

Chinese travelers' preferences for hotel amenities

Abstract

Purpose: This research investigates how Chinese leisure travelers value hotel amenities when they book hotel rooms in Hong Kong.

Design/methodology/approach: The research method was based on a conjoint analysis approach. Conjoint models were developed to determine how people make decisions and what they really value in products or services.

Findings: Price had the highest average importance value, followed by airport/local area shuttles, wireless Internet, breakfast and quality of coffee/tea. Price, airport/local area shuttles and wireless Internet were rated as being relatively more important than breakfast and quality of coffee/tea.

Research limitations/implications: This research has some limitations in terms of the generalizability of its findings to all hotels and travelers. First, only four hotel amenities were considered. Second, the research focused on Chinese leisure travelers staying in hotels in Hong Kong. Finally, the sample only consisted of leisure travelers.

Practical implications: This research shows that providing complimentary breakfast and free access to quality coffee/tea when a hotel already provides a shuttle service and free wireless Internet does not add much value to the overall hotel product from the customer's point of view. Moreover, it provides insights into how hotel professionals can customize and select the amenities they provide to impress their customers.

Originality/value: This research has significant implications for hotel managers' efforts to formulate and implement strategies or tactics in their daily operations or long-term plans through the selection of hotel amenities.

Keywords: Chinese travelers, leisure travelers, hotel industry, hotel amenities, conjoint analysis.

1. Introduction

The main goal of this research is to determine how hoteliers should use hotel amenities to enhance their customer value propositions. Conjoint analysis is used to investigate how Chinese leisure travelers value hotel amenities. The main challenge is determining the utility of a multi-attribute item, that is, the hotel amenities attached to room rate, by identifying the specific contributions of each attribute through a utility theory based model of product choice. In today's dynamic economic environment, companies formulate and implement daily operational activities and strategies for creating sustainable competitive advantages by focusing on two main factors: market position (Connor, 2000; Parnell, 2013) and resources or capabilities (Ambrosini and Bowman, 2009; Madhok, Li, and Priem, 2010).

Managers should generate strategies to gain customers and keep them in the loop (Fraering and Minor, 2013; Yang and Peterson, 2004). Hence, before companies offer benefit packages that include primary and periphery products and/or services with attributes or amenities, they should understand their customers' preferences. Given that customers are exposed to so many product choices, companies should consider how to differentiate their products or services to better attract customers (Culiberg and Bajde, 2013; Estelami, 2014; Koklic and Vida, 2011).

Previous studies have investigated how and why companies differentiate their products and services or provide amenities (see Abebe and Angriawan, 2014; Cruz-Ros and Gonzalez-Cruz, 2015; Lee, Kim, Seo, and Hight, 2015; Timsit, Castiaux, Truong, Athaide, and Klink, 2015) to influence customer perspectives (see Chen and Quester, 2015; Murali, Pugazhendhi, and Muralidharan, 2016; Simon *and* Gómez, 2014; Slevitch and Oh, 2010; Vogel and Paul, 2015). Company-focused studies have sought to discern how differentiation influences organizational performance and what types of differentiation (vertical or horizontal) increase profits (Makadok and Ross, 2013). Customer-focused studies have assessed the antecedents of customer

satisfaction and loyalty, seeking to identify customers' preferences as a means of exploring competitive priorities or offering service product bundles that are valuable to customers (Roth and Menor, 2003; Verma and Plaschka, 2003).

A limited number of studies have discussed amenities in the hospitality industry, such as technology-based (Bilgihan, 2012; Bilgihan, Cobanoglu, and Miller, 2010; Bilgihan, Smith, Ricci, and Bujisic, 2016; Cobanoglu, Berezina, Kasavana, and Erdem, 2011), in-room (Heo and Hyun, 2015; Masiero, Heo, and Pan, 2015) and service (Alabi, Otegbulu, and Gambo, 2013; Chu and Choi, 2000; Hamilton, Rust, Wedel, and Dev, 2016) amenities. However, further research is needed to elucidate customers' amenity preferences, particularly in studies that focus on Eastern cultural contexts. Such work is needed to help managers formulate more effective value-creating and differentiation strategies.

