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Factors Affecting Students' Decision of Hotel Selection

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Abstract

The goal of this research is to identify the factors affecting students' hotel choices, to examine the impact of hotel servers when a potential guest selects a hotel, and to determine how hotel servers influence a student's preference. The target populations for this study were Johnson & Wales University students who had stayed in U.S. hotels. A print-out questionnaire survey was distributed, descriptive statistics, and z-tests were used to address the research hypothesis. The results of the study indicated a significant positive relationship between hotel services and students' decisions on their hotel selection. Location of the hotel, online information, and "package" components were statistically significant at the .05 level. Results indicate that a successful hotel should continuously improve its services/products that relate to better performance to meet customers' special needs and expectations.

Keywords: *hotel services, hotel-selection, student's choice*

Statement of the Problem

Societal factors of an increase in disposable income, leisure time, and political stability all have the potential to contribute growth in hospitality industry. Many developing countries turn to hospitality and tourism as an economic development strategy for poor communities (Hampton, 2003). Consequently, the hospitality

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industry has grown both larger and more competitive; and organizations in the hospitality industry have more pressures. The hotel preferences of the students cannot be identified, which will lead hotels to confront with significant and serious problems, such as losing customers. Thus, the increasing competition in the hotelling sector made it unavoidable to determine the opinion of the individuals of the hotelling sector. In order to be able to survive in the existing intense competitive environment, the hotels started to attach more importance to the concept of customer preference. It is widely recognized that hotel customers' satisfaction has been successfully used to measure the quality of hotel service and overall performance. The hotels must know about the target customers very well and identify requirements and develop strategies to achieve the requirements. This study was conducted to identify factors of hotel service, which have significant effects on students' hotel preferences.

Review of Related Literature

Services in Hospitality Industry

Generally, hospitality services are described in four unique attributes terms, intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability. Although the rooms' costs, service amenities availability, and proximity to tourism destinations are all extremely important factors in customers' hotel selections, the lodging industry should be conscious of how important it is to look beyond current service items and characteristics.

Customer Satisfaction

Oliver (1981) defined customer satisfaction as a customer's emotional response

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to the use of a product or service. That means service satisfaction is a function of consumers' experiences during the period of service encounter. Findings from previous research state that most travelers consider the following hotel attributes when choosing a hotel: cleanliness, location, room rate, security, service quality, and the reputation of the hotel chain (Knutson, 1988; Choi & Chu, 2000; Ndhlovu & Senguder, 2002).

There are two important principles learned by the guest service industry. One is that what hotels are providing on the settings should match customers' expectation. Another one is that to create an environment that meets customers' needs for safety, security, support, competence, physical comfort and psychological comfort (Fottler, Ford, Roberts, Ford, & Spears Jr., 2000). Service satisfaction is a function of the setting and the consumers' experiences during the service encounter. The lack of quality services can also cause hotel businesses unbearable loss. In other words, satisfying customers is especially important to encourage repeat business and fosters word-of-mouth advertising (Spinell & Canavos, 2000).

Customer Loyalty

Generally speaking, customer loyalty may be defined as an attitude toward the loyalty object or as repeat patronage behavior; also, the definition may combine attitude and behavior in an additive or an interactive expression (East, Gendall, Hammond, & Lomax, 2005). Like any interpersonal relationship, a customer-oriented business relationship is dependent on trust. Trust is rooted in the customer's belief that keeps customers satisfied on core business attributes and helps a business

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increase customer loyalty (Bhatty, Skinkle, & Spalding, 2001). Facing the competition, the hospitality industry should realize how consumers view hospitality services and focus on customer satisfaction to retain customers.

Research Hypothesis

The objectives of this study were to identify the factors affecting students' hotel choices, to examine the impact of hotel servers when a potential guest selects a hotel, and to determine how hotel servers influence a student's preference. Therefore, we make a specific hypothesis of this study:

H₀: *The hotel settings have no impact on students' preferences.*

H_a: *The hotel settings have impact on students' preferences.*

Method

Objective of the study:

The hotels must design their services so as to create positive perceptions for the customers. Simultaneously, they have to monitor frequently how their servers have been perceived by the consumers. It is necessary to understand positive and negative attitudes of the customers against hotel services and to identify what attitudes can be turned to use of hotel services. These findings will be effective on observing the customer needs and requirements correctly. Nowadays, students became a very important part of market segment, because the number of student increases each academic year and can provide an opportunity to build a valuable long-term relationship. This paper aims to present and analysis of the students' hotel preference. It is expected that this study makes a major contribution to the hotels which intend to

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pave the way for achieving needs of the students related to use hotel services.

