by using online travel platforms for qualitative analysis, the firm basis for defining hotel attributes can be created. In the future this can represent a good starting point for quantitative research on measuring the degree of customers' perceived value of hotel attributes.

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