There is no universally accepted definition of hotel amenities. In the context of this research, hotel amenities are services and products offered to customers as a part of their overall hotel stay. Hotel amenities can be separated into two categories: property and in-room (Hotels.com, 2013a). According to an amenities survey conducted by Hotels.com (2013a), the most important hotel property amenities include breakfast, restaurants, wireless Internet, parking, 24-hour front desk service, non-smoking rooms, swimming pool, bar, air conditioning and coffee/tea in the lobby. The same survey showed that the most important in-room amenities were wireless Internet, bathroom shower, room size, television facilities, air conditioning, coffee/tea, non-smoking rooms, premium bedding, daily housekeeping and mattress type. The amenities offered in each hotel vary depending on hotel location, size, type and quality. Some hotels do not charge for certain amenities, but do charge for others. For instance, most hotels do not charge customers if they take **toiletries home, but are likely to charge if amenities, such as umbrellas or bathrobes, are taken.**

What types of hotel amenities make the millions of leisure travelers from China choose particular properties? This research makes an initial attempt to examine the joint effects of several hotel amenities on Chinese leisure travelers' hotel room choices using conjoint analysis. The data are from Hong Kong, the number one destination for Chinese leisure travelers (China National Tourism Administration, 2015) and therefore a suitable research setting.

The two key research objectives are as follows:

1. to identify the values Chinese leisure travelers attach to different hotel amenities when they book hotel rooms.
2. to investigate any differences in the relative importance of different types of hotel amenities to Chinese leisure travelers with different socio-demographic backgrounds and travel characteristics.

This research makes several contributions to the literature. First, although a few studies have investigated the factors predicting traveler satisfaction in the Asian context (see Khozaei, Nazem, Ramayah, and Naidu, 2016), no research has shown the trade-offs customers make based on hotel amenities when selecting a hotel. The hotel amenities research is very limited and largely focuses on the Western context. In addition, research related to hotel amenities is mostly non-academic or descriptive in nature. Second, the hospitality literature does not explain how hotel amenities can be used strategically to deliver value to customers. Value-based pricing refers to pricing based on the strengths of the benefits hotels can provide to their customers. It is related to customers' willingness to pay for a hotel room and the services provided by a hotel. This research makes an initial connection between hotel amenities and value-based pricing. Third, unlike previous research, this research identifies the preferences of Chinese leisure travelers based on a combination of hotel amenities using conjoint analysis, which is essentially founded on consumer preference theories and helps understand how consumers choose between similar

offers or products. Lastly, preference is measured based on utility scores, which is a value of customers' total satisfaction with hotel amenities.

The findings of this research contribute to two main strategic management approaches. First, companies use tangible and intangible resources to formulate strategies using a resource-based perspective (Welnerfelt, 1984). This research elucidates how tangible resources (products) offered as services to customers may emerge as an entirely new level of competitive advantage. Second, the “strategy as practice” approach identifies practices and how they influence competitive advantage levels (Jarzabkowski, 2004). Hence, this research demonstrates how hoteliers can use tangible resources (what) effectively (how) to formulate and implement strategies in long- or short-term phases in practice. Selecting the right amenities (primary or periphery) plays a significant role in customers' value judgments. For example, some hotels provide free wireless Internet service as a primary amenity, whereas others provide high-speed wireless Internet as a periphery amenity at an extra cost. Moreover, providing primary and periphery amenity combinations also contributes to the overall perceived product value. Lancaster (1966, 1971) asserted that the characteristics of goods rather than the goods themselves are the main indicators of satisfaction. In this research, the amenities are specifically chosen to cater to the needs of Chinese visitors to Hong Kong.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Product

According to Kotler (1972, p. 46), marketing is “concerned with understanding buyer and seller systems involved in the marketing of goods and services.” A more contemporary definition of marketing defines it as “the set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating and delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society

at large” (Armstrong, Adam, Denize, and Kotler, 2014, p. 4). In the context of marketing, products refer to goods, services, organizations, persons, places and ideas. Designing a customer driven marketing strategy is very important in product development. For products to be successful in the marketplace, they should be of high quality, high performance and innovative (Armstrong et al., 2014).

Customers evaluate different products based on customer-perceived value. Customer-perceived value refers to a customer’s evaluation of the differences between all of the benefits and costs of a product relative to those of competing offers (Arslanagic-Kalajdzic and Zankar, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to have a better understanding of the trade-offs customers make when they evaluate product offerings. In the context of this research, products refer to the amenities provided to customers when they stay at a hotel.

2.2. Hotel amenities

An amenity is “something that makes life easier or more pleasant” or a set of things that are conducive to comfort, convenience or enjoyment (Merriam-Webster, 2016). Based on this definition, several approaches have been used in the hospitality literature to explain hotel amenities. For instance, Jones (2005) suggested that amenities are luxury items that a hotel gives away, provided as part of the overall stay package beyond the actual room. Thus, hotel amenities can be defined as extra supplies or facilities provided to guests in or outside of the room at no charge (Vallen and Vallen, 2009). Casado (2000) explained that guest amenities are non-reusable items that customers are expected to use or take away upon check-out. In this respect, the quality of hotel amenities plays an important role in determining the overall value perceived by guests (Dubé and Renaghan, 1999). Therefore, amenities can be important factors that predict the choices, and thus the loyalty, of customers (Neal, 1999).

