MEASURING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE HOTELS IN THE CAPITAL CITIES OF EUROPE

Tijana Radojević, Nemanja Stanišić, Nenad Stanić, Marko Šarac

Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to assess the expectations of hotel guests in relation to the services offered by the hotel. For the purpose of this research, data on 6,768 hotels located in 47 capital cities in Europe were collected from the website www.booking.com. We have used all information available on the website regarding the hotels chosen on the basis of previously specified criteria, including ratings given by the registered users. The methods of partial correlation and hierarchical regression analysis were then conducted. Research results indicate that the number of stars is the most important factor that influences overall customer satisfaction in the hotel industry. We find that room price, the presence of air-conditioning in rooms, lobby bar, and free Wi-Fi are variables that positively correlate with customer satisfaction, whereas the number of rooms in hotel and distance from the city center are negatively correlated with customer satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of services provided and customer satisfaction are critical success factors in any business [1], as they are essential for gaining competitive advantage and keeping customers. Given that the costs of attracting new customers are higher than the costs of keeping existing ones, successful managers need to pay special attention to keeping existing clients by conducting efficient policies on customer satisfaction and loyalty, which are particularly prominent in the hotel industry. Customer satisfaction, though an important output, is often ignored in hotel efficiency studies [2]. The success and profits of any hotel are tightly connected with customer satisfaction as one of the main preconditions for creating customer loyalty in business. Moreover, customer satisfaction is one of the leading indicators of successful performance in the hotel sector.

Many hotels today tend to increase their investments with the aim of improving service quality and perceived value for guests in order to achieve better customer satisfaction and loyalty, which leads to a better relationship with each customer [3]. Such relationship quality has a remarkably positive effect on the behavior of hotel guests, creates positive word of mouth (WOM), and increases repeated guest rates [4].

In order to understand the expectations of guests in relation to the services hotels offer, and after examining the main literature and sources in the field of customer satisfaction in the hotel industry, we analyze customer satisfaction in hotels in the capital cities of Europe based on the feedback and ratings provided by registered users of the website www.booking.com.

We choose the capital cities of Europe because tourists nowadays prefer short holidays and visits to major cities (so-called city breaks). Many people use holidays and extended weekends to visit some of the most beautiful European cities. According to UNWTO statistics (World Tourism Organization), city breaks comprise more than 50% of all tourist movements, are the second or third holiday during the year, and usually last no more than 1–4 days. Historical heritage, culture, shopping, various sporting and entertainment events, and nightlife are all factors that are most likely to attract tourists to try city breaks.

This research paper is based on the available data on every hotel found on www.booking.com, including their Facilities (General, Services, Internet, and Parking) and Policies (Check in, Check out, Children and extra beds, Pets, Groups, Accepted credit cards). The method of partial correlation is used for determining variables that best describe customer satisfaction, and hierarchical analysis is applied to determine the importance of the contribution of individual variables to overall customer satisfaction with the services offered in the hotel industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer satisfaction is typically defined as a post-consumption evaluative judgment concerning a specific product or service [5]. It is the result of an evaluative process that contrasts pre-purchase expectations with perceptions of performance during and after the consumption experience [6]. Studies show that customer satisfaction may have direct and indirect impacts on business results. [7], [8], and [9] concluded that customer satisfaction has a positive effect on business profitability. The majority of studies have been devoted to examining the relationship with customer behavior patterns [10] [11] [12] [13] [14] [15]. According to these findings, customer satisfaction contributes to increasing customer loyalty, influences repurchase intentions, and leads to positive WOM.

Providing high quality services and improving customer satisfaction are widely recognized as fundamental factors boosting the performance of companies in the hotel and tourism industry [16] [17] [18] [19] [20]. Hotels with good service quality will ultimately improve their profitability [21]. In a highly competitive hospitality industry that offers homogeneous services, individual hoteliers must be able to satisfy customers better than their counterparts can [22]. In order to create loyalty and outweigh other competitors, hotel providers must be able to gain high levels of customer satisfaction for the service supplied. Numerous studies have been conducted on the attributes that travelers may find to be important regarding their satisfaction. [23] found that cleanliness, security, value for money, and staff courtesy determine customer satisfaction. [24] showed that room cleanliness and comfort, convenient location, prompt service, safety and security, and the friendliness of employees are extremely important. [16] stated that employee attitude, location, and rooms are likely to influence travellers' satisfaction. A study conducted by [25] showed that the main determinants of hotel guests' satisfaction include the behavior of employees, cleanliness, and timeliness. [22] concluded that staff quality, room quality, and value for money are the top three hotel factors that determine travellers' satisfaction.

