

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ONLINE REVIEW ON HOTEL ATTRIBUTES TOWARDS CUSTOMERS ROOM PURCHASING DECISION: BUDGET HOTEL

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Abstract: *Online review is an important role as a source of information for guest, while customers' purchasing decision could be reconstructed by looking into online reviews. Hence, the ultimate objective of this research is to determine the most influential hotel attributes that incline customers room purchasing decision for budget hotels. The researcher distributed structured questionnaire to 386 young adults age ranging from 18 to 34 years old who are potentials to patronize city budget hotels in Klang Valley. From this research, the researcher is able to determine the most influential hotel attributes from the online reviews that incline customers purchasing decision for budget hotels which is price, cleanliness and location.*

Keywords: *Hotel Attributes, Online Reviews, Customers Purchasing Decision*

Introduction

Over the past decade, word-of-mouth (WOM) is one of the most influential channels of communications in the marketplace (T. Allsop, R. Bassett & A. Haskins, 2007). Bone (1992, pg. 579) defines WOM as an exchange of comments, thoughts, and ideas among two or more individuals in which none of the individuals represent a marketing source. WOM can influence decisions either positively (Engel, Kegerris & Blackwell, 1969; Richins, 1983) or negatively (Tybout, Calder & Sternthal, 1981; Bolfing, 1989). Without any doubt, WOM played an important role in the information of consumer opinions and become an even more powerful force.

As the world has become more connected through the use of technology and the Internet there has been a shift from WOM to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004, pg. 39) defines online review as *“any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product or a company, which is made available to a large group of people and institutions via the Internet”*. In 2010, Mudambi and Schuff define online review as a peer-generated product evaluation that aids consumers' purchase decision while Ogut and Cezar (2014) said that online reviews in the cyber world is a form of word-of-mouth.

One of the forms of eWOM is online reviews including blog posts, consumer forums and comments (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Ha, 2002; Henning-Thurau et al., 2004; Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007; Grimes, 2012; Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2013). Hence, eWOM has been accepted easily by online users and is disseminated worldwide which increases its influence on consumer decision-making (Mihaela, 2015). Multiple researchers also have examined eWOM may influence consumer loyalty and important factor influencing decision making (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Ha, 2002; Gruen, Osmonbekov & Czaplewski, 2006; Pan, Maclaurin & Crotts, 2007; Grimes, 2012).

While in the hotel industry, a survey made by TripAdvisor (2013) found that online reviews had been the main source of information for consumers to plan and research a trip. Online reviews also play a very important role in hotel selections (Noone, McGuire & Rohlf, 2011) as they provide a real person's feelings towards the products or services purchased to the customers who may have never had the same experience before thus helping the potential customers in hotel selection; it is the same product as of advertising (Rosman & Stuhura, 2013).

The study conducted by Prabu (2014) showed that the respondents regularly rely on TripAdvisor. Out of the total number of respondents, 29% visit the site several times a month, 12% check at least once a week and 26% percent often use the site more than once a week. Evidently, this shows that 67% of the respondents check TripAdvisor a few times a month or more. The scenario shows that online review is significant in decision making because travellers are able to obtain detailed information with high trustworthiness and credibility from TripAdvisor (Park & Nicolau, 2015).

Apart from that, a survey released by TripAdvisor stated that from the total number of respondents, 80% of them had read at least 6-12 reviews prior to making their decisions (Prabu, 2014). Hence, travel website such as TripAdvisor provided some categories of rating summary that helped the customers to write the review of the hotel. The rating summary is also important to the consumer as a source of information and to determine the most influential hotel attributes that incline them to make purchase decisions.

The stated statistics show that online reviews are undeniably important in assisting customers with their purchasing decisions, hence the researcher chose to take a look at the hotel attributes of online reviews on the budget hotel sector due to the demand of budget hotels in Malaysia were increasing and a vibrant market (The Star Online, 2014, December 2017; The Star Online, 2017, October 2018). Therefore, the researcher able to clearly identify the most influential online reviews on hotel attributes towards customers room purchasing decision for budget hotels in Klang Valley before make a purchasing decision.