Hotels use amenities to create a short-term competitive advantage until their competitors start to provide the same amenities (Vallen and Vallen, 2009). The growth in the variety and number of amenities provided by hotels (Bardi, 1996) is referred to as the “amenity creep” (Vallen and Vallen, 2009). Since the 1980s, hotels have provided extra features that they think add value for guests. Over time, these extra features and amenities have become brand standards, to the extent that guests may now be indifferent to their availability. In this way, an extra amenity that once conferred a competitive advantage may now be a standard guest expectation associated with the room rate. Although most hotels provide similar amenities to please their customers (such as flat-screen televisions and DVD players), they still look for unique and superior amenities to differentiate themselves from other hotels. For instance, the Marriott Hotels design and development teams recently tested more than 50 toiletries in choosing the perfect products to offer guests in their hotels around the world (Touyalai, 2014). Hotel brands, such as Ritz-Carlton, Intercontinental and Mandarin Oriental, have followed this trend, upgrading their toiletries to upscale cosmetic lines (Heo and Hyun, 2015). Starwood Hotels promotes its “heavenly bed” concept and emphasizes cleanliness by using terrycloth and linen products. As a result, hotel amenities, as tactics in marketing strategies designed to convince customers to book rooms, have become value-creating elements of a hotel’s product.

Although the matter of what is or is not a hotel amenity is open to discussion, the amenities included in this research are considered hotel property amenities, despite an overlap with in-room amenities. For instance, one of the most important hotel amenities, wireless Internet, can be considered both a hotel property and an in-room amenity, given that it is likely to be available in-room and in other locations of a hotel. The list of hotel amenities can be very long; thus it is outside the scope of this research to address all of the possibilities. Instead, this research focuses on those amenities identified as the most important in surveys conducted by Hotels.com (2013a,

2013b) and TripAdvisor (2013a, 2013b). That is, wireless Internet, breakfast, quality of coffee/tea and airport/local area shuttles.

Many non-academic articles have been published on hotel amenities, particularly in industry magazines. For instance, according to the amenities survey conducted by Hotels.com (2013a), the most important hotel property amenities include (from highest to lowest priority) breakfast, restaurants, wireless Internet, parking, 24-hour front desk service, non-smoking rooms, swimming pool, bar, air conditioning and coffee/tea in the lobby. The same survey showed that the most important in-room amenities were wireless Internet, bathroom shower, room size, television, air conditioning, coffee/tea, non-smoking rooms, premium bedding, daily housekeeping and mattress type. Industrial surveys have revealed that guest Internet access is the leading preference of hotel guests (Ehotelier.com, 2015; Hospitalitynet.org, 2015; Hotels.com, 2013b). Free wireless Internet is more important for business than for leisure travelers, yet both identify free breakfast as the second most important amenity (Hospitalitynet.org, 2015).

Several academic studies have focused directly on hotel amenities. However, this topic's treatment in the hotel industry research has been scattered. It has been discussed as an aspect of broader topics, rather than as the primary focus of the systematic amenities literature. A few studies have assessed technology-based hotel amenities, as these are becoming more essential for today's customers. For example, Cobanoglu et al. (2011) demonstrated that technological amenities can significantly influence a hotel guest's overall satisfaction. Specific examples include business center services, express check-in/check-out, an in-room telephone, an in-room alarm clock and easily accessible electronic outlets. In-room technologies, such as VoIP telephone services, pay-per-view movies, voicemail/messaging, game systems and universal battery chargers, also positively affect guest satisfaction.

Heo and Hyun (2015) vetted the attitudes of guests toward luxury hotel amenities. They find that wireless Internet is regarded as the most useful hotel amenity, that telephones are regarded as the least useful hotel amenity and that customers' willingness to pay is affected by the provision of luxury-brand room amenities. When luxury amenities are placed in a room, customers' evaluations of the room rate and their willingness to pay for it increase.

Numerous studies have also considered hotel amenities as an aspect of a hotel's overall attributes. Sammons et al. (1999) asserted that cleanliness and safety are the two major preferences of female travelers. These aspects of hotel services are perceived as more important than women-only floors, feminine décor (such as pastel-colored rooms) or female toiletries (such as bubble bath and nail polish remover). Newth (2009) focused exclusively on female business travelers and suggested that it is important for female travelers to be able to contact their families. Shanka and Taylor (2004) examined the perceived importance of the service and facility attributes of a three-star hotel, and found that of 18 attributes, physical facilities, service experience and provided services had the most effect on the overall rating.

