

## Title: **Reflections on the Asian Hotel Attributes: the Russian Gaze**

### **Abstract:**

The present paper focuses on a lucrative, but a relatively unknown Russian market. Content analysis of online reviews from three review websites is conducted and the important hotel attributes for Russian visitors to Hong Kong are identified. The results demonstrate that Russian guests, as other markets, place importance on scenic views, accessibility, breakfasts, swimming pools and friendly and attentive staff. Several issues that emerged in the present study merit further attention. Due to high fluctuation of national currency exchange rates the mode and timing of payment is an important consideration. Experience of a room booking via an OTA may impact on the hotel experience. Hotel brand, Russian-speaking staff and Russian language information did not appear important.

### **Introduction**

Hotel stay is one of the important aspects of an overall travel experience (Murphy, Pritchard & Smith, 2000). Previous studies acknowledged the value of research into the importance of various hotel attributes. Traditionally a survey questionnaire has been used to collect such data (e.g. Choi & Chu, 2001; Shanka & Taylor, 2004). However, more recently online social media and review sites have become tools of analysis into the importance of hotel attributes (e.g. Jeong & Jeon, 2008; Sun, Tong & Law, 2015). Online reputation of a hotel is increasingly important for hotel's performance (O'Connor, 2010; Xie, Zhang & Zhang, 2014). Analysis of online reviews contributes to better understanding of hotel attributes that are currently important for different customer segments. Continuous research in this area is necessary as the importance of different factors for hotel guest satisfaction varies across market segments and changes with time (Au, Law & Buhalis, 2010).

Emerging outbound tourism markets, especially those of BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, have attracted the attention of academia and industry practitioners (Mariani, Buhalis, Longhi & Vitouladiti, 2014). Among the aforementioned countries, Chinese market is arguably the largest and holds the greatest potential. Thus there has been a multitude of research studies undertaken about China's outbound travel (Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline & Wang, 2011; Tse, 2014). However, little is known about the Russian outbound market despite its ranking as the world's fourth largest spender in 2013 (UNWTO, 2014). It experienced approximate average annual growth of 12% between 2009 and 2013 (UNWTO, 2015). Growth in some destinations, such as Hong Kong reached 20% (HKTB, 2015). Year 2014 has seen a decline in outbound tourism from Russia which is the result of geopolitical situation and economic crisis in Russia (HKTB, 2015). The number of overseas trips overall in 2014 has reduced by 15%, for tourism purposes by 4% (Federal Agency for Tourism, 2015). Statistics for Hong Kong demonstrate a 9.6% reduction in arrivals from Russia (HKTB, 2015). Despite the currently negative situation in the Russian

outbound market, it is important to understand Russian travellers better due to its high potential for growth in the long-term (UNWTO & European Travel Commission, 2015).

The present research investigates hotel attributes that are important among the Russian guests in Hong Kong. The research aims to investigate the hotel attributes important to Russian market, update the knowledge related to hotel attributes as these may change over time and explore the utility of online reviews and QDA Miner content analysis tool as means for investigation of hotel attributes. The content analysis of online reviews is utilised. The research highlights the importance of market segmentation according to ethnicity and behavioural characteristics. The relevance of content analysis of online reviews as a method for marketing research is discussed.

### **Russian outbound market**

Russian Federation has a population of approximately 144 million people (Federal State Statistics Service, 2015). An average annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of Russia in the last five years (2010-2014) was 2.8%. The economy has been slowing down in the last two years, however Russia remains the world's seventh largest economy according to the size of its GDP (CIA World Factbook, 2015). The quality of life in Russia has been improving over the last fifteen years (OECD, n.d.; UNDP, n.d.). The economic and political focus of Russia has been shifting towards Asia in recent years. The diplomatic and trade cooperation between Russia and China as well as other Asian countries has been steadily growing (Hill & Lo, 2013; Lim, 2016). Furthermore, 2012 was declared a year of Russian tourism in China and of Chinese tourism in Russia (Ponomareva, 2013). This is likely to result in increase in travel flows between Russia and Greater China, thus demonstrating the necessity to understand Russian visitors better in the Greater China region.

There was a total of 17.6 million outbound tourists from Russia in 2014 (Federal Agency for Tourism, 2015). Russian outbound tourists were the fourth largest spenders in the world in 2013. Their expenditure totalled US\$53.5 billion, an almost 25% growth compared to 2012. This constitutes 4.6% of the world's tourism market (UNWTO, 2014). The top three most popular outbound tourism destinations for Russians are Turkey, Egypt and Greece accounting for almost 40% of all tourist travel. China is the seventh most popular destination accounting for almost two million Russian visitors. Russia is the fourth largest market for China outside Greater China. Russia is the second largest "New Market" for Hong Kong after India and the fourth largest market in Europe (HKTB, 2015). Thailand, Vietnam, Korea and Japan are other Asian destinations that are popular or growing in popularity among Russian travellers (Federal Agency for Tourism, 2015). Considering that Hong Kong is an international hub with many Russian travelers visiting it as part of an itinerary to Northeast and Southeast Asia, the results of the present study may be of value for these destinations.

Relatively little is known about Russian market beyond the numbers. The majority of publications in international academic journals focus on the inbound tourism development in Russia (e.g.

Algieri, 2006; Braden & Prudnikova, 2008; Burns, 1998; D'Annunzio-Green, 2002; Hall, 2000; Lukashina, Amirkhanov, Anisimov & Trunev, 1996; Stepchenkova, Kim, & Kirilenko, 2014; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008). Among the outbound tourism-related studies Choi, Tkachenko & Sil (2011) analyse destination image of Korea among Russian tourists and Furmanov, Balaeva & Predvoditeleva (2012) investigate tourism flows from Russia to the European Union. Both papers provide only limited knowledge of Russian outbound tourism. Choi, Tkachenko & Sil (2011) suggest that word-of-mouth is an important source of information about Korea among Russians, and that the Russians have a generally positive image of Korea even though it is perceived as an expensive destination. Furmanov et al. (2012) predicted future outbound travel numbers from Russia to European Union. However, the real numbers (according to statistics from Federal Agency for Tourism, 2015) were higher than the forecast.

