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The effects of experience perceptions on eWOM of U.S. hotel guests' in American and Chinese five-star hotels

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**The effects of experience perceptions on eWOM of U.S. hotel guests' in American
and Chinese five-star hotels**

by

Mai Wu

A thesis submitted to graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Hospitality Management

Program of Study Committee:
Thomas Schrier, Major Professor
Tianshu Zheng
Young-A Lee

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2013

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ABSTRACT

In the hospitality industry, advancements in information communication technology have led to an increase in online reviews written by guests. This study investigated differences in word usage of U.S. guests' electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) communications regarding the different perceptions of their experiences in American and Chinese five-star hotels by analyzing the content of online reviews. It also investigated the impact eWOM had on the post-purchase behaviors of guests who wrote reviews. Content analysis was applied to collect and classify words and phrases used in the online reviews. Five American-based five-star hotel brands were selected, and five pairs of American and Chinese cities were selected, respectively, based on the five hotel brands for comparison purpose of this study. Data were collected from Tripadvisor.com and coded manually into four main categories. The results of this study revealed differences in customers' word usage that reflected their different perceptions regarding the main hotel attributes of American and Chinese properties. The results should assist American and Chinese five-star hotel management in improving the service and facilities offered to U.S. guests as well as in adapting their managerial strategies in various aspects of their properties.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) has been the basic method of communication between customers as well as among customers and service organizations in service industries such as the hospitality industry (Harrison-Walker, 2001a). It has also been referred to as a “verbal exchange of positive and negative information about a business’s products and services” (Haywood, 1989, p. 55). Through recommendations or warnings obtained from friends or family members, Word-of-Mouth provides the opportunity for potential customers to learn about the positive and negative aspects of services offered by certain organizations before an actual purchase takes place. As technology has advanced, the internet has been widely applied in various areas in the hospitality industry. Traditional Word-of-Mouth which spread from person to person vocally has been replaced gradually by electronic Word-of-Mouth. One form of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) is online reviews generated by internet users regarding travel destinations, hotels, and tourism services, which has become an important source of information for other travelers (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007). In the hospitality industry, an increasing number of social media websites enable hotel guests to share their eWOM regarding their travel experiences with other customers as well as communicate with the hotel management. This helps potential customers in their decision-making process, and also helps with management strategy modification as well (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Thus, eWOM plays an increasingly important role in the hospitality industry as technology develops.

Statement of the Problem

This study is conducted in order to systematically investigate whether there are some differences in the patterns of the relationship between U.S. guests' eWOM and their perceptions of hotel experience as well as their post-purchase behaviors, and whether these differences in U.S. guests' experiences in American and Chinese five-star hotels will lead to differences in the overall ratings they assign for hotels on social travel websites.

Research Questions

The following questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are the differences in the perceptions of U.S. guests in American versus Chinese hotels based on the hotel's services, room facilities, value, cleanliness, location and sleep quality?
2. How do the differences in U.S. guests' perceptions result in differences in their eWOM behaviors regarding hotels in the United States and China?
3. How do the differences in eWOM written by previous guests lead to different post-purchase behaviors of U.S. guests?

Significance of the Study

Differences in the patterns of the relationships between the frequency of words and phrases used in guests' online reviews can be used to determine customer satisfaction in hotel properties in the United States and China. The differences in the patterns of the relationship between U.S. guests' perceptions of their experience are reflected by online

reviews for American and Chinese five-star hotel properties that belong to the same American hotel brands and their post-purchase behaviors. The varying patterns found in the results should provide both theoretical and managerial implications for hotel managers to use in improving their properties in various aspects. This knowledge will also assist hotel managers in making different management strategies for properties in eastern and western countries.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined for use in this research:

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM): The online reviews generated by internet users regarding travel destinations, hotels, and tourism services, which are an important source of information for other travelers (Pan et al., 2007).

Hotel Service: The physical environment and the service provided by hotel staff in various departments including the front desk, housekeeping, restaurant, etc (Bitner, 1992).

Overall Perceptions: The way hotel customers perceive the hotel property as a whole (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

Post-purchase Intentions: The consequential intentions resulting from hotel customers' perceptions of their hotel experiences (Bergenwall, 1998).

Room Facilities: The various in-room and out-of-room facilities provided by the hotel to satisfy their customers' needs. (Wilkins, Merrilees, & Herington, 2007).

Value: The extent to which the price for the services and facilities provided by the hotel matches the quality of them (Dolnicar & Otter, 2003).

Word-of-Mouth: “The verbal exchange of positive and negative information about a business’s products and services” (Haywood, 1989, p. 55).

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Content Analysis Theory

Content analysis is “a well-established research method commonly used in social sciences to analyze communications” (Holsti, 1969, p. 235). It has been widely used in various areas such as political science, psychology, communication, journalism and media. There are several previous studies conducted by utilizing content analysis (e.g., Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Pantelidis, 2010; Shea, & Roberts, 1998; Simmons, Conlon, Mukhopadhyay, & Yang, 2011). According to Weber (1990), content analysis is “a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (p. 9). This method enables researchers to classify text that contains many words into less complicated content categories that are easier for compiling statistics (Weber, 1990). Due to its qualitative basis, content analysis is able to “capture a richer sense of concepts within the data” (Insch & Moore, 1997, p. 2).

Content analysis is a method that has been frequently used in the hospitality management area. Numerous hospitality management studies have utilized content analysis to assist in analyzing guests’ reviews for hotel properties (Shea & Roberts, 1998), hotel’s destination image representation on website (Choi et al., 2007), business and leisure travelers’ perceived importance and performance of selected hotel characters (Chu & Choi, 2000), content of hotel and management company ethical codes (Stevens, 1997),

and content of hotel guests' reviews posted on hotel review websites (Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011).

