A segmentation of online reviews by language groups: How English and non-English speakers rate hotels differently

Markus Schuckert [a,*], Xianwei Liu [b], Rob Law [a,1]

[a] School of Hotel & Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 17 Science Museum Road, TST-East, Kowloon, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
[b] School of Management, Harbin Institute of Technology, 92 Xidazhi Street, Harbin 150001, PR China

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

We employ a secondary data source of more than 86,000 customer ratings of Hong Kong star-rated hotels to explore the distribution and difference in rating behavior of English and non-English speaking guests in an online environment. We find that (a) English speaking guests prefer high-class hotels, (b) non-English speaking guests are more fastidious about five-star hotels and demand higher service quality, while English speaking guests desire bigger rooms in four-star hotels, and (c) satisfaction difference is bigger in lower class hotels or in hotels with fewer English speaking guests. We propose managerial implications for the hotel industry and give suggestions for future research.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Online reviews have become very important in the tourism industry, especially in the hospitality sector (Mauri and Minazzi, 2013). Customers base purchase decisions on electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) and online customer feedback from travel websites or hotel booking platforms (Zhang and Mao, 2012). More travelers seem to rely on online hotel ratings and post valuable reviews (Zhong et al., 2012). The ratings are a timely reflection of customer satisfaction online, usually quantified on a five-point scale from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). These information sources are considered more objective, immense, and without sample bias, because reviews are posted spontaneously without laboratory effects unlike traditional questionnaires (Yacouel and Fleischer, 2012).

This big data motivate us to explore online ratings in more depth. For this contribution we investigate whether travelers from different cultural backgrounds, which is proxied in terms of spoken languages, rate hotels significantly different in the online environment. From earlier research, it is already known that customer loyalty, quality perception, and brand awareness differ significantly from culture to culture offline (Chen et al., 2012). For our research we employ a data source from a destination where international

tourist arrivals are numerous and relatively evenly distributed to justify this research direction. The destination needs a wide range of hotels listed on a popular online platform for a large number of accessible ratings.

Hong Kong, with over 54 million international tourist arrivals a year, seems to be an excellent site for the study. After searching for well-known worldwide online platforms to collect online ratings from, TripAdvisor is identified, which operates in 34 countries worldwide, has more than 260 million monthly visitors and over 125 million reviews, as the most appropriate online platform from which to collect our secondary data (Jeacle and Carter, 2011). A customer's rating of a particular hotel can reflect his/her satisfaction degree at a certain point in time post-travel (Gu and Ye, 2014).

In the following sections, we give insights into the findings and limitations of related literatures, and present our research questions and the differences between the present study and extant literature. After that, we present the data collection and research design. We then present the results, discuss the findings, explore their implications for users, the industry, and researchers, and identify future research opportunities. A critical view of the study's limitations will close this paper.

2. Literature review

Customers' different cultural backgrounds and languages can be the basis for many differences in perception and reactions to products and services (Chen et al., 2012). Previous studies focus purely on cultural differences and can be segmented into four areas:

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 3400 2321; fax: +852 2362 9362.
E-mail addresses: markus.schuckert@polyu.edu.hk (M. Schuckert), liuxianwei@126.com (X. Liu), rob.law@polyu.edu.hk (R. Law).
[1] Tel.: +852 3400 2181; fax: +852 2362 9362.

Table 1
Summary of the literature review.

Research Topics	Author/Year	Targeted hotel class	Number of respondents	Targeted country or region	Method	Main findings
Perception difference	Legohérel et al. (2012)	n/a	441	Asian and Western	Factor analysis	Variety-seeking and an exploratory tendency have a significant relationship with travelers' consumption behavior
	Hsieh and Tsai (2009)	International tourist hotels	382	Taiwan and USA	Factor analysis	Taiwanese and American consumers have different cognition of hotel service quality because of their cultural differences
	Reisinger and Turner (1999)	n/a	358	Japan and Australia	SEM	The comparison between Japanese and Western guests shows different perceptions of service quality caused by cultural differences
	Tse and Ho (2009)	Five- and four-star	56	Hong Kong	Description	The comparison of Western and Hong Long studies highlight cultural differences with regard to service expectation
Expectation difference	Wang et al. (2008)	n/a	46	China and UK	*t*-test	Chinese travelers have higher expectations of service in developed countries like the UK and expect employees to be consistently courteous
		Business hotels	70	South Korea and Australia	*t*-test	Expectations are significantly different for each cultural group between Koreans and Australians
	Mok and Armstrong (1998)	Mid-price hotels	325	UK, USA, Japan, Australia, and Taiwan	ANOVA	Expectations of hotel service, rooms, and other aspects are different from culture to culture, which generate distinct satisfaction ratings
	Mattila (2000)	First-class hotels	149	Asian and Western	*t*-test	Asian travelers give significantly lower ratings to service providers in both hotel checkout and fine dining
	Mattila and Choi (2006)	n/a	591	South Korea and USA	ANOVA	Korean consumers give relatively lower fairness and satisfaction ratings than American consumers regardless of the outcome
	Mey et al. (2006)	Five- and four-star	286	Malaysia; Asian, and non-Asian	*t*-test	The ratings on overall satisfaction with hotel stay are significantly different between Asian and non-Asian hotel guests
Emphasis difference	You et al. (2000)	n/a	2.408	Japan and UK	ANOVA	Travelers from different cultural backgrounds seek different travel benefits and have different preferences for travel products and services
	Mccleary et al. (1998)	n/a	377	South Korea and USA	*t*-test	Korean and American travelers have place significantly different importance on specific hotel characteristics
	Kuo (2007)	International tourist hotels	776	Taiwan, Japan, and USA	ANOVA	American travelers emphasize employees' problem-solving abilities whereas Taiwanese customers emphasize politeness
	Mattila (1999)	Luxury hotels	159	Asian and Western	*t*-test	Western travelers pay more attention to fun and enjoyment than Asians, whose value structures tend to reflect duty in life
	Sussmann and Rashcovsky (1997)	n/a	189	French- and English-speaking Canadians	*t*-test	French- and English-speaking Canadians differ significantly in some dimensions of vacation travel
Complaint difference	Kwortnik and Han (2011)	Five- and two-star	601	China	SEM	Distributive justice and interactional justice have greater effect on customer loyalty than procedural justice
	Huang et al. (1996)	International tourist hotels	148	Japan and USA	*t*-test	American guests are more likely to complain to hotel managers, whereas Japanese guests prefer to take no action against unsatisfactory service
	Ngai et al. (2007)	n/a	271	Asian and non-Asian	*t*-test	Asian guests are less likely to complain to the hotel and are less familiar with complaint channels than non-Asian guests
	Yuksel et al. (2006)	n/a	420	Turkey, Israel, the Netherlands, and UK	ANOVA	The complaining of hotel customers from different countries have more differences than similarities