Interest in Russian outbound market within the industry outside Russia is evident based on industry reports such as ETC (2010) and UNWTO (2009). The reports share the following findings. Russian travel market has been growing alongside improving economy, however holiday travel remains very expensive for the majority of Russians. Russian market is not homogenous, with travel preferences varying between the emerging middle-class, young professionals and the ultra-rich. Russians constitute a large share in the luxury travel market. Many Russians are lavish spenders. The majority of Russian overseas trips are not leisure travel, but rather travel for business purposes or to visit friends and family. While many leisure trips are booked using travel agents, online tools are becoming increasingly important. Often Russians do not plan and book travel far in advance. Russians prefer to go to destinations for which bureaucratic hassle can be avoided. Russia's neighbouring countries constitute a large share of outbound trips for Russians despite recent strong growth in travel to South-East Asia (ETC, 2010; UNWTO, 2009).

The majority of Russians travelling to Hong Kong are overnight leisure travelers. The majority are young and mid-career singles and couples born between 1970s and 1990s. Primary geographic markets are Moscow and St. Petersburg, while eastern cities of Novosibirsk, Khabarovsk and Vladivostok are the secondary markets. The latter three cities are located close to border with China and have direct flights to Hong Kong (HKTB, 2015).

Many characteristics of the Russian outbound market remain unknown, while the existing information mostly derives from industry reports and news media and may lack reliability. For example, it is not clear whether there is a growth of travelling population in Russia or the growth of number of trips within the same population (Kolbasova, 2014). One popular view is that overall Russians prefer to stay at upscale, five-star hotels as demonstration of the social status (Lysikova, 2014). However, other experts suggest that Russian travellers have been more price sensitive in the recent years (Wek, 2012). Goroshko (2012) suggests that Russians have become increasingly interested in the destinations where beach holiday can be combined with interesting cultural and educational programs (ATOR, 2014). However, all-inclusive resorts are very popular, while shopping contributes 25% of the expenditure (ATOR, 2014). Most Russian travellers spend their holidays with family and children (NBTC, 2014). Moreover, Russian travellers expect service to

be personal and customized, the travellers are placing high demands on hotel quality. They seek authentic local experience, unforgettable atmosphere, a high level of comfort and expect innovation (Prohotel, 2014a).

Difficulties in processing necessary documentation, lack of independent travel experience and lack of knowledge of foreign languages constrain independent travel from Russia (Lysikova, 2014). There is a level of distrust towards online transactions among many Russians, thus travel agencies are still widely used. Hotels.com (2013) report suggests that information in Russian is welcome as well as Russian-speaking personnel and Russian TV channels in hotel rooms (ATOR, 2014; Kazakov, 2014). One survey has identified that 88% of Russians do not have language barrier while travelling abroad. However, 38% of respondents admitted that they speak only their native language. 22% of Russians believe that they will use hand gestures to communicate at the destination if needed (Prohotel, 2014b).

Kazakov (2014) suggests that the most important factors in the hotel considered by the tourists from Russia during the purchasing process are: location, room rate, perceived value for money, hotel reputation, recommendations by friends, relatives, and colleagues, on-line hotel reviews and feedback and visual representation of the hotel. Another distinctive feature of Russian tourists is that they are annoyed by extra charges for such services as Wi-Fi, air conditioning, safe (ATOR, 2014; Hotels.com, 2014). Smoking hotel rooms and smoking policies and facilities are of concern for Russian travelers due to large smoking population (Hotels.com, 2013). Moreover, Hotels.com (2013) suggests that as Russia's median income rises and more Russians are becoming experienced international travellers, more Russians choose to travel independently, book holidays online, learn English and experience local cuisine and culture.

2014-2015 are difficult years for Russian outbound tourism due to devaluation of Russian Rouble and political tension with the EU and the USA (Baikalfinans, 2014). Prior to 2014 the only year in which number of outbound travels has significantly declined was in 2009, however, already in 2010 there was an increase of 32% (Kazenina, 2010; Market Center, n.d.; The World Bank, 2015). Despite the overall growth of outbound tourism, in the period of 2010-2014 more than 30 tour operators went bankrupt (RIA Novosti, 2014). This is likely to be associated with lax regulation and unethical business behaviour. While Russian market has a great potential based on a large population that wishes to travel overseas, in the short-term this market may continue to experience problems (Spector, 2014; Vedomosti, 2015; Vesti Turkey, 2014). However, the impact on different market segments may vary. In 2009 the biggest decline in sales of about 30% occurred in the mid-scale segment of the market, where tourists spent USD1000-3000. But the number of cheap (under USD1000) trips clients increased due to redistribution of middle class travellers. The upscale segment of the market where the travel cost was over USD3000 per person saw a relatively small decline. Wealthy travellers were not inclined to sacrifice quality, but reduced the number of trips (TourBusiness, 2009).

The present study considers the high potential of the Russian outbound market and lack of academic research about it which could confirm or dismiss some of the above representation of the market. The present study investigates upscale hotel attributes that are important amongst Russian travellers to a long-haul destination of Hong Kong.

### **Hotel attributes**

Hotel experience significantly contributes towards an overall travel satisfaction and continuous patronage of a tourist destination (Shih, 1986; Stevens, 1992). “Hotels” is one of the six sectors analysed in the Hong Kong Tourism Satisfaction Index (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2015). Visitor satisfaction with hotels in Hong Kong is lower than with transportation, attractions and immigration, although it is better than retail sector and restaurants. To be able to attract new markets, a destination needs to understand its competitive advantages and disadvantages. As suggested by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (2015), improved visitor satisfaction with the hotel sector will benefit the whole destination. In order to understand what contributes to guest satisfaction of a hotel previous research has looked at analysis of attributes that a hotel possesses (Bodet, Anaba & Bouchet, 2016; Chu & Choi, 2000).