Hoteliers need to fully acknowledge which service attributes are most likely to influence customers' choice intentions [26]. Customer satisfaction practices can enable them to identify the crucial elements affecting customers' purchase experience and post-purchase behavior, such as subsequent purchase and favourable WOM publicity

[27] [22] [28] [29] [24]. A satisfied guest promotes positive WOM at no cost to the enterprise and with effect and credibility that are superior to those of conventional advertising [30] [31] [32]. The WOM effect is also amplified by the World Wide Web [33] [34].

Customer satisfaction represents the starting point in creating customer loyalty and long-lasting relationships in business. In other words, it increases hotel customer loyalty and contributes greatly to improving the corporate image of the overall hotel chain. Research on guest satisfaction, which translates into the consideration of whether or not customers will return to a hotel or recommend it to other tourists, is thus pivotal to the success of a hospitality business.

METHODOLOGY

This research used the data available on www.booking.com, one of the most visited webpages concerning hotels. Altogether, 6,768 hotels located in 47 capital cities in Europe were included in the research. Access dates via this website were March 6 and March 8, 2013.

In order to determine those variables that best describe customer satisfaction, the method of partial correlation was used. Furthermore, we used the technique of hierarchical regression in order to comply with the objective of measuring their importance. We used the ratings provided by registered users of www.booking.com as a proxy of customer satisfaction with hotel services. The weights assigned to individual hotels were determined based on the number of votes of registered users for that particular hotel, implying that ratings with greater credibility had a greater impact on the model construction.

The number of votes of registered users per hotel was log-normally distributed, with an average of the original (non-transformed) distribution of 773.40 votes per hotel and a standard deviation of 801.53. The total number of votes in the selected sample was 2,067,370.

As a method of excluding cases with missing data, pairwise exclusion was used. A large number of data points available on the website with detailed descriptions of hotel characteristics were examined using independent variables.

Distance from the centre of the town, as a predictor variable, was calculated by geo-coding the data on hotel addresses. The values of distance variables from the centre of the town expressed in km, number of rooms in the hotel, and double room price were then transformed using logarithm with a base 10.

RESULTS

Using hierarchical regression, the variables were grouped into three blocks. Number of stars (hotel classification) was included in the first block. The second block included the following variables: Double room price log10, Number of rooms in hotel log10, Distance from city centre in km log10, Air conditioning, Free Wi-Fi, and Bar (last three were dichotomous variables). The third

block included a smaller number of variables obtained using principal component analysis as a widely accepted dimensionality reduction method that explains a certain level of variability in the original set of variables.

The first block of variables

Number of stars is a predictor variable included in the first block of variables in the hierarchical regression, which can explain 29% of the total variation for average rating $R2 = .289$, $F (1, 1936109) = 788055, 60$, $p < .001$.
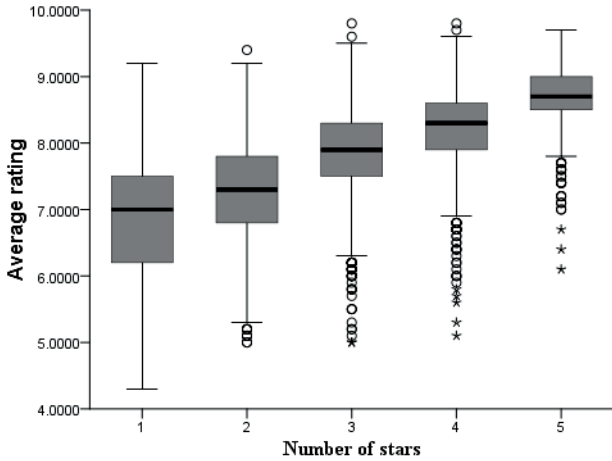

Fig. 1. The box plot for average ratings by number of stars

Without insights into the other hotel characteristics, average rating increases by 0.461 for every additional star the hotel receives.

The second block of variables

Variables showing the highest partial correlation with hotel rating were included in the second block of variables, including the following three interval variables: Double room price log10, Number of rooms in hotel log10, and Distance from the city centre in km log10, as well as the three dichotomous variables of Air conditioning, Free Wi-Fi, and Bar.

The change in variance accounted for (DR2) was equal to .097, which was a statistically significant increase in variance accounted above the variability contributed by the previous predictor variables entered in step one (DF(6,796873) =.097, p<.001). All included variables were statistically significant (p<.001):

$R2 = .386$, $F(6, 1936109) = 788055,60$, $p < .001$.