Shea and Roberts (1998) analyzed 11 guest room logbooks provided by owners of a Caribbean resort during a period of 15 months in order to “develop a structure for analysis of post-purchase evaluation” (p. 68), as well as to show how a content analysis of guest room comment logbooks can help reveal important customer responses and reactions to their lodging experiences in a hotel. Shea and Robert (1998) concluded that using content analysis as the main method of data collection is unobtrusive, does not require mailings and collected data are more accessible than that from a formal survey or focus group. Shea and Roberts (1998) also pointed out that content analysis does provide a more objective accounting of the data in guest comment logbooks, however, since the resource of data content analysis relies on is unprompted to some extent, the lack of consistency in both content and form of each individual responses or comments seems to be an issue.

Recently information technology systems have been developed at an amazingly rapid speed, and have been expanded into a broader field of study (O'Connor & Murphy, 2004). Based on historical records, the hospitality industry often lags other economic sectors in adopting information technologies (Buick, 2003); however, the situation has changed recently and information technology systems have been developing rapidly in various aspects of the hospitality industry (O'Connor & Murphy, 2004). The application of information technology in the hospitality industry has resulted in an important change in the hospitality industry through the transformation from paper-based hotel guestbooks

to internet-based reviews and the appearance of various hotel review websites (Susskind, 2005). As a result, guests tend to write and post reviews on either official websites of hotels or hotel review websites, by transforming traditional Word-of-Mouth into electronic Word-of-Mouth (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

Along with the transformation from traditional Word-of-Mouth to electronic Word-of-Mouth in the hospitality industry, the subjects analyzed by content analysis and the way content analysis is conducted have both changed (Simmons et al., 2011).

Simmons conducted research comparing traditional Word-of-Mouth and hotel guests' reviews posted on the hotel official website or hotel review website by creating a platform on which guests get the chance to communicate with each other as well as the service provider, and share opinions with wide audiences just by a click of a mouse. Previous research has shown that the application of information technology together with content analysis enhances the rigor of qualitative research by computer-based content analysis (Simmons et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) pointed out that content analysis is used to examine the content of communication, which involves investigating theoretical definition and empirical measurement. The purpose of conducting content analysis is to “create systematic and objective criteria for transforming written text in highly reliable data that can be analyzed for the symbolic content of communication” (Singleton & Straits, 2005, p. 44). In *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*, Holsti (1969) indicated that, although there is a diversity of the definition of content analysis, a broad agreement is reached on the requirements including objectivity, system and

generality, and the application of content analysis is changing with the evolution of information technology in the hospitality industry. Studies concerning hotel guests' online reviews utilizing content analysis (e.g. Ye et al., 2011; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Stringam & Gerdes, 2010) were completed in a similar way—by collecting words and phrases from a website, and coding them into several categories and subcategories, frequencies of words and phrases were then calculated and listed in tables, followed by further analysis on the relationship between the frequencies of words and phrases and the variables those studies aimed to investigate.

The findings of studies involving content analysis vary based on the different research questions the studies intended to solve. For example, according to Hung and Li's (2007) research regarding the influence of eWOM on virtual consumer communities, eWOM may trigger variety-seeking and excessive purchase to an informed consumer but may also facilitate selective purchase behavior to an uninformed consumer. Another study by Zhang, Ye, Law, and Li (2010) was conducted to examine the factors within the reviews posted on restaurant review website that are mostly able to appeal online users to a restaurant website through the application of content analysis by using a popular hospitality review website in China. Zhang et al concluded that positive consumer reviews, the volume of consumer reviews of a restaurant, and higher price can significantly improve the online popularity of restaurant websites, and that reviews posted by travelers seem to be more likely to provide up-to-date, enjoyable, and reliable information than reviews written by service providers.

Based on previous studies (Shea & Roberts, 1998; Simmons et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2010) conducted by content analysis concerning the hospitality industry, it could be summed up that content analysis method has its advantages such as unobtrusive data collection and easy access to the data; however, this method showed disadvantages in the inconsistency of the content and form of data. Therefore, it is important to combine content analysis with other research methods such as survey, interview or regression in order to collect more consistent data and to analyze data more accurately (Shea & Roberts, 1998).

Evolution from Traditional Word-of-Mouth to Electronic Word-of-Mouth in the Hospitality Industry

Traditional Word-of-Mouth

Previous research has shown that hotels may not be able to perfectly satisfy their guests no matter how excellent the service they provide since hotel guests are becoming more demanding but less loyal than ever before (Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2009). Therefore, it is inevitable that hotel guests will complain about their dissatisfying experience, which is regarded as negative Word-of-Mouth (Susskind, 2002). Karande, Magnini, and Tam (2007), Susskind (2002), and Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar (1998) agreed on the definition of negative traditional Word-of-Mouth in the hospitality industry as the customers' vocal complaints regarding service failures to the service operators.

Haywood (1989) proposed a more general definition of Word-of-Mouth in the hospitality industry in his research, which stated as "the verbal exchange of positive and

negative information about a business's products and services" (p. 55). Haywood also pointed out the reason for the occurrence of traditional Word-of-Mouth is that "services cannot always be seen, touched, tasted, displayed, or demonstrated prior to purchase, and the true essence of services is their intangibility" (p. 56); therefore, service providers need to rely on customers who have experienced the service to evaluate the quality of their service.

Goldenberg, Libai, and Muller (2001) considered Word-of-Mouth communications as a pervasive and intriguing phenomenon which exists when customers express both negative and positive emotions about their dissatisfied and satisfied purchase experiences. In the context of relationship marketing perspective, Kim, Han, and Lee (2001) illustrated Word-of-Mouth as one of the important performance measure of customer-hotel relationship quality. They stated that Word-of-Mouth refers to the interpersonal communication between two or more individuals regarding their experiences in a hotel, and they also considered Word-of-Mouth as the most powerful form of communication in the hospitality industry (Kim et al., 2001).

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

As mentioned previously, the way hotels used to collect guests' reviews has evolved from traditional Word-of-Mouth, such as hotel logbooks, to electronic Word-of-Mouth, that can be found on social media website such as Tripadvisor, Orbitz, Travelocity, Frommers, Travelpost, Fodors, Expedia (About.com Guide, 2006). The internet-based version of hotel guests' reviews is considered as Electronic Word-of-Mouth

(eWOM).