Despite the growing importance of using hotel amenities to create competitive advantage and perceived value from a customer perspective, little research has been done on hotel amenities and most studies have focused on the Western context. However, the importance of hotel amenities from an Eastern customer's perspective should also be addressed by hoteliers and scholars, as Eastern outbound tourism, particularly from China, has grown exponentially in recent years as a result of political, economic, cultural and social development (Lo and Qu, 2015; Wang, Vela, and Tyler, 2008). It is clear that China is becoming a major source of customers for the hospitality industry (Pizam, 2008). Thus, it is increasingly important to understand how the preferences and needs of Chinese tourists differ from those of other customers. This research

focuses on Chinese tourists' preferences for hotel amenities in Hong Kong, the most important destination for this group.

2.3. Chinese tourists

Chinese cultural values are largely derived from Confucianism (Bond, 1991; Bond and Hwang, 1986). Bond (1991) stated that Chinese social behavior can be understood through various concepts, such as authoritarianism, association, trust and values. Chinese people value harmony between groups in social settings (Bond, 1991; Wong and Lau, 2001; Yau, 1988). Traveling helps build social bonds between the Chinese, who commonly prefer to travel (Mok, Armstrong, and Go, 1995) and participate in tourist activities (such as dining and shopping) in groups (Tse, 1996). However, satisfaction levels among Chinese tourists differ according to gender. Male travelers tend to be more satisfied with their experiences than female travelers (Xu and McGehee, 2012).

Chinese tourists may travel independently or in organized tours (Pearce, Wu, and Osmond, 2013). Younger Chinese tourists prefer independent travel, as they are more adventurous and interested in active tourism and enjoy spending time in the destination country (Agrusa, Kim, and Wang, 2011; Fountain, Espiner, and Xie, 2010). Chinese tourists tend to choose hotels in good locations, such as close to a city center or near tourist spots, and expect to spend plenty of time shopping, given their "shopping culture" (Wang et al., 2008). They shop not only for themselves, but also for friends, relatives and acquaintances (Guo, Kim, and Timothy, 2007). They commonly prefer discounted and low-price products for their friends and relatives (Agrusa et al., 2011).

Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline, and Wang (2011) noted that adequate facilities and equipment, cleanliness and hygiene, safety and security, price and quality are all important criteria for Chinese travelers. Chinese tourists want to receive the same services and offerings they get at

Chinese hotels, such as hot water and a large set of “standard amenities.” Gift giving after travel is also an important expectation in social relationships; this practice is a common means of expressing love, gratitude and friendship (Wang et al., 2008). Many Chinese tourists are motivated by prestige and they desire to raise their statuses in their social circles when they return from traveling abroad (Pearce et al., 2013). For instance, they are likely to try exotic foods, so that they can flaunt such experiences when discussing their trips with friends and family (Fu, Lehto, and Cai, 2012).

Chinese tourists expect reliable and enthusiastic service, and value a hotel staff that demonstrate respect and hospitality (Li et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2008). Yeung and Leung (2007) found that negative perceptions and attitudes expressed by hotel service staff influenced customer service. Chinese tourists typically desire Chinese guides and signage and Chinese-speaking staff members (Xu and McGehee, 2012). However, in terms of hotel services, their preferences are similar to those of Western tourists. Fu et al. (2012) reported that cultural differences between Chinese and American tourists are reflected in their travel experiences across three major areas: scenery, food and social interaction. For example, Chinese tourists are attracted to New Zealand’s scenery and its clean, green image, but not to its culture or history (Fountain et al., 2010). Drawing on planned behavior theory, Sparks and Pan (2009) found that the most important considerations for Chinese outbound tourists were natural beauty, the icons of a destination and the quality of its infrastructure, along with their desire for autonomy, inspiration and social self-enhancement.

3. Methodology

The research method was based on conjoint analysis. Conjoint models were developed to cope with the practical problems of understanding how people make decisions and what they really value in products or services (Hobbs, 1996). The conjoint analysis approach was built on

information integration theory (IIT), according to which customers combine information about different product attributes to form their overall impressions of a product. Specifically, IIT is a theory of judgment in daily life (Anderson, 1996, 2008). Louviere (1988) described information integration as the behavior of numerical data in response to multiple pieces of information (such as a series of individual rating responses to a combination of different product attributes).

Information integration has three stages: relative attribute valuation (psychophysical judgment formation), integration into a value proposition and response formation. Conjoint analysis uses these concepts to describe how consumers choose between similar products.