Hotel attributes can be categorised in terms of functional and emotional features which in turn are based on tangible and intangible components (Zhang & Mao, 2012). Dolnicar & Otter (2003) have identified the following categories of hotel attributes: ‘Services’, ‘Hotel’, ‘Location’, ‘Room’, ‘Price/Value’, ‘F&B’. Chiu et al. (2015) have further split the ‘Hotel’ attribute into ‘Hotel Image’ and ‘Amenities’. In addition, Xie et al. (2014) specify cleanliness as a separate important attribute. O’Connor (2008) identified location, room size, quality of service provided by the staff, cleanliness, comfort, breakfast, room temperature, noise level and items in need of repair. Ancillary services, such as a swimming pool or a beauty salon, can be considered either as a separate attribute or as part of hotel amenities (Bodet et al., 2016; Gu & Ryan, 2008). Jeong & Jeon (2008) add check-in & check-out and price as other important attributes. Bulchand-Gidumal, Melián-González & González López-Valcárcel (2011) focus on a single emerging hotel feature, provision of Wi-Fi, urging hoteliers to provide free Wi-Fi services in order to improve guest satisfaction.

The context is important in studies of hotel attributes contribution to guest satisfaction. Bodet et al. (2016) have found that different attributes contribute differently to guest satisfaction of visitors from different countries. Gu & Ryan (2008) argue that the core product of a hotel, which is clean bedroom and bathroom, comfortable bed, good food at restaurants and friendly and efficient staff, is the most important for Chinese guests. In contrast, such features as being part of an international chain and having shopping and night life venues in the area were the least important for Chinese guests (Gu & Ryan, 2008). In a recent study of hotel preferences among travellers to Bangkok, Shanghai, Sydney, Singapore and Hong Kong Li et al. (2015) have found that a night club was one of emerging hotel features, while interest in lounge areas, swimming pools and views is also increasing among travellers. Moreover, Li et al. (2015) observed a temporal change in the

importance of hotel attributes. For example, price and cleanliness appear less important in recent years.

Many of the aforementioned attributes contribute to the functional value of a hotel, i.e. its core product. Chen & Peng (2014) use example of luxury hotels to demonstrate that beyond functional value, experiential and symbolic values affect consumer behaviour of luxury hotel guests. Experiential value refers to fantasies and emotions that a hotel stay may evoke in the guest, while symbolic value relays the message of consumer's wealth and status. Wu & Liang's (2009) in their study of luxury hotel restaurants, conclude that experiential attributes enhance customer satisfaction. Restaurant environment and interaction with personnel and other customers are of particular importance. Furthermore, Lee & Back (2010) have investigated the antecedents and consequences of brand personality. Consumers are likely to purchase products that are congruent with their self-image, therefore cultivating brand personality congruent with the type of consumers an upscale hotel wants to attract helps cultivate loyal customers (Lee & Back, 2010). It may be concluded that in upscale and luxury hotels non-core product attributes may be more important than the core product attributes.

Liu et al. (2014) suggest that the trip mode such as business trip, family, couple or travel with friends affects hotel guest expectations. Li et al. (2013) have found differences in hotel preferences between guests of various trip modes and geographical segments. For example, room quality was found important for business travelers from Europe and couples from North America and Oceania. Service was important for businesspeople from Asia, Europe, and North America and families from Oceania. Moreover, the value for money is important to Asian couples and businesspeople from Oceania. Similarly, Torres, Fu & Lehto (2014) identified differences between guests from different cultural backgrounds. For example, guests from the US place importance on service that is flexible and fulfills guests esteem needs. Guests from Northern Europe emphasized problem resolution. Canadians place importance on staff friendliness and element of surprise. South Americans emphasized how rapid the service is (Torres et al., 2014). Taking a different approach, Sun et al. (2015) studied satisfaction of Chinese travelers staying at international brand hotels in Mainland China and overseas. They utilised content analysis of online reviews regarding service quality, discrimination by the staff, rooms and facilities, location, cleanliness and value, and found little difference in perceptions regarding hotels of same international brands in Mainland China and overseas.

Lu & Stepchenkova (2015) note that many online complaints are a result of inadequate response by staff and management to the initial issue or complaint. The majority of online complaints focus on employee rudeness and incompetence. Au et al. (2010) suggest that Mainland Chinese travelers overall complain less using online platforms than non-Chinese. Based on the review of the previous research into hotel attributes it may be concluded that guest preferences vary between cultures and change with time (Au et al., 2010; Li et al., 2013). Therefore, a study into the preferences of Russian guests will provide a contribution into understanding of the importance of various hotel attributes.

## Methodology

The present research is exploratory and constructionist in its nature. Moreover, links between various themes are identified to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Krippendorff, 2013; Schreier, 2012; Silverman, 2013). The present research utilises content analysis of online reviews in order to understand hotel attributes of importance to Russian hotel guests in Hong Kong. Content analysis of user-generated online content is a suitable method for research into consumer satisfaction (Sun et al., 2015). In contrast with questionnaire surveys it does not predetermine the issues of importance (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015).

The reviews are collected across 17 four- and five- star hotels in Hong Kong for the period of two years from 01.01.2013 to 31.12.2014. 1336 reviews from Russian-speaking hotel guests are collected across three online platforms, namely Booking.com (780 reviews, 58.4%), Trip Advisor (476 reviews, 35.6%), Agoda (80 reviews, 6%). After the initial search for hotel reviews it was apparent that the majority of the reviewed hotels were within four- and five-star category, therefore it was decided to limit the study to four- and five- star upscale hotels. The choice of the individual hotels is based on the availability of Russian reviews. All reviews collected are in Russian language, however from residents of various countries: 87.3% were Russian residents (the majority are from Moscow), 3.7% from Kazakhstan, 1.6% from Ukraine. 34.4% of the commentators are female, 57.3% are male. Only 23.6% of respondents state their age. The highest percentage is within the 25-34 age group (9.7%) followed by 35-49 age group (6.5%) and 35-44 age group (3%).

QDA Miner software package is utilised for the data management and the analysis of text. LaPan (2013), Lewis & Maas (2007) and Silver (2014) provide extended reviews of QDA Miner's functionality and applications. The QDA Miner serves as a computer-assisted content analysis tool and integrates both qualitative and quantitative tools (Lewis & Maas, 2007). It allows for coding and categorisation of data, query of quotes, frequency count, co-occurrence and cluster analysis. A number of graphical and table representation methods are available. It also generates and is able to export network data for social network analysis (LaPan, 2013; Silver, 2014).

