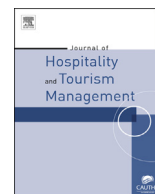




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Identification of hotel attributes for senior tourists by using Vavra's importance grid[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Senior tourists are an important market segment for hospitality businesses. For being successful, understanding the influence of hotel attributes on senior tourist satisfaction is important for managers. The aim of the present study is to examine the asymmetric impacts of hotel attributes on senior tourists' satisfaction by using Importance Grid method. Data obtained from German and the British senior tourists, accommodating at five-star resort hotels in Antalya-Turkey. Results show that hotel attributes' importance differ considerably for German and the British senior tourists. While 'perceived value' was a *basic* factor for the British seniors, 'price' was a *basic* factor for German seniors. Moreover, for both markets, majority of hotel attributes are either *performance* factors with high importance or *basic* factors. Therefore, generation of *excitement* factors, targeting senior tourists is a necessity for the hotels in the area.

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1. Introduction

Antalya is one of the most popular 3S (sea, sand and sun) destinations in the world. In 2014, 11.5 million international tourists visited Antalya, which accounts 31.2 percent of total international tourist arrivals to Turkey (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2014). It was also the tenth destination in the world in 2013 (Euromonitor International, 2015). This popularity origins from the clean beaches, in average 300 sunny days in a year, and high number of accommodation facilities (266 five-star and totally 2239 accommodation facilities which have 471,412 bed capacities) in the city. All-inclusive boarding with reasonable prices at the high season (between April and October) attracts both domestic and international tourists.

However, decreasing occupancy rates at the low season, negatively affect the total revenues of the hotels, like many other 3S destinations. For overcoming this problem, in the recent years, considerable number of hotels began to attempt to

target alternative markets at the low season, such as senior tourists. Senior tourists have become an important market for travel and tourism sector, since "globally, the number of older people is expected to more than double, from 841 million people in 2013 to more than 2 billion in 2050" (UN, 2013). As European Commission note, seniors "have both purchasing power and leisure time (mainly in the retirement age), thus representing a significant economic market potential" for travel and tourism sector (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/tourism-seniors/index_en.htm).

For being successful in serving senior tourists, hotel managers have to understand which hotel attributes are important for this market segment and the effect of these attributes on customer satisfaction. Hotel attributes comprise the both tangible and intangible components such as "image, price/value, location, security, marketing and even food and beverage (F&B), whereas the 'hotel' as a whole, include a wide variety of different and not necessarily interrelated attributes" (Dolnicar & Otter, 2003). In last couple of decades, the academics showed that various product attributes' performances have asymmetric influences on customers satisfaction. While some attributes create high satisfaction, if they are perceived high performed by the customers, some others may not increase customer satisfaction even their performance is high. One of the methods that proposed to clarify such 'asymmetric' relationships between product attributes' performance and customer satisfaction is Vavra's (1997) Importance Grid (IG) Method.

In the travel and tourism literature, to the authors' knowledge,

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the effect of hotel attributes' perceived performance by senior tourist on customer satisfaction has not been explored yet by following Vavra's (1997) IG Method. Thus, the objective of this study is to identify the characteristics of hotel attributes and to identify asymmetric influences of these attributes on senior tourists' satisfaction by using IG Method. With this purpose, survey data belong to German and British senior tourists visiting Antalya, Turkey are used. The obtained findings in this study are expected to specify both the importance of hotel attributes, and their effects on customer satisfaction for senior tourists.

2. Senior tourists

Senior tourists, which signify the travellers who are above than 65 years old (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1995), has an increasing share in the world tourism and travel sector. For example, a Eurostat (2012) report show that, the number of tourists dropped in all age groups in the European Union area except for the 65 and older people, where 10 percent more seniors participated in tourism in 2011 than in 2006. The growth of this segment is mainly linked with today's seniors' physical conditions whose are considerably healthier and more active in contrast to predecessors (Lago & Poffley, 1993). Besides, they have more free times, spending capacities and prefer to travel non-peak seasons of the destinations. Since they spend above than an average tourist, they generate a financially attractive market segment for hospitality and tourism businesses. In the meantime, they are very loyal and favour destinations and businesses that have high level service quality (Carlino, 1994). Therefore, the academics investigated different aspects of the senior tourists including; importance of information sources (e.g. Patterson, 2007), travel motivation (e.g. Sellick, 2004), travel participation constraints (e.g. Lee & Tideswell, 2005), travel-health relationship (e.g. Hunter-Jones & Blackburn, 2007), and decision-making process (e.g. Batra, 2009).