In the context of this research, conjoint analysis involves presenting hotel customers with choices of hotel amenities and then analyzing the drivers of their choices. The conjoint model enables the identification of the optimal level of attributes and amenities that balances value for the customer against cost implications for the hotel. There are several approaches or types of conjoint models. The model used in this research had a fractional factorial design with a full profile approach based on an orthogonal array experimental design (Green, 1974). The orthogonal array allow reviewing 16 profiles rather than greater numbers of profiles (Ding, Geschke, and Lewis, 1991).

3.1. Selection of hotel amenities for conjoint analysis

Four attributes—wireless Internet, breakfast, quality of coffee/tea and airport/local area shuttles—were selected as the hotel amenities to be evaluated. It is important to note that these chosen hotel amenities are likely to be considered important in Hong Kong, the research setting. Levels of service were determined for each attribute as part of the conjoint modeling process (see Table 1). In selecting hotel amenities, consumer research done by Hotels.com, TripAdvisor and Orbitz was considered. There were two reasons for using these sites. First, they were accessed by millions of travelers worldwide and the sample sizes included in their studies totaled more than

500 and were approximately 1,000 in general. Second, the literature on hotel amenities is very limited and potentially outdated.

Please insert Table 1 about here

In a survey by Hotels.com (2013b), hotel customers listed free wireless Internet as the number one hotel amenity, regardless of the purpose of their visit. Only 11% of the respondents reported that they were willing to pay for wireless Internet. In another survey conducted by Hotels.com (2013a), free wireless Internet ranked third on a list of hotel property amenities. In the room amenity list, free wireless Internet took first place. A survey of 1,000 U.S. travelers and 600 hotel staff conducted by TripAdvisor (2013a) revealed that free wireless Internet was a major determinant of where many travelers chose to stay: 85% of the travelers and 99% of the hotel managers surveyed considered it the most important amenity; 88% of the respondents believed that wireless Internet access should be free in all hotels; 41% of the travelers had never paid for wireless Internet access in a hotel; and 65% of those surveyed acknowledged using free wireless Internet in a hotel lobby or common area to avoid paying a fee in their room. The TripBarometer Truth in Travel Survey (TripAdvisor, 2013b) identified which hotel amenities and services U.S. travelers found most or least important, based on data from 19,692 travelers and 10,469 places to stay during June and July 2013. Free wireless Internet in the room and the lobby were ranked first and fifth on the list, respectively. There is no question that wireless Internet is an important hotel amenity. Wireless Internet provision was given three levels: free wireless Internet in the lobby with an in-room surcharge, free wireless Internet in both the lobby and room and surcharged wireless Internet in both the lobby and room. Cobanoglu et al. (2011)

also chose wireless Internet access in public areas as an attribute in their study on the effects of technological amenities on the overall satisfaction of hotel guests.

A survey conducted by Hotels.com (2013b) revealed that free breakfast was one of the most important hotel amenities for customers. Another survey conducted by Hotels.com (2013a) involving 1,000 global travelers with trips planned in the subsequent 6 months revealed that complimentary breakfast ranked second on the list of the top 10 most important hotel property amenities (after free wireless Internet) for leisure travelers. In a survey conducted by TripAdvisor (2013a), free breakfast was the second most important hotel amenity for 78% of travelers and 79% of hotel managers. The TripBarometer Truth in Travel Survey (TripAdvisor, 2013b) found complimentary breakfast to be one of the top three hotel amenities. Breakfast was given two levels: complimentary breakfast and surcharged breakfast.

A Hotels.com (2013b) hotel amenities survey found freely available food and drink to be one of the most missed comforts of home when traveling. People who regularly drink coffee and tea are more likely to look for these amenities during their trips. Patel (2014) identified access to superior quality coffee/tea as one of the top nine hotel amenities that guests want. Quality of coffee/tea was given two levels: free access and surcharged.

Airport/local area shuttles were ranked the fifth most important hotel amenity by 66% of travelers and 41% of hotel managers in a survey conducted by TripAdvisor (2013a). When travelers are not familiar with a city, they may feel more comfortable knowing that their hotel provides a shuttle that can help them access destinations of interest. This amenity is likely to give them a sense of comfort and ease during their travels. Airport/local area shuttles were given three levels: available and free of charge, available for a surcharge or not available.

The fifth attribute included was room rate. Hotel amenities linked to room rates were presented to the respondents. As the sample consisted of Chinese leisure travelers visiting Hong

Kong, the room rates were presented in Hong Kong dollars. It was reasonable to assume that Chinese travelers in Hong Kong would be familiar with Hong Kong dollars. The room rates were retrieved from a 2013 hotel room statistics report prepared by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (2014). According to this report, the average room rates for high-tariff A hotels, high-tariff B hotels and medium-tariff hotels in 2013 were HKD2,385, HKD1,201 and HKD758, respectively. The average room rate for all hotels was HKD1,447. Taking HKD1,447 as the reference room rate (to represent a medium room rate), the high and low room rates were computed as 25% higher and lower than the reference room rate, respectively. Thus, the high, medium and low room rates were determined to be HKD1,809, HKD1,447 and HKD1,085, respectively.