The analysis is data-driven or inductive (Schreier, 2012). The textual material is imported into the QDA Miner with each review representing a separate case. The data is coded using several approaches. A unit of coding is a sentence. This allows for overlap of different codes, thus providing the opportunity to understand connections between the codes. Some codes and categories are identified based on previous research related to hotel attributes (e.g. Dolnicar & Otter, 2003; Gu & Ryan, 2008; Li et al., 2015; O'Connor, 2008). Using the WordStat (a text mining tool within the QDA Miner package) word frequencies are checked to identify the most common terms and phrases used within the text. The findings of this step are useful in order to identify some keywords to look for within the text. The text under analysis is then read to assign codes. A total of 237 codes within 27 themes (also called "categories") are created. Two categories are evaluative in nature and gathered the respondents comments that explicitly stated positive or negative

attitudes towards the information. This enables establishing what in particular the respondents find positive or negative in their hotel stay experience.

Jaccard's similarity index is used to analyse the type of comments that co-occur within a review and are related. A function within QDA Miner software is used for this purpose. This function also assisted in grouping of separate codes into themes allocating codes that frequently appear within the same sentence or a paragraph together. However, the authors aimed to avoid having themes that combine too many codes to ease subsequent analysis and to be able to determine important hotel attributes. As is evident from the literature review there is no standardised structure of hotel attributes. Since the present study adopts a data-driven approach the categorisation of attributes presented here may differ from previous studies. Social network analysis is also utilised to identify relationships between the codes. Gephi software package is used to develop a network graph. Furthermore, the correlation between different textual codes and review ratings are tested using SPSS statistical analysis software.

## **Results**

The following section presents and discusses the findings. While some results seem to support previous research, some changing dynamics and new attributes are identified. Firstly, information about the reviewers is provided. All three websites reviewed ask reviewers to indicate the composition of the visit party. 27.17% of the reviewers travelled as couples, 17.66% travelled as a family, 16.09% travelled solo and 7.34% travelled with friends. Overall, 68% of respondents provide this information. In addition, Trip Advisor and Booking.com provide opportunity for reviewers to indicate the purpose of the trip. 41.32% of reviews were made by the leisure travellers (552) and 14.07% of reviews were undertaken by the business travellers (188). Moreover, the reviewers on Trip Advisor can indicate up to four of their travel interests, as presented in Table 1. Among the top five are interests in living "like a local", in food, shopping, nature and thrills. While Hong Kong is well-known for its food and shopping, there is currently little promotion emphasis on nature-based and adventure travel.

**[Insert Table 1 here]**

The average overall rating of Hong Kong hotels among Russian-speaking guests is 9.15 out of 10. Almost half of respondents have given their hotel the highest rating. This is higher than the overall rating of the selected hotels across the three websites, which is 8.95. Only two hotels have been rated lower by the Russian guests than the overall rating. The high rating amongst Russian visitors may be a result of being an emerging market, where new travellers have lack of awareness of the standards of accommodation outside their own country. Table 2 provides further details regarding the rating. The rating of individual hotels fluctuates between 8.5 and 9.7. No statistically significant rating correlations according to age of respondents, the country of reviewers residence



or the date of the review is established. Female reviewers provide a higher rating than the males: 9.25 and 9.15 respectively.

**[Insert Table 2 here]**

As illustrated by the Table 3 the mean rating varied between different review websites.

**[Insert Table 3 here]**

The content analysis resulted in 237 codes grouped into 25 categories, i.e. different themes that the reviewers have mentioned. The analysis presented below combines three methods of identifying positive and negative sentiment of certain comments: Jaccard's similarity index, Pearson correlation and social network analysis. Table 4 provides the categories, the frequency of their occurrence and the correlation between the comments and the review rating.

**[Insert Table 4 here]**

As may be expected based on the mean rating provided by the reviewers, the positive comments largely outweigh negative comments. In fact, 96.8% of all reviews contained an explicitly positive statement, while only 24.8% of reviews contained a negative statement. Both positive and negative comments highly affect the rating of the review. Statistically significant correlations have been identified between another 13 categories and the rating. Four of them have negative value, meaning that these types of comments negatively impact on the rating of a hotel. 88 codes significantly correlate with the rating, 38 of them have negative correlation.

Based on the co-occurrence analysis, i.e. Jaccard's similarity index, and Pearson correlation it can be concluded that the positive comments and higher review ratings are often attributed to location ( $r=0.132$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), hotel facilities ( $r=0.070$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), food and beverage ( $r=0.128$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and staff ( $r=0.180$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Quality issues ( $r=0.077$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), monetary considerations ( $r=-0.111$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), rooms, front office and reservations, room division and telecommunications have relatively high co-occurrence with both positive and negative comments. The correlation between the aforementioned categories (except quality and monetary considerations) and the review rating is not significant due to some codes within the category being positive and others negative. The codes within these categories that affect the rating are discussed further below. The following sections of the paper discuss emergent themes in further detail.

A graph visualisation is another tool that assists identifying relationships between different themes, including identification of themes closely related with positive and negative evaluation. Figure 1 provides the overview of a network graph of different themes. Social network analysis enables to graphically present the closeness of various themes within the text based on how frequent the themes appear within the same review. The infrequently mentioned comments related to weather, culture, travel agencies, opening time and crowding are located in the periphery of the network.

Positive evaluative comments are located in the centre of the network and have high degree connection to location, food and beverage and quality.

### **[Insert Figure 1 here]**

The following is the analysis of the most common categories of comments and their impact on the rating of hotels. Correlation between codes and hotel rating is provided within the text, if statistical significance is observed. Representative quotes from reviews are provided to enrich the findings, with gender, place of residence and rating given to the hotel by a reviewer provided after each quote.