Table III. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting hotel rating – second block

The third block of variables

In order to avoid the possibility of over fitting due to a great number of variables describing the available hotel facilities, we decided to include a smaller number of variables in the third block, which were obtained by using the dimension reduction method and principal component analysis, which describes a certain level of variability in the original set of variables. Owing to the presence of correlations between the variables in the original set, direct oblimin was used in the principal component analysis as a rotation method.

Table I. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting hotel rating – first block

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.538[a]	.289	.289	.59823	.289	788055.601	1	1936109	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant). Number of stars

b. Dependent Variable: Average rating

Table II. Summary of coefficients in hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting hotel rating – first block

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.395	.002		3583.364	.000
	Number of stars	.461	.001	.538	887.725	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Average rating

Model Summary^c

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.538^a	.289	.289	.59823	.289	324354.135	1	796879	.000
2	.622^b	.386	.386	.55590	.097	20995.942	6	796873	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant). Number of stars

b. Predictors: (Constant). Number of stars. Free Wi-Fi. Distance from city centre in km log10. Air conditioning. Double room price log10. Bar. Number of rooms in hotel log10

c. Dependent Variable: Average rating

Table IV. Summary of coefficients in hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting hotel rating – second block

Coefficients^a

| Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.395	.003		2298.911	.000
	Number of stars	.461	.001	.538	569.521	.000
2	(Constant)	6.351	.006		1093.707	.000
	Number of stars	.315	.001	.368	311.980	.000
	Double room price log10	.190	.003	.067	68.433	.000
	Number of rooms in hotel log10	-.157	.002	-.093	-89.523	.000
	Distance from city centre in km log10	-.234	.001	-.145	-161.364	.000
	Air conditioning	.306	.001	.212	218.618	.000
	Free Wi-Fi	.214	.002	.108	120.647	.000
	Bar	.230	.002	.152	147.284	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Average rating
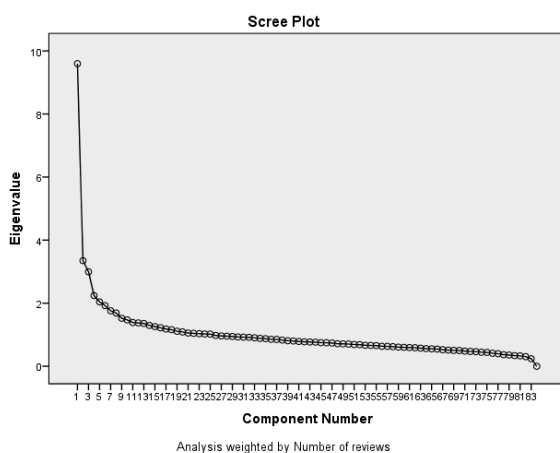
Fig.2. Scree Plot with Eigenvalues for each of the components

Based on the Scree plot (Fig. 2), we decided to extract three factors out of the 84 variables. The percentage of cumulative total variance explained was 18.97%.

A detailed overview of the variables with factor loadings can be found in the appendix. The change in variance accounted for (DR2) was equal to .010, which was a statistically significant increase in variance accounted above the variability contributed by the previous predictor variables entered in step two (DF(3,545847)=.010, p<.001). All three factors were statistically significant (p<.001).

Table V. Summary of the results of principal component analysis

Total Variance Explained

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	9.595	11.422	11.422	8.219
2	3.349	3.987	15.409	3.866
3	2.995	3.566	18.975	5.484

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, the sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain total variance.

Table VI. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting hotel rating – third block

Model Summary[d]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.538[a]	.289	.289	.59823	.289	222180.093	1	545856	.000
2	.622[b]	.386	.386	.55591	.097	14382.009	6	545850	.000
3	.630[c]	.397	.397	.55122	.010	3105.614	3	545847	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant). Number of stars

b. Predictors: (Constant). Number of stars. Free Wi-Fi. Distance from city centre in km log10. Air conditioning. Double room price log10. Bar. Number of rooms in hotel log10

c. Predictors: (Constant). Number of stars. Free Wi-Fi. Distance from city centre in km log10. Air conditioning. Double room price log10. Bar. Number of rooms in hotel log10. Regression factor score 2. Regression factor score 3. Regression factor score 1

d. Dependent Variable: Average rating

Table VII. Summary of coefficients in hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting hotel rating – third block