3.2. Questionnaire design

A structured questionnaire consisting of three sections was used. The first section was designed to understand the participants' travel behavior, such as the type of hotel they prefer, their hotel stay patterns in a year and perceptions of their travel experiences. The second section included 20 combinations of hotel rates and amenities, as generated by the conjoint analysis method using SPSS. The minimum number of profiles to generate was not explicitly specified. The SPSS conjoint model generated the minimum number of profiles necessary for the orthogonal plan, which was 16 in this case. During this process, holdout profiles were also identified. Holdout profiles are those that are rated by the respondents, but that are not included in the conjoint analysis to estimate utilities. They are mainly used to check the validity of the utilities estimated by conjoint analysis. Four holdout profiles were selected. The SPSS conjoint model generated 20 profiles from 108 possible combinations (3 levels for wireless Internet x 2 levels for breakfast x 2 levels for quality of coffee/tea x 3 levels of airport/local area shuttles x 3 levels for price). As four holdout profiles were not identified in the list presented to the respondents, the respondents ranked 20 profiles, four of which were holdouts. The respondents

were asked to rank the combinations according to their preference levels. The third section of the questionnaire included socio-demographic questions. The respondents were told to imagine themselves in the following situation:

You are going to travel to Hong Kong and need to book a hotel room for your stay. When you make the reservation, you are informed that the hotel provides a number of amenities. These amenities include breakfast, wireless Internet, quality coffee/tea and airport/local area shuttles. In this study we ask you to rank different combinations of hotel amenities attached to hotel room rates. Please rank 20 combinations from the most preferred to the least preferred. Please rank the most preferred combination as 1, the second most preferred combination as 2, the third most preferred combination as 3 and so on.

A brief introduction to the rate amenities and related definitions was provided to the respondents as background information.

The questionnaire was prepared in English and then translated into Chinese. To confirm translation validity, the back-to-back translation method was used (Behling and Law, 2000; Wilson, 2010).

3.3. Data collection

The data were collected from Chinese travelers traveling to and staying in hotels in Hong Kong. The venues for data collection were a number of popular tourist spots in Hong Kong, such as the Avenue of Stars and Victoria Peak. According to the Hong Kong Tourism Board (2016), these two spots are the top two on the list of top 10 attractions in Hong Kong. The respondents were approached at random by two trained Chinese-speaking interviewers. The data was collected in February 2015. Screening questions were asked to ensure that the respondents were

from mainland China and were in Hong Kong for a leisure trip. The interviews were conducted in Putonghua (spoken Mandarin) and the respondents were offered an incentive to increase the response rate. There were 472 respondents. Twenty-seven of the surveys were discarded for being incomplete. The suggested sample size for conjoint studies is between 150 and 1,200 respondents (Orme, 1998).

4. Findings

Table 2 presents the respondents' socio-demographic status and travel patterns. There were more male (57.2%) than female (42.8%) respondents. In terms of their education levels, 87.9% had college degrees and 2.5% only had secondary/high school education. The majority of the respondents (94.7%) were working at the time and 64.8% were between 26 and 35 years of age. 39.6% of the respondents had monthly pre-tax household incomes between CNY5,001 and CNY10,000 and 42.4% had an income between CNY10,001 and CNY20,000. Approximately 45% of the respondents chose to stay in budget hotels, followed by three-star hotels (28.6%), four-star hotels (18.9%) and five-star hotels (8.0%). The highest percentage for frequency of hotel stays was four to six times per year (40.7%), then, one to three times (30.7%), seven to nine times (15.9%) and more than ten times (8.0%). A total of 77.1% of the respondents stated that they were experienced or very experienced in traveling.

Please insert Table 2 about here

Table 3 shows that the respondents preferred "low prices" and that "free in-room and lobby wireless Internet" received the highest scores for wireless Internet options. The "complimentary breakfast" amenity scored highest for breakfast; "free access to quality coffee/tea" had the highest score for quality of coffee/tea; and "airport/local area shuttles are available and free of

charge” received the highest score for airport/local area shuttles. Table 4 shows the importance values for each of these attributes. Of the five attributes tested, price had the highest average importance value (26.757%), followed by airport/local area shuttles (25.898%), wireless Internet (22.538%), breakfast (13.187%) and quality of coffee/tea (11.619%). Based on this set of findings, it appears that price, airport/local area shuttles and wireless Internet were relatively more important than breakfast and the quality of coffee/tea. The value of Pearson’s R was 0.892, indicating respectable goodness of fit of the conjoint model and significance at the 0.05 level.