Based on previous studies, the definition of eWOM in the hospitality industry differs according to different studies. Pan et al (2007) illustrated in their study that eWOM in the hospitality industry refers to the online reviews generated by internet users regarding travel destinations, hotels, and tourism services, which is an important source of information for other travelers. Similarly, according to Gretzel and Yoo (2008), eWOM is online guests reviews performed as an information source for travelers when planning their trips. Senecal and Nantel (2004) defined electronic Word-of-Mouth as the feedback left by previous guests on social travel websites, and they further pointed out that electronic Word-of-Mouth consists of two major parts—guests' online reviews and guests assigned ratings for a particular hotel.

Instead of referring to eWOM as just the combination of online reviews and assigned ratings, Jeong and Jang (2011) indicated in their study that eWOM is a kind of consumer behavior of expressing their thoughts, comments towards the services they have received and experienced by posting it to the website or blog of the service organization. Compared with traditional word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth has prompted new ways of communication and tends to become a potentially cost-effective way for hotel marketing (Litvin et al., 2008).

Zhang et al. (2010) defined electronic Word-of-Mouth as the evaluations of products or services online shared by consumers with the usage of internet and information technology. Zhang et al. further divided electronic Word-of-Mouth in the hospitality industry into two types: consumer-generated reviews and editor-generated

reviews. Additionally, they pointed out that consumer-generated reviews are written based on hotel guests' personal experience in a hotel, while editor-generated reviews are written by professional editors who visit hotels with some evaluation purpose (Zhang et al.).

According to Harrison-Walker (2001a), eWOM is further divided into positive and negative categories, and they specifically pointed out that negative eWOM is associated with dissatisfying experiences with the service organization, for example, employee rudeness, employee incompetence, lying and dishonesty. Similarly, Jacoby and Jaccard (1981), and Singh and Howell (1984) also pointed out that customers' dissatisfaction is the source of negative eWOM, and negative eWOM is triggered by dissatisfying perceptions.

Effect on hotel guests' pre- and post-purchase behaviors

Pre-purchase behaviors (decision-making process). A wealth of research on the influence of electronic Word-of-Mouth posed on customers' pre- and post-purchase behavior and their perceptions of experiences in the hospitality industry has been conducted in previous studies. When reviewing the literature generated during the last few decades, most of the studies have focused on the influence of electronic Word-of-Mouth has on customers' pre-purchase and post-purchase behaviors. For pre-purchase behavior, most studies focused on hotel guests' decision-making behavior; whereas for post-purchase behavior, most studies focused on guests' repeat visit behavior (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009; Ye et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2010). Senecal and Nantel (2004) found that eWOM posted by previous consumers influences

the purchase decision-making behavior of the consumers who read the eWOM.

Varadarajan and Yadav (2002) further proposed that eWOM may have a strong impact on consumers' judgments of the product or services. Dellarocas (2003) proposed that customers may be able to form their idea and opinions on purchasing products or services more easily when they are accessible to other customers' online reviews regarding their previous experiences with the service provider.

Similarly, Gretzel and Yoo (2008) found that most United States customers have posted their comments on hotel review websites, and most of them expressed their trust toward the comments and thoughts posted by other customers who have experienced the services. According to the statistical result provided by Travelindustrywire.com (2007), 84% of potential hotel guests were influenced by online reviews posted by other travelers in their reservation making process. Tripadvisor.com (2006) conducted similar research and obtained similar results in a different perspective which indicated that hundreds of millions of potential travelers consult online reviews each year. Goldenberg et al (2001) stressed that customers' decision-making behavior is significantly affected by reviews posted by other consumers who have experienced the services provided by a specific hotel property.

According to Litvin et al (2008) and Sigala, Lockwood, and Jones (2001), an increasing number of travelers are using information derived from the Internet in their travel planning process. In addition, the *Pew Internet and American Life Project* (2006) also showed that searching for travel-related information is one of the most popular online activities. Similarly, Compete, Inc. (2007) found that about 30% of hotel bookings

and purchases were made after guests' visit a message board, forum, or online community since they trust the eWOM generated by other hotel guests and think that it would provide valuable information for making wiser hotel purchase and travel planning decision.

Forrester Research (2006) illustrated that about 35% of total online consumption is related to the hospitality and tourism industry, and more than 74% of hotel guests use eWOM as a primary information source in their trip planning process. Moreover, Parra-Lopez, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, and Díaz-Armas (2011) conducted a similar study considering travelers' intention to use social media when planning for their vacation trips. They proposed a theoretical model to explain factors that influence travelers' decision-making behavior and their motivation to turn to social media to organize their coming trips. It is stated in their study that the potential travelers' perception derived from the social media during their decision-making process is important since it may provide an excellent information source regarding the design and plan of future trips (Parra-Lopez et al., 2011).

Gretzel and Yoo (2008) also found that hotel guests often consider online reviews offered by other guests to be more up-to-date, enjoyable, and reliable than information provided by hotel itself through advertisements. Moreover, they investigated the influence of travel reviews in hotel guests' trip planning process, and showed that about three-quarters of travelers have considered eWOM as a source of information during their trip planning process, which proved the importance of eWOM in an individual perspective (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). On the other hand, based on data obtained from a major travel website in China, Ye et al (2011) made an opening effort to explore the

influence of eWOM on hotel companies' performance in terms of bookings and sales in an organization perspective.

Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) revealed in their study that positive eWOM may help hotels improve potential guests' perception of the hotels. Furthermore, Jeong and Jang (2011) reported in their research that positive and satisfactory perception of services tends to stimulate customers' motivation to express positive emotions, and they also noted that customers are motivated to articulate positive eWOM after experiencing excellent services. Wang, Yu, and Fesenmaier (2002) concluded from their research that potential travelers' intention to utilize social media in their trip decision-making process is mostly due to their perception of the benefits gained from the information it provided.