#### *Location*

Location has been the most frequently mentioned theme (55.3% of comments;  $r=0.132$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). The most common type of comments within this category (32% of comments within this theme) is the view from the hotel or the room ( $r=0.159$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Most of these comments specify that they enjoyed the room with a view towards the Victoria Harbour, which includes renowned Hong Kong skyline. The following is an example of a view description that has impressed guests: “*Sunset, ships and fishing boats sailing into the distance, hills, islands... Romantic!*” (Female, Saint-Petersburg, hotel rating: 10). Some reviewers provided a tip for the readers: “*You should book a harbour view room and a higher floor*” (Male, Moscow, hotel rating: 10). Such scenic views are not common in Russia, where majority of population lives inland. Therefore, having a harbour view can be perceived as exotic and is especially attractive. Other location-related comments generally find important the central location of a hotel ( $r=0.75$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and accessibility of hotel by different modes of transport ( $r=0.074$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and its proximity to shopping venues ( $r=0.072$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). The transportation to and from hotel is specifically mentioned in 13% of reviews. While there are more positive comments related to hotels’ locations, the negative comments and the low rating within the reviews that mention location also appear, therefore accessibility, location within shopping and dining precinct and view from the room are of paramount importance for Russian hotel guests in Hong Kong. Issues with location is the second most common reason for reviewers to not return to the same hotel or recommend readers another hotel.

#### *Food and Beverage*

Food and Beverage is the second most popular theme (44.5% of all cases). This theme has high co-occurrence with positive comments and low co-occurrence with negative comments, as well as positive correlation with the review rating ( $r=0.128$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), thus indicating that food and beverage contributed to positive hotel stay experience. In 20% of all reviews, guests stated that the hotel food was tasty ( $r=0.104$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Almost 10% of guests point out that a variety of dishes and cuisines is available at their hotel ( $r=0.098$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Another 10% of food and beverage related comments were about hotel restaurants in general, while 5% of comments discussed restaurants that are outside of the hotel. The most discussed meal was breakfast (26% of reviews;

$r=0.83$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), followed by snacks, tea and coffee (5%;  $r=0.114$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and dinner (3%). Therefore, it is important to provide Russian guests with a high quality breakfast. The following is an example of what makes a good breakfast: *“Breakfasts are great – huge variety of hot dishes and fruits, local and European cuisines, large assortment of pastries, always freshly squeezed juices – in a word, it is impossible to stay hungry”* (Female, Russia, hotel rating: 10). The negative comments, although infrequent, are related to food not being tasty ( $r=-0.114$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), low quality of breakfast, lack of clarity whether the breakfast was included into the room rate, negative perception of value for the price, low variety of dishes and low service quality by the restaurant staff. Positive comments cover a variety of topics related to the quality of food, of service, restaurant ambience, view from the restaurant and cost. Chinese cuisine has been mentioned in 4% of reviews which is higher than the European cuisine. These reviews are largely positive ( $r=0.057$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) meaning that Russian travellers are curious about Chinese cuisine.

### *Room amenities*

Room amenities is the third most popular theme (39.7% of all cases). This theme has almost equally high co-occurrence with both positive and negative comments. This indicates that the room is highly important for guest satisfaction and it is challenging to meet guest expectation. A total of 48 room features have been mentioned. However, the highest number of comments in this category is related to two aspects: whether the fittings are modern (10% of all reviews) and whether the room size is large (10% of all reviews). Modern fittings code has a positive correlation with the rating of  $r=0.135$  ( $p<0.01$ ), while the basic or outdated room fittings has a negative correlation of  $r=-0.099$  ( $p<0.01$ ). The bed and sleep quality accounted for 5.5% of all reviews ( $r=0.056$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). The following could be one typical review example for this category: *“The room is great, new, clean, large beds, great mattress and pillows – great to sleep in (if you don’t mind airplane noise, and it is noisy)”* (Female, Moscow, hotel rating: 10). Damp ( $r=-0.144$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), stuffy ( $r=-0.091$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) or small ( $r=-0.086$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) rooms had negative correlations with the rating. Other negative comments mention an absence of hair conditioner or toilet brush, an inconvenient tooth brush, low ceilings and sealed windows. Positive details such as flowers ( $r=0.063$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) in the room add to positive guest experience. Overall, attention to details in the room is important. Contrary to expectation room items such as TV, Russian TV channel, minibar or air conditioning did not get many mentions.

### *Hotel Facilities/Services*

Facilities and services provided by hotels are the fourth most mentioned theme of the reviews (34.7% of all reviews;  $r=0.07$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and have the third highest rate of co-occurrence with positive comments. However, there is also a rather high co-occurrence of negative comments related to facilities and services. The most frequently mentioned facility is a swimming pool (16.5% of all reviews;  $r=0.088$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Food and beverage offered at the swimming pool and the view from it are of major importance. Shuttle bus service and transfers is another important service (12.2%). Other facilities and services are mentioned less than in 5% of reviews each. Among them:

spa, lobby, gym, lounge and sauna. Negative comments are related to such aspects as the loud music in the lift, small number of lifts and lack of seats in public areas.

### *Quality*

Comments related to quality are the fifth most common category appearing in 27.1% of all reviews ( $r=0.077$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). This category has high co-occurrence rate with both positive and negative comments. This suggests that quality is an important and challenging issue. The majority of comments in this category would mention “service quality” in general (17.1% of all reviews;  $r=0.80$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Other significant groups of comments within this category can be identified as attitude towards guests (5.8% of all reviews) and quality standards (5.6% of all reviews), which contain both positive and negative comments. The following is one example of a quality related comment that encompasses most of guest concerns: *“In my opinion this hotel is inferior to them [other hotels the guest stayed at in Hong Kong] in all aspects: quality and richness of the rooms, service and attitudes towards customers”* (Female, Moscow, hotel rating: 8). Other notable comments related to quality are as follows: *“Service standards in the [hotel] are great, staff is very attentive in all details beginning from smile and help from the doorman and ending with help to get ready for sleep (for example, housekeepers always put the sleepers of the right size to the right side of the bed)”* (Female, Moscow, hotel rating: 10. Another comment is as follows: *“This amazing combination of in-depth knowledge of the business and subconscious anticipation of what the guest needs. Details are everything”* (Male, Russia, hotel rating: 10). The aforementioned comments together with comments related to room amenities suggest that small details are noted by Russian guests and contribute to the positive evaluation of hotel experience.