Objective

The following are the two key research questions of this study attempts to answer:

- i) To identify the hotel attributes that incline customers room purchasing decision for budget hotel
- ii) To determine the most influential hotel attributes that incline customers room purchasing decision for budget hotel

Scope of Study

The scope of this study focuses on the customers room purchasing decision based on the hotel attributes of online review from TripAdvisor which are location, cleanliness and price. TripAdvisor has been chosen because it is the most popular and many visitors use it frequently when choosing hotels because the site makes it possible to share videos, photos, and have a conversation with other people (Aljahdali, 2016).

The respondents of this study were young adults which age from 18 to 34 years old as leisure traveller and potential customers of budget hotel in Malaysia. Hence, the population of this study were covered all hotels in Malaysia, but this study focused was focused on city budget hotels in Klang Valley. The budget hotels were chosen because the budget hotel sector has not been given serious attention by relevant parties in terms of its growth and sustainability (Jaafar, Ing & Mohd Sukarno, 2011) even though this sector is Malaysia's fastest growing tourism component (Malaysia Productivity Corporation, 2014).

According to Ministry of Tourism, budget hotel defined as all hotels classified two stars and below include 1 star, 2-star, 1 orchid, 2 orchid and 3 orchid rated hotels (My Bajet, 2013). The new Orchid-rating grading scheme was introduced to systematically categorize the budget accommodation sub-sector, which comprises bed and breakfasts, inns, hostels, rest houses and similar (Abdul Karim, 2013). However, this research eliminates accommodation establishments or hotels which are non-rated, and chain-hotels or corporate groups, in the above-mentioned category in the sample of respondents.

Literature review

Online Reviews

Online reviews can reach those with access to the Internet. In addition, online reviews are not tampered by time and distance, apart from them being more detailed and durable as they reflect the opinions of many people in written form (Bhatnagar & Chose, 2004; Duan, Gu & Whinston, 2008). Current consumers largely consider online reviews in a decision making to purchase products online and offline and a significant part of the decision process. Online reviews also enable people to obtain detailed information with high trustworthiness and credibility compared to information provided by marketers (Park & Nicolau, 2015).

In addition, several researches in hospitality disciplines explore tourists' responses in online reviews; the researches' foci are trustiness, helpfulness, and usefulness of online reviews (Racherl & Friske, 2012, pg. 548; Wei, Miao & Huang, 2013). Wei et al.'s study (2013) revealed that positive customers' reviews are more favoured than negative comments. Furthermore, online reviews offer display heuristic cues which make readers consider the said reviews to be more helpful. Park and Nicolau (2015) claimed there is a higher

probability for tourists to search for useful reviews when making their decision and those that they find pleasing to read; review ratings which are an indicator of positive or negative responses are seen as more enjoyable by tourists than neutral evaluations.

Hotel Attributes of Online Review

There are many significant hotel attributes that can influence consumer in hotel purchasing decision (Kõiva, 2016). For this research, the researcher adopted three hotel attributes of online review from Callan and Bowman (2000), Chan and Wong (2006), Rhee and Yang (2014), Ahmad, Ibrahim, Abd Raof, Nasruddin and Mat So'od (2016) in order to determine the most influential hotel attributes that incline customers purchasing decision. The hotel attributes are price, cleanliness and location.

Price

Price plays an important role in decision making process in hotel choice and hotel purchasing (Lewis, 1984; Koiva, 2016). Based on customers, they often make comparisons between the prices when they shop and prices from other offers to understand the value they are willing to pay (Kim, Xu & Gupta, 2011; Koiva, 2016). Lee (2012) mentions that in the hotel business, reasonable price will influence the customers to a greater perceived value and intention to purchase.

Besides that, an analysis of reviews on TripAdvisor, Jeong and Jeon (2008) had identified price as the main determinant for customer satisfaction. This is because customers will compare the prices to make their own decision and willing to pay (Kim et al., 2011). Lee (2012) stated that in hotel business, reasonable price will give customer greater perceived value and greater intention to purchase. Price may pass information to the consumer about the service or product quality and value (Erickson and Johansson, 1985).

Cleanliness

Law and Hsu (2005, pg. 493) and Chan and Wong (2006, pg. 481) stated that cleanliness is one of the important attributes for customers purchasing decision of budget hotels including location, service, staff and price. Multiple research papers also indicate that cleanliness of the accommodation is the most important attribute for travellers in hotel choice selection (Shanahan & Hyman, 2006, pg. 107; Schall, 2003, pg. 51). Providing hygiene factors like clean room will decrease the possibility for dissatisfaction and increase consumer utility and increases likelihood of customers choosing one hotel over another.