Post-purchase behavior (repeat visit). Loyal customers tend to spend more compared to non-loyal customers (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). More specifically, Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (1996) demonstrated that the cost of obtaining a new customer is about five times the cost of keeping a loyal and returning customer. In the hospitality industry, loyal guests often spread positive Word-of-Mouth, making referrals to potential guests both through physical communication and posting online review (eWOM), providing references and publicity, as well as serving on advisory boards (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). Therefore, repeat visit behavior of hotel guests is influential to the performance of hotel businesses (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). By reviewing the literature generated during the last few decades, factors that influences customers' revisit behavior through electronic commerce are different from those in traditional commerce because

the occurrence and development of electronic Word-of-Mouth (Wen, Prybutok, & Xu, 2011).

The impact eWOM has on customers' retention behavior after purchasing a product or service has been heavily researched by a wealth of studies (e.g., Harris, Grewal, Mohr, & Bernhardt, 2006; Harrison-Walker, 2001b; Holloway & Beatty, 2003; Litvin et al., 2008; Mattila & Mount, 2003). Tax, Chandrashekar, and Christiansen (1993) reported that eWOM plays an increasingly important role in customers' post-purchase behaviors as technology develops and the electronic communication among customers develops as a result. This is why it is crucial for service organizations to provide excellent service to encourage positive eWOM and reduce negative eWOM (Jeong & Jang, 2011). Harrison-Walker (2001b) illustrated that negative eWOM may lead to lower probability of repurchase behavior of old customers and initial purchase of potential customers as well. Approximately 75% of customers tend not to purchase from a service provider after they experienced a service failure and wrote negative eWOM for the provider (Holloway & Beatty, 2003).

In the hospitality and tourism industry, eWOM also plays an important role in obtaining repeat visit of the hotel guests according to previous literature (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Vermeulen and Seegers illustrated this point since the effect of eWOM generated by hotel guests on the performance of hotel companies remained unknown to a large extent in the context of hospitality and tourism industry. This effect becomes clear as Vermeulen and Seeger (2009) demonstrated it by conducting an experimental study to determine the influence of eWOM on the attitudes of hotel guests to hotels and showed

that exposure to eWOM raised hotel guests' awareness towards hotels, and furthermore that positive eWOM enhanced the positive perceptions of hotel guests hold towards hotels. According to Schlesinger and Heskett (1991), guests' eWOM is positively related to hotel guests' "willingness to recommend", "recommendations to others" and "revisit intention". Also satisfied guests tend to spread positive eWOM and tend to return to a hotel more than dissatisfied guests do (Anderson, 1998).

Effect of the way of handling eWOM

Based on previous research (Karatepe, 2006; Yuksel, Kilinc, & Yuksel, 2006), the way hotels handling guests' eWOM may also influence guests' revisit behavior.

According to Reichheld and Sasser (1990), Smith and Bolton (1998), and Tax et al. (1998), effective handling of guests' negative eWOM may result in positive subsequent behavior of the guests such as revisit or recommendation to friends and family. Likewise, Tax et al (1998) indicated that guests' satisfaction resulted from hotels' excellent reaction to service failure or guests' negative eWOM poses a positive influence on guests' revisit behavior.

On the other hand, after conducting research considering customers' perceptions of hotels' negative eWOM handling performance, Maxham III and Netemeyer (2002) revealed that guests' satisfaction due to hotels' positive respond to service failure and guests' complaint also results in a positive impact on guests' willingness of sharing positive eWOM. Moreover, effective handling of customers' negative eWOM leads to increases in customer satisfaction level as well as their revisit behavior. On the contrary,

failure in handling customers' negative eWOM or handling negative eWOM unfairly results in a decrease in customer satisfaction level, WOM referral, and revisit intention (Kim et al., 2009).

In summary, electronic Word-of-Mouth generated by hotel guests regarding travel destinations, hotels, restaurants and other tourism service organizations has become an increasingly essential source of information for potential and real travelers in their reservation decision-making process as well as in their repeat visit decision-making process (Pan et al., 2007).

Important hotel attributes and guests' repeat visit behavior

In any market for any industry, it is important that customers will return after their first purchase, and it would be even better if customers make the company their first choice while planning for a new purchase (Hanai, Oguchi, Ando, & Yamaguchi, 2008). However, Hanai et al. noted that many companies are facing the loss of existing customers due to competition from other companies that produce similar products or provide a similar type of services in the same market segment. Therefore, retaining existing customers is regarded as an increasingly important topic in many industries, especially in those emphasizing service qualities.

Considerable research has focused on the strategies that can be utilized in satisfying as well as retaining customers for businesses (Walsh, 1995; Yoon & Ekinci, 2003). Moreover, according to Davis and Vollmann (1990), diverse factors from various perspectives regarding certain goods or services determine customers' satisfaction level

which in turn leads to customer behaviors such as positive Word-of-Mouth, recommendation to friends and families, as well as their repeat purchase of the goods or services. Numerous studies have revealed that guests revisit the same hotel property if they had a satisfying experience with certain hotel property previously (Gundersen, Heide, & Olsson, 1996; Hallowell, 1996; Ross, 1993; Spinelli & Canavos, 2000). Hanai, Matsushima, Ando, Yamaguchi, and Oguchi (2005) took a further step investigating the important attributes that trigger guests' repeat visit behavior and concluded that low quality of service provided by hotel employees and an inconvenient or noisy location of the property lead to negative impact on guests' repeat visit behaviors to some extent.

As a service concentrated industry which enrolls a great amount of communication between customer and customer as well as customer and company, the hospitality industry also advocates guests' repeat patronage or revisit behavior (Hanai et al., 2008). As stated previously, the hospitality industry is a service industry; therefore, it shares common characteristics with other service industries such as retailing, airline, banking, etc. (Wong, Dean, & White, 1999). With the intention to outweigh the large number of competitors and to achieve success in the hospitality industry, hotel companies need to offer extraordinary service to their guests in order to make them feel satisfied. Thus, Choi and Chu (2001) illustrated that it is necessary for hotel companies to devise approaches to make their products and services unique and outstanding among their competitors in the highly competitive the hospitality industry where similar products and services are provided.

