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Dimensions of lodging guest satisfaction among guests with mobility challenges: A mixed-method analysis of web-based texts

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Integrate mixed-method web content analysis with Penalty-Reward Contrast Analysis.
- A strategic order of lodging service development to optimize customer satisfaction.
- Capture tourists' lodging service evaluation with improved accuracy and reliability.
- A thorough and efficient exploitation of customer-generated web textual data.

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ABSTRACT

Given that many lodging businesses cannot afford to provide satisfactory services to people with mobility challenges, this study recommends a strategic order of service attribute development to maximize customer satisfaction with minimal costs. The crucial lodging service attributes of this population are identified and distinguished by degrees of influence on customer satisfaction based on the analyses of 543 web travel reviews. The results suggests prioritizing the bottom-line delivery of basic and performance factors (i.e. *room access* and *staff attitude capability*), whereas optionally offering the delivery of excitement factors or above-and-beyond delivery of performance factors, such as *luggage and equipment support* and *general lodging features*. Being the first attempt to integrate quantitative and qualitative web content analysis with Penalty-Reward Contrast Analysis, this study captures the real-life tourist service evaluation criteria with improved accuracy and reliability. It also enables a thorough and efficient exploitation of customer-generated web textual data.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, scholars have highlighted the importance of serving the fast-growing leisure travel market of people with mobility challenges, which also includes a considerable proportion of the mature market (Darcy, 2010; Eichhorn, Miller, & Tribe, 2013; McKercher, Packer, Yau, & Lam, 2003; Metz, 2000). Efforts to better understand and improve the travel experience for people with mobility challenges can help tourism and hospitality businesses maintain this loyal tourist market as well as the tourists' support networks (Stumbo & Pegg, 2005). Besides, it is ethically righteous to facilitate travel opportunities for people with mobility challenges, as travel as a basic human right should be satisfied equally across different populations (Cole & Morgan, 2010).

Researchers have agreed on the crucial role that hospitality service environment plays in enabling/disabling travelers with mobility challenges (Poria, Reichel, & Brandt, 2011; Yau, McKercher, & Packer, 2004). They have accordingly advocated for building the proper facility and service settings to remove the mobility challenges for this population in order to encourage increased travel behaviors (Papamichail, 2012). Regardless of the benefits from implementing the recommended facility and service settings, a large proportion of hospitality businesses cannot apply them all, as this requires significant investments of both time and finances (Burnett & Baker, 2001; Rice, 2006). The findings from the Opening Doors 2002 market study show that, with 100 percent of

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interviewed managers realizing the great market potential as a compensation for their facility and service implementation costs, only 20 percent planned improvements in the near future (Open Doors Organization, 2002). A follow-up study in 2005 further revealed the unfortunate fact that 60 percent of travelers with disabilities with overnight hospitality experiences reported problems including physical barriers, or customer service and communication issues (Open Doors Organization, 2005). Also, hundreds of complaints have been filed to the U.S. Department of Justice, not to mention unofficial complaints through various business websites or social networks. Rice (2006) provided a possible explanation for the customer dissatisfaction, noting that few hospitality managers interviewed in his study demonstrated interest in developing accessible facility and service settings beyond the mandatory building code requirements.

It is understandable that many businesses lack sufficient resources and budget to implement all the desirable service attributes at once for people with mobility challenges. Yet in order to satisfy this travel market to some degree, even if some service attributes cannot be fully implemented yet, hospitality businesses should implement service attributes strategically by prioritizing the implementation of the most influential attributes for customer satisfaction. Such strategic development of service attributes can also maximize investment returns for hospitality businesses. The orderly service development is hence necessary for the mutual benefit of the clients and the hospitality businesses.

In order to identify the strategic order of attribute implementations that can maximize customer satisfaction, the current study uses the Kano Model or *three-factor theory* of customer satisfaction as the conceptual framework (Kano, Seraku, Takahashi, & Tsuji, 1984), which has been widely utilized across various service fields to identify the most influential service attributes to satisfactory consumption experiences (Busacca & Padula, 2005; K. Matzler & Sauerwein, 2002). The theory identified three categories of service attributes, that of basic, performance, and excitement factors. The basic factor reflects fundamental needs of customers and is most responsible for customer *dissatisfaction*. The performance factor contributes to both *dissatisfaction* and *satisfaction* equally. The excitement factor is the unexpected extra value for customers and contributes the most to customer *satisfaction*. Given such attribute categorization, the most influential service attributes for customer satisfaction can be identified based on the commonly acknowledged principle that, the avoidance of dissatisfaction should be prioritized as compared to adding satisfaction. Furthermore, the service attributes that enhance/reduce the overall customer satisfaction the most should be prioritized as well.