In the last couple of decades, identification of the salient hotel attributes for senior tourists' satisfaction has become an area of consideration for the practitioners and the academics (Chen, Wang, Luoh, Shih, & You, 2014). In one of the previous study, Marvel (1999) conceptually discussed hotel attributes that were critical for competing in the senior market by evaluating the specific products and services of hotel chains. He concluded that hotel staff should avoid using inappropriate words like 'senior', 'elderly', and 'old timer'. In addition, he advised hoteliers to use large size in printed materials, handy shower sets, and shower grab bars. In another preliminary study, Callan and Bowman (2000) focused British senior tourists, and investigated the important hotel attributes when selecting a hotel or judging its quality. Their findings showed that value for money was more important than low prices and discounts, similar to Koss's (1994) study. Moreover, 'service' and 'staff attitude and behaviour' were highlighted as the important components of the service quality. They also concluded that senior tourist market was heterogeneous. In other words, the importance of hotel attributes for seniors was differed according to their genders, ages, and retirement status.

In one of the recent comprehensive study, Caber and Albayrak (2014) investigated salient hotel attributes for pre-senior (between 50 and 64 years old) and senior (65 and above years old) tourists. As well as, they compared the results belong to pre-seniors' and seniors' with young people by focusing German, British, and Dutch tourists. While the 'politeness of staff' and 'friendliness of staff' were among the five most important hotel attributes for three nationalities and all age groups, differences were also identified in some attributes. For example, 'small food portions' and 'special dietary menus' were more important for pre-senior and senior Dutch tourists than other groups. In addition, their results

showed that 'availability of organised entertainment in the hotel' was important for pre-senior and senior British tourists. As being different from previous studies, Chen et al. (2014) used a field experiment for understanding whether renovated hotel rooms which became more senior friendly, and provided explanations by the staff affect tourist satisfaction. Their results revealed that while senior friendly facilities increased tourist satisfaction, staff explanations did not have any effect.

To sum, many of the studies showed that, for senior tourists, 'service quality', 'cleanliness', 'non-smoking rooms' and 'in-room amenities' were the most important attributes of the hotels (e.g. Pederson, 1992; Shoemaker, 1984; Wuest, Emenheiser, & Tas, 1998). Moreover, studies on senior tourists show that various hotel attributes have direct influences on customer satisfaction (Choi & Chu, 2001). However, individual hotel attributes may have symmetric or asymmetric influences on satisfaction of senior tourists, and this is an unexplored area of research for the academics. To summarize, customer satisfaction is affected by the hotel attributes and their perceived qualities which are the touchstones to motivate senior tourists to be repeat customers or vice versa.

3. Asymmetric impacts of the product/service attributes on customer satisfaction

Previous studies highlight the importance of high service quality and customer satisfaction for the success of hospitality businesses. While service quality is known as one of the most important determinants of customer satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), customer satisfaction is found to be directly determined by the availability of quality service (Whipple & Thach, 1988; Wuest et al., 1998). Many study results show that high service quality creates customer satisfaction, while low service quality reasons to customer dissatisfaction. Because of that, majority of the academics assume that there must be a symmetric relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. However, in many of the recent studies, findings indicate that such a symmetric relationship does not occur in all conditions (Busacca & Padula, 2005; Kano, Seraku, Takahashi, & Tsuji, 1984; Lin, Yang, Chan, & Sheu, 2010; Vavra, 1997). In other words, product/service attributes' effect on customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction changes depending on their performance level. While some product/service attributes' impact on customer satisfaction is high, when their performance is high; exactly the same attributes do not cause customer dissatisfaction, when they are absent or their performances are low. In contrary, low performance or absence of the some attributes may have a greater impact on customer dissatisfaction than its impact with high level performance. Those kinds of relationships are described by the academics as the asymmetric impacts of the product/service attributes on customer satisfaction.

Kano et al. (1984) are the first researchers in the literature, who attempted to explain asymmetric relationships between product/service attributes' performance and customer satisfaction by inspiring from Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation (1959). Kano et al. (1984) proposed that product/service attributes could be classified in five categories by relying on their different effects on customer satisfaction, which are namely the: basic (must be), performance (one-dimensional), excitement (attractive), indifference, and reverse factors.

Basic factors should be necessarily offered to the customers. Otherwise, customers are expected to be dissatisfied, since these are the minimum requirements. Besides, basic factors do not lead to customer satisfaction, even they are fully delivered. In contrast, excitement factors highly affect customer satisfaction, when they are delivered. Thus, they have the ability of creating customer delight. If excitement factors are not offered to the customers, they

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