The rationale for hotels to improve the uniqueness of their products as well as services has been demonstrated repeatedly—customers in the hospitality industry who had satisfying experience with a hotel in terms of excellent services or room facilities are more likely to establish loyalty (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) which, in turn, leads to repeated visits to the hotel property (Fornell, 1992) as well as positive Word-of-Mouth communication (Halstead & Page, 1992). Nevertheless, the hospitality industry has its unique characteristics. For example, consumption of the products is occasional and infrequent, and the prices for the products and services are more expensive than those in other service industries (Nishimura, 2004). These unique characteristics result in special attributes that need continual focus in order to improve hotel companies' ability to attract repeat visits by their guests (Davis & Vollmann, 1990).

Previous studies have focused on hotel attributes and the influence on hotel guests' satisfaction of their experience with a hotel property (Atkinson, 1988; Cadotte & Turgeon, 1988; Heung, Mok, & Kwan, 1996; Knutson, 1988; Leblanc, 1992). Wilkins, Merrilees, and Herington (2007) proposed that hotel guests utilize a range of attributes to access their perceived service quality provided by a hotel at which they have stayed. Ekinci, Dawes, and Massey (2008) found that both physical and service quality of a hotel pose a positive impact on guests' satisfaction. Mohsin and Lockyer (2010) further pointed out that some of the hotel attributes that affect hotel guests' satisfaction level are linked to intangible service factors, while some are linked to tangible physical factors, and others are to some extent difficult to define, such as the attribute of "value of money". Mohsin and Lockyer (2010) further explained that intangible attributes are often service related,

including “customer service, understanding and caring on the part of hotel management, assurance, the relative convenience of dealing with transactions while staying in a hotel, service received at the restaurant, if any” while the tangible attributes are often physical facilities related, which include “the availability and quality of various facilities in the room (e.g., coffee facilities and bathrobe) and in the entire hotel (e.g., swimming pool and gym), the physical appearance of hotel employees, the cleanliness of the room and the entire hotel, the restaurant and the quality of food, if any” (Han, Back, & Barrett, 2009; Wu & Liang, 2009).

According to Dolnicar and Otter (2003), several hotel attributes may affect guest satisfaction as well as their repeat visit behavior. Callan (1996), and Lockyer (2000 & 2002) indicated from their research result that cleanliness is the most essential attribute as it is one of the utmost concerns of most guests when evaluating the hotel property in which they stayed. Nevertheless, Oguchi, Okamoto, Shimizu, and Matsushima (2004) considered quality of guest service provided by the hotel employees as the most important attribute that contributes to improving guests’ satisfaction. Furthermore, Ekinici (2004) and Ekinici, Riley, and Fife-Schaw (1998) found that the quality of service provided by the hotel employees also influence guest behavioral intention (e.g., the intention to visit the same hotel property repeatedly, as well as their readiness to recommend a particular hotel property).

By reviewing previous literature on hotel attributes that influence hotel guests’ satisfaction, it was revealed that some inconsistencies exist on the impact of price on guests’ overall satisfaction (Hanai et al., 2008). Some researchers hold the view that

guests do not pay much attention on the value of their experience when they evaluate a particular hotel property. According to Chu and Choi (2000), the attribute of price is only valuable when accessing other attributes such as cleanliness and ambience. While others disagree with this point of view argue that the value of the hotel is one of the most important elements that affect guests' perception of their hotel experience and is one of the most important elements that guests consider when evaluating certain hotel property they stayed in (Knutson, 2000).

In their research on hotel guests' perceptions on the attributes that affect guests' loyalty, Ramanathan and Ramanathan (2011) found that "value of money" is an essential attribute that has a positive effect on guests' intention to stay in the same property repeatedly. They further stated that for different types of guests—business guests, guests of independent hotels, leisure guests, and guests of chain hotels, the attribute of "value of money" plays different roles. They found that, for business guests and guests of independent hotels, "value of money" has a positive effect on their intention to visit repeatedly to the same hotel property, while for leisure guests and guests of chain hotels, "value of money" turns out to be a "dissatisfier". According to Mason, Tideswell, and Roberts (2006), and Nasution and Mavondo (2008), hotel guests' loyalty is determined by their positive experience with certain hotel property, and the experience itself is influenced by a number of attributes of hotel including "customer service", "cleanliness", "facilities", "price", "food", and "location" (Clow, Garretson, & Kurtz, 1994; McCleary, Weaver, & Hutchinson, 1993; Yavas & Babakus, 2005).

Purpose of traveling

Based on previous research, travelers can be divided into three groups according to their purpose of traveling: business only, business and leisure, and leisure only (Cai, Lehto, & O’leary, 2001). A copious amount of previous work has mentioned these three groups of travelers. Kim and Ritchie (2012) defined business travelers as those travelers who travel for their business trips which has an economic impact on the hospitality industry. Previous research has also defined business travelers as travelers whose travel-related costs and expenses are all paid by the company or organization that the travelers work for (thefreedictionary.com, 2012). Based on a study conducted by Aguilera (2008), business travelers are defined as people who go on a work-related trip to a traveling destination that is different from their regular place of work. This definition is considered fairly general which captures the core of the phenomenon and states the main function of business travel since “it covers various activities and excludes commuting to work and regular trips of businessmen within their local surrounding, thus addressing a spatial perspective” (p. 393) (Tretyakevich, 2012).

Moreover, Wootton and Stevens (1995) demonstrated that the population of business travelers has been increasing at a high speed during the last three decades. There is statistical evidence revealing that the total amount of business travelers in the United Kingdom has increased approximately three times from 1982 to 2007, which has reached a huge number of 9.02 billion (Beaverstock, Derudder, & Faulconbridge, 2009). This trend continues to increase in business travelers despite the recession of the economy (Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, Derudder, & Witlox, 2009). Furthermore, according to

Swarbrook and Horner (2001), business travelers tend to spend higher amounts per person while traveling compared with leisure travelers. Business travelers can also be further divided into individual business travelers and business tourism based on Davidson and Cope (2003). Leisure travelers, on the other hand, are those whose main purpose for traveling is to take a vacation from their daily work and life by staying in a nice hotel or resort, spending time on beaches, in spas, casinos, or just in the guest room (McGuigan, USA Today). According to a study conducted by Gilbert and Abdullah (2002), leisure travelers can also be further divided into two subcategories: holiday-taking groups and non-holiday-taking groups. According to Cai et al. (2001), the three groups of travelers differ in several aspects including their travel planning behaviors, traveling characteristics and the characteristics of their behaviors of joining in the activities while they are traveling at the travel destination.