### *Monetary considerations*

Monetary considerations is the sixth most common category of reviews (26.9% of all reviews). This category had a higher rate of co-occurrence with negative comments than with positive as well as a negative correlation with the review rating ( $r=-0.111$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). This is expected since this group of comments is related to costs. 10.9% of all reviews state that their accommodation or a certain service was expensive ( $r=-0.103$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Almost, the same percentage of reviews (10.6%) discuss whether their experience was a “value for money” and in many cases it was not. 3.4% of reviews mentioned service available at extra cost ( $r=-0.122$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), while 3.1% of reviews mentioned services available for free. The monetary considerations category did not include discussion of telecommunications, such as paid versus free Wi-Fi. Paid Wi-Fi had a negative correlation with the rating of  $r=-0.068$  ( $p<0.01$ ).

Other comments within this category are related to the room price, the amount of the deposit and issues related to it ( $r=-0.076$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), as well as issues related to payment for the room ( $r=-0.099$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Two other codes are related to this issue, namely reservation ( $r=-0.89$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and dealing with online travel agencies (OTAs) ( $r=-0.081$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Considering the currency fluctuations some guests are very sensitive to the timing and the method of payment for the room.

One comment states the following: “*The payment was withdrawn in roubles before the arrival, my currency exchange loss was 200USD*” (Male, Russia, hotel rating: 6.7). Guests also have issues with double payment for the room, non-return of the deposit, large amount of the deposit (up to 1000USD) and staff using the guest’s credit card account to withdraw the cost of mini-bar items without notification. OTAs have become a popular means of booking hotels. However, the lack of clarity of procedures during the booking contributes to the negative evaluation of hotel experience. Management of distribution channels and the role of OTAs in forming hotel experience is a topic that warrants further investigation.

The following comment reflects a widespread sentiment noted in the reviews: “*All is superb except for the price*” (Male, Obninsk, hotel rating: 10). It is important to note that high price by itself does not result in the negative review by Russian guests. However, it is important to communicate with the guests how their credit cards or bank accounts will be used and the staff should ask guests for their preferences regarding the payment for room and ancillary services. It may not be a big issue for the hotel, but may make a great difference for guests arriving from countries experiencing economic instability. Monetary issues are the most common reason for reviewers to not return to the same hotel or recommend another hotel.

### *Staff*

Comments which mentioned hotel staff constitute the seventh most common category with 22.7% of all reviews. The staff was mentioned much more often in positive comments than in the negative comments ( $r=0.18$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Reviewers acknowledge attentiveness (8.6% of reviews;  $r=0.125$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and friendliness (7.6%;  $r=0.121$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) of staff. The ability to respond to enquiries has been mentioned in 5.2% of all reviews ( $r=0.54$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The speed of service was mentioned by 3.3% of reviewers ( $r=0.95$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). 2.7% of reviewers thanked a certain member of staff ( $r=0.101$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). The following comment is a representative example of positive evaluation of staff: “*Especially I would like to note the cordiality and responsiveness of staff in relation to any clients’ questions*” (Male, Russia, hotel rating: 10). It should be acknowledged that reviews suggest that Russian guests appreciate when service is provided with sincere willingness to help, as one reviewer put it “*from the heart*” (Female, Russia, hotel rating: 10). On contrary, the negative reviews in this category are attributed to lack of willingness to help guests and the apparent indifference towards the guests needs ( $r=-0.7$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

### *Other*

This section analyses several themes that have not been covered in the previous categories of comments, but represent important hotel attributes. Various modes of telecommunications have been mentioned in 12.4% of all reviews. Absence of free Wi-Fi and high prices for internet co-occurred with negative reviews ( $r=-0.068$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). On the other hand, provision of a smartphone with Hong Kong SIM card, internet and international calls by some hotels was an appreciated solution for some guests. This signifies that an in-room phone is becoming obsolete. Wi-Fi has

become an important hotel service expected by most guests. It appears a better solution to include the cost of Wi-Fi in the room rate than charge extra.

10.6% of reviews mentioned whether their room was comfortable ( $r=0.103$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), while cleanliness was mentioned in 9% of comments. 10.3% of reviewers mentioned major tourism sights. Design was mentioned in 7% of reviewers with most positive reviews related to modern ( $r=0.055$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), elegant, functional design and the negative comments related to outdated design ( $r=-0.149$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and shabby furniture. Interestingly, hotels that appeared in need of renovations have been compared to the Soviet architecture, for example as follows: “*A hotel for the members of Communist Party of USSR*” (Male, Moscow, hotel rating: 8). 6.4% of reviews mentioned “transit” as their purpose of visit. These reviewers predominantly focused on the convenient location of the hotel to travel to the airport and ability to do some sightseeing during the layover in Hong Kong.

The lack of comments for certain other hotel attributes is rather surprising. For example, check-in procedure is mentioned in 3.9% of reviews. Brand-related comments, such as mentioning of international chains, appear only in 3.7% of reviews and have negative correlation with the rating ( $r=-0.07$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). Culture-related comments are found in 1.5% of reviews. Interestingly, communication has been discussed in the 4.6% of all reviews. In 2.8% of reviews guests mention Russian language ( $r=0.058$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) while in 1.8% of reviews they mention English language ( $r=0.73$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Only two reviewers explicitly stated that they faced communication difficulties. Six reviewed hotels had a Russian-speaking staff member, however the number of times a Russian staff member was mentioned varied greatly between hotels. Possibly, some hotels did not utilise their staff as well. Two hotels had a Russian TV channel which has been acknowledged only by three reviews. 11 reviewers wished that there was a Russian TV channel. A free unlimited wi-fi probably could substitute TV channels as guests would be able to stream Russian TV programs. The presence of Russian-speaking staff or Russian TV channels does not appear to be a significant contributor to the hotel experience.