Method of Study

In the study performed based on opinions of the students, the data that were used in this study were collected by a print-out questionnaire survey. It was conducted and descriptive statistics and z-tests were used to address the research hypothesis. The utilized data have been obtained in Johnson & Wales University Providence campus. The questionnaire consisted of one main section that evaluated the relative importance of the services based on seven questions. A Likert five-point scale rating ranging, from five for strongly agree to one for strongly disagree, was used to measure information sources influencing respondents' hotel selection decision. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed at Johnson & Wales University library and dining halls on downtown campus and Harborside Campus. There were 252 completed questionnaires which were usable for sample data, representing a response rate of 84%.

Analysis of results

Overall, from the sample (N = 252) JWU students (n = 147 male and n = 105 female) were involved in this research. Also, the demographic profile of the respondents is displayed in Table 1 below. There were 58% male respondents and 42% female respondents. Among all students who responded the questionnaire, most of the respondents (29.81%) were majored in Culinary and the second largest group of students who were majored in Hospitality took up to 23.14%, (the remainder of the respondents were 15.69% Business major, 8.24% of both Technology and Accounting

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major, 3.53% of both Finance and Management major, 2.75% of Marketing major and 5.07% of others).

Table 1*Profile of the Respondents*

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	147	58.33
Female	105	41.67
Major		
Culinary	76	29.81
Hospitality	59	23.14
Business	40	15.69
Technology	21	8.24
Accounting	21	8.24
Finance	9	3.53
Management	9	3.53
Marketing	7	2.75

The hotel preference of respondents is shown in Table 2. The most frequently purpose of JWU students for a trip was “pleasure” (34.5%) and “visiting friends/relatives” (28.6%). The majority of both the male respondents (36.1%) and female respondents (40.9%) were travelling for “pleasure”. According to the responded questionnaires, JWU students’ choices of a hotel were based on the following factors (the same factors we put into the questionnaire) such as: Location of the hotel (36.9%), Brand name (9.1%), Recommended by travel agent (8.3%), VIP program (2.8%), Online information (16.6%), Recommended by friend/relative (8.3%), Included in the

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package (10.7%), others (6.0%) and Missing (1.3%).

Table 2*Travel Behaviors of the Respondents*

Variable	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Purpose of Trip						
Pleasure	53	36.1	43	40.9	96	38.1
Business	26	17.9	19	18.1	45	17.9
Visiting Friends/Relatives	44	29.9	18	17.2	62	24.6
Meeting/Conference	19	12.9	14	13.3	33	13.1
Others	5	3.2	11	10.5	16	6.35
Hotel Choices						
Location of the hotel	57	38.8	36	34.2	93	36.9
Brand name	12	8.3	11	10.5	23	9.1
Recommended by travel agent	14	9.6	7	6.7	21	8.3
VIP program	2	1.4	5	4.8	7	2.8
Online information	24	16.3	18	17.1	42	16.6
Recommended by friend/relative	13	8.9	8	7.6	21	8.3
Included in the package	15	10.2	12	11.4	27	10.7
Others	8	5.4	7	7.7	15	6

The dependent variable, which is JWU students' decisions on Hotel-selection and on the other hand, the independent variable should be facts of hotel settings in both tangible and intangible forms. Then the hypothesis we stated before turns out to be a decision to reject-section according to various data. There was a significant relationship (positive) between hotel performance and students' decision on hotel

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selection.

Table 3*Students' Decisions on Hotel Selection*

Factors	Average	SD	Z	P
Location of the hotel	4.49	1.02	2.77	.006*
Online information	4.39	1.06	2.53	.011*
Included in the package	4.03	1.21	3.66	.000*

***P < .05**

It is understood from findings that the factors having impact on hotel preferences indicate statistical significant. From Table 3 (according to Excel), it shows that each p-value < α (0.05). Thus, the hypothesis **H₀**: *The hotel settings have no impact on students' preferences* has been rejected in favor of the **H_a**: *The hotel settings have an impact on students' preferences*.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Prior research found that there was a significant relationship between hotel settings and guest decision; thus, in this study, the investigations revealed that positive results from JWU students' decisions on hotel selection, which were greatly influenced by hospitality settings. According to the z-test that has been conducted before, three factors have been found significant based on $\alpha = 0.05$. From the evaluation of the

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obtained data, hotels can develop long-term relationship with students by achieving the needs of students. However, repeated research or activity in this field should be done to get a profound finding when it applied to hospitality---the huge topic and income origin. The research has been conducted successfully although the students segments are bound to the JWU campus. Otherwise, culturally, geographically and politically differences among the survey groups should apply to the target population with further dedicated action.

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