The conjoint analysis revealed Kendall’s Tau for both the estimation and holdout profiles. Furthermore, “the conjoint procedure computes the correlation between the observed and predicted rank orders for these profiles as a check on the validity of the utilities” (IBM SPSS Conjoint 20 Manual, 2011, p. 33). Kendall’s Tau is a measure of rank correlation that is mainly used for internal reliability and validity in conjoint analysis. As such, the preference is for the correlation to be high. The Kendall’s Tau values for the estimation and holdout profiles were 0.824 and 0.764, respectively, and both were significant at the 0.05 level, indicating the high internal validity of the data and that the participants’ rankings were consistent.

Please insert Table 3 about here

Please insert Table 4 about here

Table 5 presents the relative importance scores from respondents with different socio-demographic and travel characteristics. Several of the patterns shown in this table are noteworthy. First, the female respondents were more price-sensitive than the male respondents. Second, the older respondents attached more importance to the airport/local area shuttles attribute. Third, price had the highest importance value for the customers who reported usually

staying in hotels for between 1 and 3 days, whereas airport/local area shuttles had the highest importance value for those who reported usually staying in hotels for between 4 and 6 days.

Please insert Table 5 about here

Table 6 presents the results of the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests. Results with significant differences are presented. The male respondents rate breakfast higher (14.153%) than females (12.464%). The respondents between 26 and 35 years of age indicated less importance on breakfast (12.534%) than those between 36 and 45 years of age (14.383%) and those 46 years of age or above (16.982%). The respondents without a college degree placed more importance on price (35.502%) than those with a college (26.496%) or graduate (26.837%) degree. In contrast, the respondents without a degree placed less emphasis on wireless Internet (15.210%) than those with a college (22.461%) or graduate (19.813%) degree. The respondents with monthly family incomes below CNY5,000 were more price-sensitive (32.612%) than those with monthly family incomes between CNY5,001 and CNY10,000 (25.743%). Those with monthly family incomes below CNY5,000 gave less significance to breakfast (18.751%) than those with monthly family incomes between CNY5,001 and CNY10,000 (23.647%) and between CNY10,001 and CNY20,000 (22.599%). The working respondents gave an importance value of 26.389% to price, whereas the non-working respondents indicated higher importance to price (33.346%). The working respondents attached more importance to breakfast (22.771%) than did the non-working respondents (18.378%).

Please insert Table 6 about here

The respondents' travel information shows that those who reported typically staying at budget/economy hotels placed a 12.444% importance value on quality of coffee/tea, compared to 10.461% for those accustomed to staying at upscale hotels. In contrast, the respondents who reported typically staying at budget/economy hotels placed less importance on airport/local area shuttles (24.805%) than those who reported staying at upscale hotels (28.019%). The respondents who reported typically staying at hotels for 1 to 3 days only attached a 25.231% importance value to airport/local area shuttles, whereas those who reported typically staying for 4 to 6 days gave this attribute an importance value of 27.635%. Experienced travelers attached a 29.071% importance value to price, whereas the respondents with average travel experience only attached an importance value of 25.589% to price. The respondents with average travel experience were more concerned with the quality of coffee/tea (12.967%) than experienced travelers (10.588%).

5. Discussion and Implications

This research has several important implications for hotel industry professionals and hospitality industry researchers. First, price was the most important attribute, with a 26.757% importance value. This is not surprising, as many studies have shown that price is the most important factor in customers' decision-making processes when booking hotels (Ananth, DeMicco, Moreo, and Howey, 1992; Lockyer, 2005; Stevens, 1992). Pricing techniques and revenue management practices are essential in justifying a hotel's prices to customers. Of the different pricing techniques, value-based pricing is more profitable (Nagle and Holden, 2005), as its method is to proactively change customers' willingness to pay by learning and leveraging the benefits they pursue (Hung, Shang, and Wang, 2010).

Second, for Chinese leisure travelers visiting Hong Kong, airport/local area shuttles were the second most important attribute, with an importance value of 25.898%, very close to the importance value for price

Fourth, it appears that in the presence of wireless Internet and airport/local area shuttles, breakfast and quality of coffee/tea are far less important. The importance values for these two attributes were 13.187% and 11.619%, respectively. This indicates that providing complimentary breakfast and free access to quality coffee/tea when a hotel already provides a shuttle service and free wireless Internet does not add much value to the overall hotel product from the customer's point of view. This can help hotels manage their costs. Indeed, wireless Internet and airport/local area shuttles incur costs, but hotels can save on breakfast and quality coffee/tea. If the perceived value of a particular service is not very high from the customer's perspective, relative to the other service offerings, providing that service free of charge does not add substantial value to customer experience.