## **Discussion**

Hotel experience is a major contributor to the overall travel satisfaction (Shih, 1986; Stevens, 1992). Content analysis of user-generated content enables identification of attributes that positively or negatively affect hotel experience. Guest sentiments towards different attributes may vary by market. While the research is focussing on the Russian guests staying in Hong Kong hotels, the results present an update on continuously changing importance of various hotel attributes and the profile of Russian guests provides an interesting insight that is useful in analysis of other emerging markets.

Russian guests staying at four- or five- star hotels in Hong Kong have a very positive hotel experience. The high ratings that all investigated hotels obtained from Russian guests may suggest that Russian travellers are less demanding than an average traveller. Nevertheless, the online

reviews have provided rich data about the Russian hotel guests in Hong Kong. The present study derives the categories of different attributes based mostly on the open coding of text. Many attributes emerging from the present study are similar to ones provided in the previous research studies (Dolnicar & Otter, 2003; Gu & Ryan, 2008; O'Connor, 2008). The emphasis on different attributes however varies.

The location is the most important category of attributes found in this study. Sun et al. (2015) had a similar finding regarding the Chinese guests. Inconvenient location results in low ratings, non-returns or recommendations of other properties. Taking advantage of the location by providing scenic views is highly beneficial. This can be achieved by an original design of the swimming pool area, taking into account that the swimming pool is the most frequently mentioned hotel facility. Scenic views from swimming pools are especially attractive for Russian visitors as open swimming pools are rare in Russia due to the climate. Swimming pool and lounge areas have been identified as emerging hotel attributes by Li et al. (2015) which is confirmed by the present study. Li et al. (2015) identified interest in swimming pools and lounge areas as an emerging trend. However, only two reviewers in the present study mentioned night clubs or night life despite many reviewers being young solo travellers or couples. Probably the importance of this attribute depends on the destination. Gu & Ryan (2008) suggest that the core product of a hotel is the most important for Chinese guests. According to Gu & Ryan (2008) the core product includes the following attributes: cleanliness of the bedroom, having a comfortable mattress and pillow, the cleanliness of the bathroom, security, quiet room and the quality of the food in restaurants. While the present study does not necessarily conclude the contrary, it suggests that the location is one of the factors helping travellers to select a hotel. Safety and security concerns were rarely mentioned in the reviewed comments. This may signify a difference between Chinese and Russian travellers, although such theory needs to be proven in other destinations, since Hong Kong is known as a safe destination.

In terms of the room amenities the bed appears to be more important than the bathroom, contrary to Stringam & Gerdes (2010) conclusion that the bathroom contributes more than bedroom to hotel guest satisfaction. Many important room characteristics mentioned by reviewers appear to be similar to the O'Connor (2008) study, which acknowledged bed, room size, noise and items in need of repair. One of the room characteristics acknowledged by reviewers that may be more specific to Hong Kong due to the humid climate is a sense of dampness. Food and beverage department is another contributor to the satisfaction with the hotel stay (Dolnicar & Otter, 2003; Gu & Ryan, 2008). In the present study one clear aspect of food and beverage has dominated: breakfasts. This is where hotels should make an extra effort to satisfy their guests. Modern-day leisure travellers who declare interest in learning about local culture and sightseeing are more likely to have lunch and dinner outside of the hotel, however a breakfast is most likely to be consumed at the hotel and set the mood for the day. Food and beverage comments often combined both the core functional value with the experiential value of dining at hotel restaurants. The comments listed food items and cuisines on offer at hotels, but also described emotions evoked by dining experience, thus supporting findings of Wu & Liang (2009).

Monetary concerns are also important for Russian travelers. New dimensions that warrant further research have been identified within this category. Negative experience with booking through an OTA affects the hotel stay experience. The lack of clarity regarding the conditions of payment contribute to confusion and dissatisfaction with stay among Russian travelers. Even though the issue may be caused by the OTA, it is expected to be resolved by the hotel. Further research should delve in more depth regarding the impact of booking through an OTA experience on hotel stay experience. Furthermore, hotel guests found it irritating when they had to pay extra for various products and services, especially Wi-Fi internet. As Bulchand-Gidumal et al. (2011) note free Wi-Fi is increasingly important for travellers. It is likely to be beneficial for hotels to include such products and services into the room rate rather than charge separately. Another important aspect, especially due to the recent economic crisis in Russia, is the form and the timing of payment for the hotel room. The hotel payment policy should be clearly communicated to guests. Where possible a hotel should ask guests regarding the preferred payment arrangement and follow guests' preferences. Other comments within this category either concluded that the hotel stay was too expensive or compared the price with the value obtained for it. It is important to note that the present study focused on the four- and five- star hotels, therefore travellers were ready to pay high room rates. Nevertheless, they expect to obtain a certain value for it. TourBusiness (2009) reported that during the global financial crisis an upscale outbound travel saw a smaller decline than the average, therefore for the four- and five- star hotels reviewed within this paper it is more important to provide comfortable environment for guests than try to undercut the competition.

The research has identified lack of comments related to branding, marketing and image of hotels in Hong Kong. Such lack of brand-related comments is surprising. Sun et al. (2015) in their analysis of Chinese market have identified specific interest in and satisfaction with international hotel chains. The comments within the present study that mention "hotel chains" are however negatively correlated with the hotel rating ( $r=-0.07$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). Possibly, hotel guests have much higher expectations from recognised international brands and these expectations is difficult to fulfil. Another possibility is that in the contemporary world of online reviews and OTAs brand recognition and the brand image projected by the company's marketing team may lack the power they used to have. As suggested by Barreda & Bilgihan (2013) user-generated content has the power to alter the brand image. In either case further critical analysis of role of branding is required.

Previous research identified differences between different cultures in terms of hotel preferences and service expectations (Gu & Ryan, 2008; Torres et al., 2014). Russian guests appreciate friendly and attentive attitude, especially valuable is service that is sincere and cordial. "Sincerity" in Russian language and culture has a broader meaning than in English and is an important part of Russian culture. It refers to such virtues as spontaneity, truthfulness, integrity and kindness (Supphellen & Grønhaug, 2003; Wierzbicka, 2002). Knowledge of such cultural nuances is useful in the hospitality industry. On contrary, apathy, apparent unwillingness to help or very formal distanced attitude may be considered a bad service. Interestingly, there did not appear much



necessity in the Russian-speaking staff, information or TV channels. Even in hotels where a Russian staff has been present, it was reflected in the minority of reviewers. This is an interesting finding as it contradicts earlier findings by ATOR (2014) and Kazakov (2014). However, according to Prohotel (2014b) despite the majority of Russian travelers having little knowledge of foreign language, they do not report major communication difficulties. This may explain the lack of Russian-language related comments.