Location

The location which affects revisit of guests (Hanai, Oguchi, Ando & Yamaguchi, 2008) is very significant for travellers (Dolnicar & Otter, 2003), because they prefer places where they access easily and sleep peacefully (Rhee & Yang, 2014; Ren, Zhang & Ye, 2015). When a consumer is making arrangements for a holiday, the location of a hotel is the tipping point to making the final decision (Chan & Wong, 2006).

A hotel with a good location increases consumer utility since it is strategically placed in the area which consumers find convenient and decreases the possibilities of walking undesired distances. However, Lewis (1984) asserted that it is important to keep business and leisure travelers separated since they will look into different factors when booking for a hotel. In

other words, the element of location is prioritized differently, in accordance to the type of holiday the consumer is looking for.

In addition, it is evident that location is considered as important in review sites as shown by the research of O'Connor (2010), who asserted that the topic of location attribute is often mentioned. This indicates that consumers are sharing output and information about location and they are intent on being updated about the location of accommodations.

Consumers Purchasing Decision

The internet is being used increasingly by consumers to inform their decisions on hotel to purchase during their holiday. Without actually experiencing the hotel, the consumers have limited opportunity to assess the quality of service that they will receive and whether it will meet their expectations (Browning, So & Sparks, 2013). Due to that, they will search online reviews posted anonymously by multiple consumers evaluating hotels and holiday resorts throughout the world (Buhalis & Law, 2008) in order to make purchasing decision.

However, the toughest purchasing decisions are those involving high risk, are expensive, demand a complex process of decision-making and often comprise of new product or service for consumers (Branchik & Shaw, 2015). Hence, holiday planning, where extensive research and evaluation are needed to acquire intensive information in order to overcome uncertainty, is regarded as a high-involvement purchase (Brian & Luiz, 2011).

There are three steps involved in the high-involvement process of planning a holiday, which are (1) identifying the need for travel, (2) looking for a destination and making arrangements to anything travel-related and (3) evaluating various options (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Nicolau and Mas (2006) presented ideas from travelers' points of view. They put two phases of decisions into consideration when tourists are in the process of choosing a tourist destination. They suggested that the first stage is to be about whether they go on a holiday or not and the length of holiday, while the second stage is choosing their destination and other conditional decisions.

Theoretical Framework

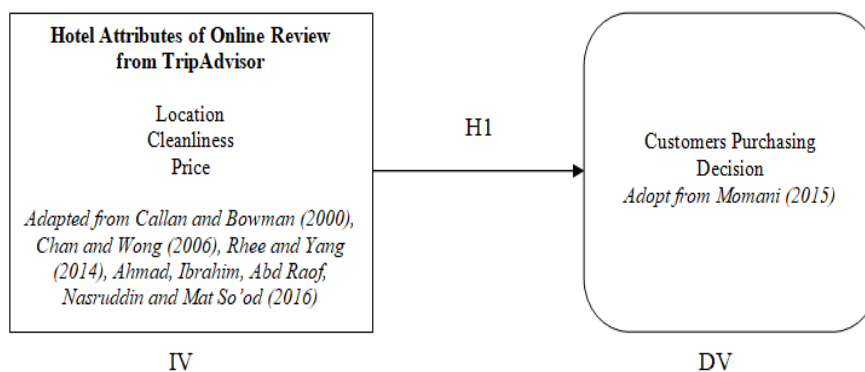


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

Research Method

The researcher used quantitative research approach in order to gain the data collection. The quantitative research approach has been selected by the researcher because the researcher

would like to use statistic to generalise a finding. By using the number, the researcher hopes that people will be able to understand the finding clearly because the finding can be analyzed and interpreted by number.

Quantitative research also focuses on statistical analysis of numerical data collected through the use of large-scale survey research, using methods such as questionnaire or structured interview (Kumar, Abdul Talib & T. Ramayah, 2013, pg. 18). In order to gain the data collection, the researcher created one set of questionnaires and distributed structured questionnaires to the young adults who are leisure traveller and potential to patronize city budget hotels in the Klang Valley.

Young adults represent a very interesting target market for budget hotels as they are known as active travellers and represent a greater part of the tourism industry every year (World Tourism Organization, 2011). Apart from the respondents' profile (gender, age, race, marital status, education level, employment, level of income), the customers' purchasing decision and hotel attributes of online attributes were addressed in the questionnaire.