Fifth, it is very important to use a proper methodology to understand the trade-offs customers make for different hotel amenities. A customer who is asked whether they desire wireless Internet, breakfast, quality coffee/tea and a shuttle service free of charge would probably say yes to all of these amenities. Without utility theory based conjoint analysis and careful selection of hotel amenities and corresponding levels, it is challenging to understand which hotel amenities are considered more valuable than others.

Sixth, reviewing the average importance values of the selected hotel amenities based on the respondents' socio-demographic profiles and travel information (Table 5), with some exceptions, it appears that preferences were largely similar regardless of socio-demographic background and travel information. The exceptions are presented in Table 6. Hoteliers can design their amenities for different customer segments. For example, the respondents who reported typically staying at

hotels for 4 to 6 days valued shuttle service more than those who reported typically staying at hotels for 1 to 3 days. This reveals that shuttle service is a value-added service for guests who stay longer. As one of Chinese tourists' favorite travel activities in Hong Kong is shopping, they are expected to engage in more shopping if they stay longer. Therefore, a shuttle service to main shopping areas may also be an important hotel service.

Seventh, today's hotel room rate pricing policies are mostly determined by value-based pricing techniques (Collins and Parsa, 2006; Ye, Li, Wang, and Law, 2014). Value-based pricing involves designing products and services that customers are willing to pay for and that they perceive as valuable (Nagle and Holden, 1995). Carefully selecting hotel amenities can add value to the overall hotel product. However, hospitality research has not given much consideration to this area. This research intends to draw hospitality researchers' attention to the connection between hotel amenities and value-based pricing.

Finally, this research provides hospitality practitioners insights to leisure tourists from China, an emerging outbound tourism market. China had 120 million outbound tourists in 2015 and they spent USD104.5 billion, increases of 12% and 16.7%, respectively, compared to 2014 (China Tourism Research Institute, 2015). Research interest in outbound Chinese tourists is growing. This research makes an initial attempt to examine the joint effects of several hotel amenities on Chinese leisure travelers' hotel room choices using conjoint analysis. The data were from Hong Kong, the number one destination for Chinese leisure travelers (China National Tourism Administration, 2015) and therefore a suitable research setting.

The results support the "providing the right hotel amenities to the right customers in the right place" motto. This approach enables hoteliers to exceed their customers' expectations and gain a competitive advantage. However, selecting the right amenities (primary or peripheral) plays a significant role in customers' value judgments. For example, some hotels provide free wireless

Internet service as a primary amenity, whereas others provide high-speed wireless Internet as a peripheral amenity at an extra cost. In this research, amenities were specifically chosen to cater to the needs of Chinese visitors to Hong Kong, whereas the distances to airports and shopping centers were considered by the customers.

6. Conclusion

As an increasing number of Chinese travelers vacation abroad, understanding them as customers is becoming a priority for hotel industry professionals worldwide. This research is the first attempt to examine the hotel amenity preferences of Chinese leisure travelers. Identifying preference values should help hotel professionals better understand the decision-making processes and hidden needs of Chinese leisure travelers, a very important market group for hoteliers. This research also opens the door for hospitality researchers to further investigate how customers make trade-offs between different hotel amenities in different contexts.

This research has some limitations in terms of the generalizability of its findings to all hotels and travelers. First, only four hotel amenities were considered. Second, the research focused on Chinese leisure travelers staying in hotels in Hong Kong. Finally, the sample only consisted of leisure travelers. Another limitation is due to the selected attribute levels. The results may be different depending on the levels selected. Further research may be conducted using different attribute levels.

Although the findings provide many insights into the values Chinese leisure travelers attach to different hotel amenities when booking hotel rooms, many unanswered questions remain to be explored in future research. For instance, although this research focuses on Chinese leisure travelers, it would be interesting to examine whether Western leisure travelers' preferences are similar to or different from those of their Chinese counterparts. It would be worthwhile to examine culture-specific amenities. Preferences may be similar across all travelers. It would also

be interesting to examine whether preferences change with trip purpose, and to determine whether and how business customers' hotel amenity preferences differ from those of leisure travelers. Different hotels have different amenities depending on location, hotel type and customer type. It would be enlightening to include other potentially important hotel amenities, such as options for different types of mattresses and pillows, toiletries, power adapters and minibar provisions.

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