Hotel attributes (Servicescape)

Guests stay in a hotel property either when they are on a business trip or on a vacation. They spend money on the property not only for staying in the guest rooms, but also for enjoying the facilities and services provided by certain hotel properties (Ananth , DeMicco, Moreo, & Howey, 1992). Guests evaluate the quality of their hotel stay from the perspectives of both the physical and the service qualities of a hotel property (Ekinci et al., 2008; Wilkins et al., 2007). In recent years, the impact of atmospherics or physical decoration elements on guests has been noticed by hotel managers and pointed out in the

majority of studies regarding hotel marketing, customer satisfaction, and organizational behavior (Bitner, 1992).

The influence of the physical environment on customer behaviors as well as company image is especially noted by hotel and restaurant companies since they are service-oriented and involve a great amount of service encounters as the service is produced and consumed simultaneously while the customer is in the 'factory', always experiencing the total service within the company's physical facilities (p. 57) (Baker, 1987; Bitner, 1986; Booms & Bitner, 1982; Kotler, 1973; Shostack, 1977; Upah & Fulton, 1985; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985). Furthermore, according to Bitner (1992), for hotel companies, the place where service is produced can strongly influence the way customers perceive their experience of the service provided. According to Berry and Clark (1986) and Shostack (1977), potential customers of hotels even seek reviews regarding the quality of certain hotel property during their travel planning process.

Previous research has also indicated that hotel customers' satisfaction about the service they received may be affected by the physical environment of hotel properties (Bitner, 1990; Harrell, Hutt, & Anderson, 1980). Therefore, it is important for hotel management to know which perspectives of the hotel property guests are mostly concern about so that they could avoid service failures on those in order to satisfy their guests (Ananth et al., 1992). According to Bitner (1992), servicescape is an artificial environment rather than an environment that is formed naturally or socially. Based on Bitner's research, servicescape is mainly considered to be the physical environment of the hotel property. Bitner (1992) further pointed out that servicescape of a hotel consists of

three proportions: “ambient conditions”, “spatial layout and functionality”, and “signs, symbols and artifacts” (p. 60).

Some studies have addressed servicescape in different ways. Wakefield and Blodgett (1996) divided servicescape into five dimensions including “layout accessibility”, “facility aesthetics”, “seating comfort”, “electronic equipment and displays”, and “cleanliness” in their research regarding leisure service settings of major league baseball stadiums. In a follow-up study, Wakefield and Blodgett (1999) divided servicescape in a slightly different way regarding leisure service settings of professional hockey games, which included three dimensions: “building design and décor”, “equipment”, and “ambience”. In another study regarding casinos, Lucas (2003) illustrated that servicescape could be divided into five dimensions, including “layout navigation”, “cleanliness”, “seating comfort”, “interior décor”, and “ambience”. Ryu and Jang (2007) stated in their research regarding upscale restaurant that servicescape should include “facility aesthetics”, “lighting”, “ambience”, “layout”, and “dining equipment”.

According to Newman (2007), servicescape should include “space” and “way-findings” in all service sectors (e.g., international airport). In a more broad view, Mohsin and Lockyer (2010) revealed that not only tangible physical service factors influence guests’ satisfaction level, but intangible service factors also impact the extent of guests’ satisfaction. Some important intangible service factors cited by Mohsin and Lockyer include: “customer service” and “vibe”. Mohsin and Lockyer defined “vibe” in a broad way that includes all the elements influencing the atmosphere of a restaurant or hotel property. Vibe is a relatively new concept that has been discussed in recent years. It

was used in a study conducted by O'Mahony, Hall, Binney, and Hede (2004), in which "vibe" was defined as invisible atmospherics incorporating two elements: "invisible organization and systems" and "intangible situational influences such as perceptions of service quality, friendliness of staff and general atmosphere".

Guests' perception of hotel experience

Based on previous literature, servicescape of a service organization may either have a positive or negative impact on customers' perceptions, which is especially true in the hospitality industry since customers of a hotel or restaurant may often spend more time observing the physical facilities as well as service provided with or without conscious thought (Kim & Moon, 2009). Hotel guests' perception of the service experience during their stay in a hotel property could have great influence on their behaviors (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The physical environment of a hotel property creates an effect on guests' emotions, which in turn leads to either positive or negative behavior of the guests based on the M-R model established by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). Guests' negative perceptions need special attention from hotel management since negative feelings are most often related to service failures including some embarrassing encounters (Mohsin, 2006).

In the area of service management, service encounter is frequently studied and widely used in reference to the interaction between customers and service operations (Stauss & Mang, 1999). Furthermore, service encounters in the hospitality industry create good opportunities for hotel operations to increase sales opportunities of their services

and products, as well as to establish “positive impressions” on their customers, and to improve the “image of the property” (Stauss & Mang). However, misunderstandings that result in embarrassing encounters can have consequences of both commercial and social harm to the hotel operation, especially in the international service trade. Mohsin (2006) pointed out that embarrassing encounters may be caused by the globalization process of the service industry in which encounters with people from diverse backgrounds need to be managed appropriately and cultural gaps need to be recognized and minimized.

Mehrabian and Russell (1974) stated that the reason hotel guests’ perceptions are impacted by hotel physical environment is that the perception of the guests is derived from their exposure to the facilities and services of the hotel property. For example, according to Derbaix and Pham (1991), hotel guests’ perception of the value of the hotel may be stimulated by their knowledge of the extraordinary low or high price of the facilities or services provided by the hotel. Similarly, Russell and Snodgrass (1987) stated that the extent of pleasure feeling is determined by the hedonic service interaction. Baker (1986) indicated that the feelings of hotel guests are often impacted by “tangible cues”, such as physical environment, of a hotel property if direct physical contact is not available during a service interaction. Studies by Ryu and Jang (2007), and Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) revealed that upscale restaurants and hotels are generally hedonic or emotion-centered. Furthermore, according to the study conducted by Wakefield and Blodgett (1994), a direct and positive relationship between hotel guests’ perceptions and their experiences of the services as well as physical facilities during their stay in a hotel

property was found. Thus, suggesting that a hotel's management and staff may have some influence of a guest's opinion of the property.