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.395	.003		1902.677	.000
	Number of stars	.461	.001	.538	471.360	.000
2	(Constant)	6.351	.007		905.197	.000
	Number of stars	.315	.001	.368	258.208	.000
	Distance from city centre in km log10	-.234	.002	-.145	-133.551	.000
	Number of rooms in hotel log10	-.157	.002	-.093	-74.093	.000
	Double room price log10	.190	.003	.067	56.638	.000
	Air conditioning	.306	.002	.212	180.937	.000
	Bar	.230	.002	.152	121.899	.000
	Free Wi-Fi	.214	.002	.108	99.853	.000
3	(Constant)	6.503	.008		800.450	.000
	Number of stars	.273	.001	.318	195.810	.000
	Distance from city centre in km log10	-.232	.002	-.144	-129.512	.000
	Number of rooms in hotel log10	-.166	.002	-.098	-74.369	.000
	Double room price log10	.227	.003	.080	66.279	.000
	Air conditioning	.279	.002	.193	162.898	.000
	Bar	.184	.002	.121	94.301	.000
	Free Wi-Fi	.200	.002	.101	93.999	.000
	Regression factor score 1	.082	.001	.116	74.608	.000
	Regression factor score 2	.027	.001	.037	31.023	.000
	Regression factor score 3	.011	.001	.015	11.693	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Average rating

The assumption that there was no multicollinearity in the model was conformed (all values of VIF were below 2.5). Further, the residual values follow the normal distribution, as seen in Fig. 3.
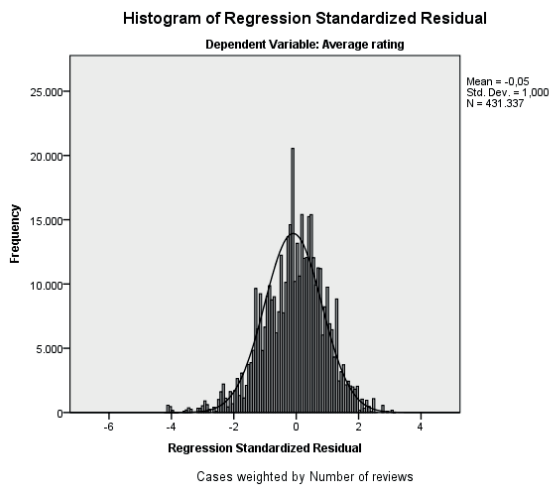

Fig.3. Histogram of regression standardised residuals

The following equation is the result of the regression and this determines the expected value of customer satisfaction (average rating) with hotel services:

Expected rating = 6.503 + 0.273 × Number of stars − 0.232 × Distance from city centre in km log10 − 0.166 × Number of rooms in hotel log10 + 0.227 × Double room price log10 + 0.279 × Air conditioning + 0.184 × Bar + 0.200 × Free Wi-Fi +0.082 × Regression factor score 1 + 0.027 × Regression factor score 2 + 0.011 × Regression factor score 3

Based on the regression, we conclude that the expected rating of customer satisfaction with hotel services increases with every additional star the hotel receives. In addition, the increase in the expected rating depends on the price of a double room in the hotel, the presence of air-conditioning in rooms, and a lobby bar with free Wi-Fi.

Number of stars is equivalent to customer ratings of the services that hotels offer to guests in order to meet their needs. Therefore, the better the quality and standard of the hotel, the greater the number of stars. This suggests in favour of the results obtained, which show that customer satisfaction with hotel services grows together with number of stars.

The price of a double room in the hotel also positively affects customer satisfaction; as city hotels usually have double rooms in their offers, value for money grows along with price. In addition, air-conditioning and free Wi-Fi are very important variables when choosing the right hotel, as they are considered to be the basic standard that guests demand in today's technology-oriented society.

Moreover, certain guests believe that it is important for the hotel to have a lobby bar where they can socialize with other guests. Therefore, the existence of such a facility in the hotel has a positive impact on customer satisfaction with hotel services. By contrast, the expected rating of customer satisfaction with hotel services decreases with distance from the centre of the town and with an increase in number of rooms.

Because guests of the hotels included in this research usually visit on city breaks, it is not surprising that customer satisfaction decreases if the hotel is located far from the centre. Furthermore, the increase in number of rooms has an adverse effect on customer satisfaction, as the guests in city hotels with a certain number of stars prefer smaller hotels where they feel more comfortable during their short stays.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research conducted on customer satisfaction in hotels in the capital cities of Europe using hierarchical regression analysis, we can conclude that the following factors have a positive impact on the level of customer satisfaction: a greater number of stars, room price, air-conditioning, lobby bar, and free Wi-Fi.

Number of stars assigned to the hotel can explain 28.90% of the total variability of the value of customer satisfaction. In addition, 9.70% of variability can be explained by including those variables that describe hotel characteristics such as air conditioning, lobby bar, free Wi-Fi, number of rooms in the hotel, distance from the city centre, and the price of accommodation. The three regression scores created on the basis of additional 84 parameters with low correlations with customer satisfaction can explain only 1.00% more of total variability, which indicates a small additional value of information contained in those parameters. All this covers 39.60% of total variability in average ratings. By contrast, some of the factors with a negative bearing on the level of customer satisfaction include distance from the city centre and number of rooms in the hotel.