There are three sections in the questionnaire. The first section is concerned with respondent's profile, which will use nominal scale. Respondent's profile will include gender, race and religion with related to nominal scale.

In the second section, the respondents answered on a dependent variable of this research which is customers purchasing decision. The last section of the questionnaire is related on hotel attributes of online review from TripAdvisor which is an independent variable in this research. These two sections will use Likert scale ranging from one to five.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4

Figure 2: Four points of Likert scale

Once all the respondents answered the questionnaire, all data collected are keyed in for analysis using IBM Statistical Package of Social Science software (IBM SPSS), version 21.0. SPSS is a well-known and widely used program for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

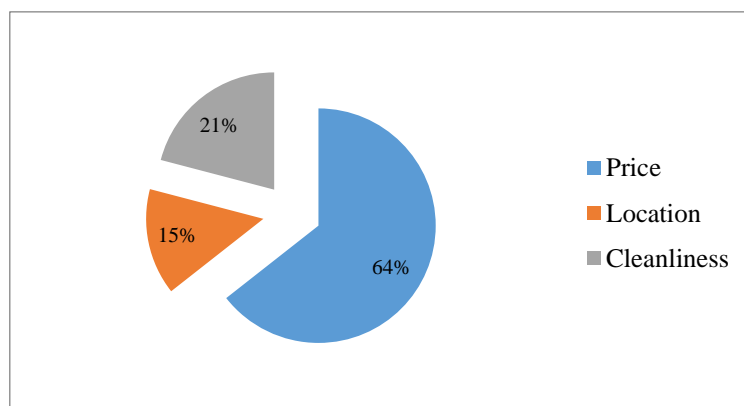


Figure 3: Hotel Attributes that incline Customers Purchasing Decision

The finding revealed that price is the most influential attribute that incline customers' purchasing decision for budget hotel followed by cleanliness and location. Figure 1 shows there are 64% of respondents that involved in this research have chosen price as the main hotel attributes while 21% have chosen cleanliness and 15% for location.

When compared to one of the latest researches on impact of hotel attributes of customers purchasing decision made by Kōiva (2016), there are no difference of hotel attributes between the previous research and this research. Kōiva (2016) also found that the main hotel attributes that incline customers purchasing decision are location, cleanliness and price, which is similar with that the researcher found, except for the ranking of the attributes and the type of hotels chosen by the customers.

Price (64%) is the most influential hotel attributes among young adults who are leisure travellers. It shows that young adults are more prices sensitive when deciding on which hotel to book (Kōiva, 2016). They tend to compare different price for budget hotels in the evaluation of alternatives stage to find the best price and what they are willing to pay. Hence, they spend more time deciding on the most suitable hotel for their travel purpose and also make a greater effort to find the best possible deal for their stay.

The second most influential hotel attributes is cleanliness (21%). Young adults found that the cleanliness of the lobby, room and bathroom is very important. Even though they did not spend too much time in their room, but they are still considering and evaluating budget hotels with certain cleanliness scores instead of making it as the main hotel attribute.

Interesting finding is that location (15%) was seen as less important by the respondents and it is less influence on the purchasing decision among the young adults. Furthermore, the focus group in this study were young adults who might be more price sensitive and therefore put less importance on the location.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, results gained from the structured questionnaire reveals that there is some impact of hotel attributes on customers purchasing decision. The researcher determined the most influential hotel attributes that incline customers purchasing decision for budget hotels are price followed by cleanliness and location among young adults who are leisure traveller. While past researches also discovered that the three main influencing attributes for purchasing decision were location, cleanliness and price. There is no different attributes between the researcher and past researchers, but the main differences are the ranking of the attributes and the types of hotels chosen by the customers.

The finding of this research is also significant for hotel entrepreneurs because it can help them pinpoint the magnitude that online reviews have on the budget hotel sectors. Hotel entrepreneurs can employ an action plan in managing their budget hotels, thus enhancing their hotel management skills and overall performance. Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism and Culture could also gain a better understanding of the factors that affect the hotel patrons' purchasing intentions and which areas require much attention to so that improvements can be made to raise the standards of Malaysian hotels at the centre of the world (Wei, Hiribae, Kuen, Yi & Ling, 2014).

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