Post-purchase intention

Customers' travel behavior in the tourism industry is affected by various factors. In order to investigate these factors, Schmoll (1977) devised a model focused on customers' behavior in the tourism industry that is mainly influenced by "travel stimuli", "personal and social determinants", and "external variables". Schmoll further noted that "travel stimuli" include: advertising and promotion, travel literature, suggestions or reports from other travelers, and travel trade suggestions and recommendations "Personal and social determinants" include: socioeconomic status, personality features, social influences and aspirations, and attitudes and values. "External variables" include: confidence in travel trade intermediary, image of destination service, previous travel experience, assessment of objective or subjective risks, and constraints of time, costs, etc. These factors further lead to customers' motivations, desires or needs, expectations, assessments, as well as decisions.

Based on research by Bergenwall (1998), customers' perceptions of the experienced hotel facilities and the received service may result in further behaviors, i.e., consequences of their feelings and emotions. One of the consequences is referred to as revisit intention. Hotel guests' revisit intention may be affected by a number of factors according to Harris and Ezeh (2008). Harris and Ezeh found that the relationship between guests' perception of their experience in the hotel and their revisit intentions is moderated

by both personal and environmental factors. They revealed that the guests will be more willing to revisit the hotel property the greater they perceive appropriateness of the music of the hotel property. They also revealed that the better the service quality the hotel provides, the more satisfied the guests will be, and the more likely the guests will be come back to the hotel property. Moreover, they also indicated that the guests will be more willing to repeatedly visit the hotel property if their perceptions are greater regarding the cleanliness, aesthetic appeal, comfort furnishings, hotel staff customer orientation, staff credibility, staff competence, and staff physical attractiveness.

Ramanathan and Ramanathan (2011) revealed that “value of money” is a factor that may dissatisfy hotel guests and keep them from revisiting the hotel property for leisure guests and guests of chain hotels. However, for business guests and guests of independent hotels, “value of money” is an important factor that may remain the guests and promote repeat visit intentions of the guests. Ramanathan and Ramanathan noted that “customer service”, “room quality”, and “quality of food” are factors that may dissatisfy business guests and guests of independent hotels, while for leisure guests and guests of chain hotels, they may turn out to be factors that may remain them as loyal customers who are going to come back potentially.

Summary

This chapter provided background on content analysis theory and studies related to assessment of hotel satisfaction using tradition Word-of-Mouth and recently adopted internet measures employing eWOM. Additionally, traditional word-of-mouth in service

industries and the hospitality industry was briefly talked about. The evolution from traditional word-of-mouth to electronic word-of-mouth was then discussed in this chapter. Since this study focused on the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the hospitality industry the effects of eWOM on hotel customers' behaviors were addressed in the literature review. Important hotel attributes related to customer satisfaction and post-purchase behaviors that had been covered in previous research were also discussed in this chapter. The next chapter will talk about the methodology used to conduct this study.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

According to Gretzel and Yoo (2008), and Pan et al (2007), content analysis is a method that is used to extract and investigate words and phrases from reviews (i.e. electronic Word-of-Mouth). This study was conducted using content analysis to research posts by U.S. guests on Tripadvisor.com for both American and Chinese five-star hotels for the purpose of revealing the effects of hotel guests' perception of their experience on their electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) as well as their post-purchase behaviors such as repeat visit and making recommendation to their family or friends. The two countries (i.e., the United States and China) were selected for comparison in this study mainly because the United States and China are both listed in the top 10 most popular travel destinations in the world (MapsofWorld.com, 2013). Moreover, in recent years many American-based hotel brands have established international branches in China, which has resulted in an increasing number of U.S. citizen travelers choosing to stay in hotel properties in China that belong to American hotel brands (Mak, 2008). Five-star hotels were chosen since previous studies have investigated the impact of hotel customers' eWOM has on their satisfaction level as well as repeat visit behaviors in three or four-star hotels (Skogland & Siguaw, 2004), or in upscale hotels which including both four- and five-star hotels (Karatepe & Ekiz, 2004). However, few previous studies have specifically focused on customers' eWOM for five-star hotels. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this gap.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the differences in the perceptions of U.S. guests in American versus Chinese hotels based on the hotel's services, room facilities, value, cleanliness, location and sleep quality?
2. How do the differences in U.S. guests' perceptions result in differences in their eWOM behaviors regarding hotels in the United States and China?
3. How do the differences in eWOM written by previous guests lead to different post-purchase behaviors of U.S. guests?

Content Analysis

Content analysis was selected as the method of data collection for this study since this kind of data collection method makes it possible to investigate customers' thoughts and comments for hotel operations by analyzing recorded written documents and putting the words into categories (Chu & Choi, 2000; Gretzel, 2006; Pan et al., 2007; Shea & Roberts, 1998; Ye et al., 2011).

According to Holsti (1969), content analysis is "a well-established research method that is commonly applied in social science studies for the purpose of analyzing communications" (p. 235). GAO (1989) defined content analysis as a method of "a set of procedures for transforming non-structured information into a format that allows analysis" (p. 6). Based on research conducted by Weber (1990), content analysis is "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text" (p. 9). Similarly, Leedy and Ormrod (2001) identified content analysis as "a detailed and systematic

examination of the contents of a particular body of material in order to see if any pattern, theme, or bias exists” (p. 22).

Content analysis can be utilized to investigate any kind of documented material provided that the information required in the study is accessible to be repeatedly analyzed for reliability verification according to GAO (1989). In most cases, content analysis is used to examine written documents; however, content analysis can also be applied to investigate other recorded communications such as movies, pictures, television programs, legislation, regulations, work papers, case studies, reports, answers to survey questions, newspapers, journal articles, as well as letters (GAO, 1989). Nevertheless, according to GAO, any verbal type of material including an interview or a lecture cannot be analyzed by content analysis unless it has been transcribed into a written format.