There are many applications of the three-factor theory in tourism settings that reveal the service determinants of tourist satisfaction with a destination (i.e., Albayrak & Caber, 2013; Alegre & Garau, 2011; Krešić, Mikulić, & Miličević, 2012), with recreational experiences such as skiing, theme park visits, and animation program experiences (Füller & Matzler, 2008; Mikulic & Prebežac, 2011), or with convention experience (Krešić et al., 2012). For instance, applying three-factor theory, Krešić et al. (2012) found that excellent performance in tourism facilities, human factors and safety measures contribute the most to tourist satisfaction with destinations, whereas poor performance of transportation infrastructure, information quality, and hygiene-related attributes would reduce tourist satisfaction the most. Despite the richness of three-factor theory explorations on tourists in general, the promising market of people with mobility challenges has not yet been adequately explored. Considering the practical significance of the tourist market in relation to mobility challenges as addressed earlier, this study applies the three-factor theory specifically among this market segment to identify the strategic order of lodging service attribute implementation.

Methodologically, one of the most popular approaches to identifying the three-factor structure is Penalty-Reward Contrast Analysis (PRCA). This approach uses multiple regressions to identify the three-factor structure of service attributes by comparing a service attribute's magnitude of influence on customer satisfaction in regards to a well-performed condition (the reward) versus a poorly performed condition (the penalty) (Brandt, 1987). Being empirically verified as a competitively accurate and reliable approach, PRCA is adopted in the current study to capture the process of real-life service evaluation by customers with mobility challenges. Most importantly, the current study extends the application of PRCA to analyzing web-based travel review data, which presumably improves the accuracy of PRCA given the lack of interference with the data generation. This study also contributes to the full exploitation of the rich source of web textual data, which has great potential yet has been analyzed in-depth to identify service-satisfaction relationships.

The introduction of web-based travel reviews into PRCA is done through a mixed-method content analysis, which involves both quantitative and qualitative content analyses. In the quantitative content analysis, the lodging *service details* that most concern people with mobility challenges are initially identified from among the most frequently mentioned relevant words in the reviews. The occurrence frequency of these popular service details are then factor-analyzed into *service attributes*, which are further interpreted with the qualitative content analysis for verification and supplementation of details. Around those service attributes, all the travel reviews were coded for valence of each attribute being mentioned (positive/neutral/negative) as well as valence of the overall service experience. In each review, the attribute valence ratings represent the customer's ratings of different attributes' performances, while the valence rating on overall service experience represents the customer's overall service satisfaction. Consequently, the PRCA analyzes the relationship between attribute performance ratings and the overall customer satisfaction, and identifies the respective and relative influences of different service attributes on customer satisfaction versus dissatisfaction. Premised on the PRCA results, service attributes are then categorized by their varied contribution to customer satisfaction and serve as the basis for a recommended strategic order for lodging businesses to implement service attributes that can maximize satisfaction of customers with mobility challenges.

2. Literature review

2.1. Three-factor theory of customer satisfaction and identification approaches

Researchers have attempted to identify the relationships between service attribute performance and customer satisfaction for decades. One assumption has been that the performance levels of service attributes linearly affect overall customer satisfaction (Mittal & Baldasare, 1995). Another school of scholars nevertheless claimed that the relationships between attribute performance and customer satisfaction may be asymmetric and that, the extent of satisfaction increase due to positive attribute performances may be different from the extent of satisfaction decrease resulting from negative attribute performances (Johnston, 1995; K. Matzler & Sauerwein, 2002). In support of both assumptions, Kano et al. (1984) identified three types of service attributes that indicate three types of attribute-satisfaction relationships, including both asymmetric and symmetric relationships. Such service attributes categorization has thus been known as the Kano Model or three-factor theory.