Based on the research results, we believe that the analysis should contain analytical details concerning the structure of average rating, including variables such as Cleanliness, Comfort, Location, Facilities, Staff, and Value for money, as these variables are rated by the registered users of www.booking.com. The analysis of variables relevant for customer satisfaction can also be examined within analytical data on groups of visitors who gave their ratings, such as families with older children, families with young children, mature couples, groups of friends, solo travellers, and young couples.

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APPENDIX

Pattern Matrix[a]

	Component		
	1	2	3
Laundry	.691	-.074	-.055
Dry Cleaning	.662	-.091	-.092
Ironing Services	.634	-.037	-.108
Room Service	.602	-.213	-.202
Breakfast in the Room	.600	-.207	-.124
Fax & Photocopying	.577	-.050	.107
Business Centre	.536	-.057	-.249
Meeting and Banquet Facilities	.535	.005	-.263
Car Rental	.524	.030	-.017
Babysitting Child	.505	-.049	-.132
Babysitting Child Services	.505	-.049	-.132
Safe	.486	-.011	.058
Ticket Service	.484	.111	.069
Newspapers	.479	-.081	.035
Currency Exchange	.470	-.071	-.226
Concierge Service	.441	-.042	-.062
VIP Room Facilities	.415	-.021	-.258
Shoeshine	.410	.098	-.130
Tour Desk	.404	.141	.133
Restaurant	.390	.036	-.340
Baggage Storage	.388	.049	.114
Elevator	.386	-.118	-.019
Honeymoon Suite	.382	.046	-.136
Shuttle Service Surcharge	.327	.196	.140
Non-smoking	.278	.046	.056
24 Hour Front Desk	.271	-.123	-.024
Heating	.257	.117	.203
Snack Bar	.234	.210	-.042
Suit Press	.231	.013	-.111
Allergy-free Rooms Available	.216	.026	-.119
Express Check-in Checkout	.213	.036	.015
Library	.140	.067	-.022
Pets allowed	.104	.087	.054
Children and extra beds free	.093	.085	-.049
Bikes Available Free	.085	.044	-.018
Credit cards accepted	.068	-.043	.007
Vending Machine Snacks	-.131	.479	.165
Pool Table	-.118	.470	-.075
Game Room	-.032	.443	.014
Vending Machine Drinks	-.166	.437	.199
Cycling	.121	.402	.056
Playground	.009	.390	-.080
Free parking	-.055	.354	-.037
Grounds	.115	.352	.055
Airport Shuttle	.326	.333	.162
Packed Lunches	.263	.320	-.021
Terrace	.227	.302	-.017
Airport Shuttle surcharge	.230	.294	.172
Golf Course within 2 miles	.085	.293	.014
Private Check-in Checkout	.107	.286	-.005
Bicycle Rental	.227	.284	.161
Airport Shuttle Free	-.005	.276	.019
Designated Smoking Area	.199	.265	-.023
Hiking	.049	.260	-.056
Tennis Court	-.006	.257	-.091
Darts	-.044	.255	-.109
Ping Pong	-.135	.254	-.161
BBQ Facilities	.042	.248	.017
Shuttle Service Free	.020	.234	-.014
Outdoor Swimming Pool Seasonal	.028	.232	-.101
Fishing	-.006	.206	.017
Bowling	-.051	.203	-.126
Family Rooms	-.124	.198	.118
Diving	-.016	.190	-.045
On Site ATM Machine	.096	.184	-.167
Outdoor Pool	.034	.180	-.095
Karaoke	-.022	.158	-.056
Snorkelling	-.008	.134	-.047
Skiing	-.032	.124	-.075
Canoeing	-.010	.112	-.018
Ski Passes Available	-.026	.091	.002
Non-smoking Rooms	.078	.087	.016
Sauna	.160	-.010	-.650
Spa	.085	.057	-.640
Massage	.220	.106	-.625
Turkish Bath or Steam Bath	.098	.001	-.624
Indoor Pool	-.006	.059	-.622
Fitness Centre	.290	-.013	-.587
Hot Tub	.076	.076	-.586
Indoor Swimming Pool All Year	.027	.115	-.532
Solarium	.034	.171	-.461
Hair Beauty Salon	.101	.175	-.442
Casino	-.056	.111	-.318
Souvenir Gift Shop	.240	.172	-.250

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation.

a. Rotation converged in 15 iterations.