In terms of functional, experiential and symbolic values that comprise a luxury experience (Chen & Peng, 2014), it is evident that across most themes functional value dominates the discourse. Reviewers predominantly focus on tangible products and on services provided by the hotel. Some comments demonstrate unique experiential values that a stay at a particular hotel can provide. Often these are related to the view from a hotel, unique swimming pool (e.g. one of the hotels within the reviews has the reportedly highest hotel swimming pool on the planet) or restaurant ambience. The symbolic value demonstrated by brands and opportunity of consumers to relay their status appears the least important. The importance of a brand is rarely communicated within the reviews.

## **Conclusion**

The present paper has reviewed the hotel attributes important to Russian guests travelling to Hong Kong. There is little current information available about Russian travellers, which represent a lucrative market (UNWTO & European Travel Commission, 2015). The present review focused on 17 four- and five- star hotels which provide a variety of services. The content analysis of 1336 reviews has been undertaken using QDA Miner software package. The adopted approach provided a wealth of information regarding the hotel attributes and features important to a particular group of travellers. The process of data collection and analysis is rather time-consuming if manual coding is undertaken. However, even descriptive word frequency statistics may provide valuable data. For example, words “view” and “scenic” were the most popular words found across the reviews and the corresponding code was identified as the most popular after the manual coding.

Content analysis of online reviews is beneficial for researchers and industry practitioners as it enables gathering information that is not structured by the researcher, but provides a breadth of information (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015). This enables authors of the present study to identify several areas for further research. Firstly, the impact of an OTA experience during the room reservation and payment on the hotel stay experience merits further investigation. Guest satisfaction with payment methods and procedures and their impact on visit satisfaction is another area of concern especially among the visitors from emerging markets where national currency has a relatively high fluctuation. Importance of a brand for hotel booking and hotel satisfaction across culturally different markets is another area to be considered, since the present study did not find branding as important as studies by Lee & Back (2010) and Sun et al. (2015). Lastly, the importance of language for different markets need to be further analysed as hiring staff who is fluent in a certain language may require a lot of effort and resource and have little contribution to

guest holiday satisfaction as suggested by the present study. Therefore, while some reviewed attributes in this paper have been highlighted in previous literature suggesting that the most important hotel attributes remain the same across markets, new issues, such as those appearing earlier in this paragraph, have been brought up.

Limitations are predominantly related to the focus on one destination and more specifically on upscale hotels. Due to the resource constraints it was not possible to analyse greater amount of online reviews. Future cross-destination and cross-market studies may prove valuable. The information provided by the means of content analysis of online reviews may serve for purposes of quality control and also for marketing. By gathering reviews provided by travellers within certain market segments marketers may identify niches they would like to enter or services and products that should be developed to attract more visitors of a certain segment. The present research demonstrates that the attributes that hotel guests are looking for are ever changing. Therefore, continuous monitoring of online reviews is important for business success.

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**Table 1. Frequency of reviewer indicated interests**

Interest Name	Frequency	Percentage
Local	93	12.90%
Foodie	83	11.51%
Shop	81	11.23%
Nature	70	9.71%
Thrill Seeker	69	9.57%
Urban Explorer	62	8.60%
History	58	8.04%
Art	51	7.07%
Luxury	47	6.52%
Beach	30	4.16%
Peace and Quiet	26	3.61%
Nightlife	17	2.36%
Thrifty	9	1.25%
Trendsetter	9	1.25%
Backpacker	5	0.69%
Eco-tourism	5	0.69%
Culture	3	0.42%
Vegetarian	3	0.42%
Total	721	100%

**Table 2. Rating of Hong Kong Hotels**

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
10	641	48%
9.0-9.9	291	22%
8.0-8.9	201	15%
7.0-7.9	118	9%
6.0-6.9	48	4%
5.0-5.9	25	2%
4.0-4.9	8	1%
3.0-3.9	2	0%
2.0-2.9	2	0%

**Table 3. Rating of Hotels by Website**

Review source	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Agoda	9.18	80	.9914
Booking.com	8.9	780	1.2642
TripAdvisor	9.54	476	1.1090
Total	9.15	1336	1.2321

**Table 4. Categories of codes**

Code category	Cases	% Cases	Correlation with Rating	
			Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Positive evaluation	1293	96.80%	.278**	0.000
Location	739	55.30%	.132**	0.000
Food and beverage	595	44.50%	.128**	0.000
Room amenities	530	39.70%	0.041	0.132
Hotel Facilities/Services	463	34.70%	.070**	0.010
Quality	362	27.10%	.077**	0.005
Monetary considerations	359	26.90%	-.111**	0.000
Negative Evaluation	331	24.80%	-.431**	0.000
Staff	303	22.70%	.180**	0.000
Guest characteristics/emotions	292	21.90%	.222**	0.000
Comfort	203	15.20%	.103**	0.000
Length of Stay	202	15.10%	0.043	0.120
Design	200	15.00%	-0.011	0.697
Activities	181	13.50%	.068*	0.012
Telecommunications	165	12.40%	0.020	0.460
Room division	145	10.90%	0.014	0.611
Purpose of travel/Hotel type	128	9.60%	.076**	0.006
Front Office Reservations	126	9.40%	-0.005	0.855
Marketing/Branding	94	7.00%	-0.011	0.687
Communication	61	4.60%	.082**	0.003
Crowding	35	2.60%	-.160**	0.000
Weather	23	1.70%	-0.013	0.628
Culture-related comments	20	1.50%	0.031	0.252
Opening time	18	1.30%	-0.007	0.804
Travel agency	16	1.20%	-.081**	0.003

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 1. Network graph of identified themes