Simmons et al (2011) illustrated that content analysis is a method that takes an in-depth look at collected information, and the information analyzed by content analysis can be in the form of pictures, tweets, statuses, blogs, videos, interviews, focus groups, etc. Moreover, content analysis can be used to identify what exists, to act as reality checks, to study societal change, to test a hypothesis, and to document trends according to Simmons et al.

Content analysis has been widely used in previous studies in many different fields including but not limited to political science, psychology, communication, journalism and media (e.g., Choi et al., 2007; Pantelidis, 2010; Shea & Roberts, 1998; Simmons et al., 2011). Researchers have frequently utilized content analysis as the primary methodology for their studies mainly because content analysis enables them to classify text that

contains many words into less complicated content categories, thus it is easier and more convenient to process statistical data in their studies (Weber, 1990). According to Insh and Moore (1997), content analysis has a qualitative basis, which enables research using content analysis to “capture a richer sense of concepts within the data” (p. 2).

Simmons et al (2011) posited that content analysis may assist in answering questions such as “who are they?” or “what are they sharing?” In addition, content analysis enables researchers to classify the information using their own categories, which makes the information collection and process much easier. Simmons et al noted that the combination of content analysis and online information makes it less troublesome to collect information considering customers’ opinions towards an operation and their pre- and post-purchase behaviors. According to previous literature, by applying content analysis, “numerical comparisons among and within documents” (GAO, 1989, p. 9) can be implemented; documents over time, in various situations, or across various groups can be compared; association of two or more statements within a single document or set of documents can be examined and compared; statements from two or more different sources can be compared (GAO).

In the article, *Facilitating content analysis in tourism research*, Stepchenkova, Kirilenko, and Morrison (2009) illustrated that content analysis is a powerful data collection technique which enables researchers to examine social communications directly through word documents and focus on the personal interaction, allows both quantitative and qualitative processes, delivers the possibility of compare data over time by analyzing word documents, and makes it accessible to look into complex models of

human thoughts and language use. Likewise, it was pointed out by Simmons et al (2011) that, by conducting content analysis, researchers may be able to discover certain trends or patterns in their data, thus it might be easier for them to do the statistics for their studies or make comparisons of the collected data according to their research questions.

The hospitality industry is communication-centered, thus it is beneficial for hotel or tourism operations to be able to get access to customers' inner thoughts or feelings as a reflection of their service interaction with the operations (Sararoudi, 2008). Content analysis makes it possible to investigate customers' thoughts and comments for hotel operations by analyzing recorded word documents such as hotel guest logbooks, online reviews, blogs, virtual communities, wikis, collaborative tagging, and media files shared on websites (e.g., Youtube (Chu & Choi, 2000; Gretzel, 2006; Pan et al., 2007; Shea & Roberts, 1998; Ye et al., 2011). This study was conducted to determine whether hotel guests' perceptions of their hotel experience will have an impact on their online reviews, and whether their online reviews will have an impact on their post-purchase behavior in terms of repeat visiting. Therefore, the object of content analysis for this study was customers' online reviews for selected hotel properties.

During recent years, the growth of Internet applications in the hospitality and tourism industry has led to the great amount of online reviews of hotel and tourism operations on travel-related websites, such as Tripadvisor.com, Expedia.com, and Travelocity.com generated by customers (Tuominen, 2011). Nearly 75% of potential travelers have taken online reviews posted by previous customers into consideration in their travel planning process (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Similarly, based on Tripadvisor.com

(2012) and European Travel Commission (2009), each year hundreds of millions of travelers seek suggestions from travel-related review websites as they are planning for future trips, and a majority (88%) of these potential travelers are influenced by the content of the reviews they read considering their choices of the hotel operations.

Buhalis and Law (2008) posited that the development of information technology in the hospitality and tourism industry has deeply changed the way travel-related information is shared among customers of hotel and tourism operations. Nevertheless, research has shown that online reviews posted by previous customers have a great impact on the performance of hotel or tourism operations since the quality of goods sold by these operations remains unknown to potential customers before the consumption happens (Chevlier & Mayzlin, 2006; Ghose & Ipeiroitis, 2006; Zhu & Zhang, 2006). According to the previous studies conducted regarding the impact of online reviews on customers' pre- and post-purchase behaviors as well as the performance of hotel and tourism operations, it is beneficial for hotel and tourism operations to find a way in order to be able to analyze online reviews posted by their previous customers.

Due to the large amount of information available from the travel-related websites, the workload of data analysis is huge, and requires a well-organized, category-based, and classification-abled data analysis method to assist the analysis process. Content analysis is an appropriate method to conduct this sort of investigation based on previous literature (Hidayat, 2011). By investigating customers' online reviews using content analysis, words and phrases used in the reviews written by previous customers of hotel and tourism

operations can be collected and classified into categories in order to provide convenience for further analysis after the data collection process.

According to Kassarian (1977), content analysis is able to organize the words and phrases under each category into an order determined by the frequency of occurrence of each word or phrase. Research conducted by Easwar (1993) suggested that it is appropriate to use previously developed categories as a reference when determining categories for current study if previous developed categories are well-matched with the concept model of the current study. Since categories created by Shea and Roberts (1998) in their previous study, *A content analysis for postpurchase evaluation using customer comment logbooks*, displayed some similarities to the structure of content analysis of the current study, which matched the rating scale provided by Tripadvisor.com perfectly, categories used in the content analysis process of this study were based on those developed by Shea and Roberts in their analysis regarding the customer comment logbooks of the resort hotel.

For comparison purposes in this study, five pairs of hotel properties were selected for both United States and China. Each pair of hotel properties belonged to the same American-based five-star hotel brand. One of the properties in each pair was chosen from a city in the United States and the other from a city in China. Additionally, each pair of cities was selected based on similarities between the two cities either economically or politically. For example, Washington, DC, and Beijing were selected as one pair of cities since the two cities are both the capital cities of the two countries. Another example would be Shanghai and New York. These two cities were grouped into a pair because of

the similar economic status they performed in each country and are both classified as the largest city in each country (city-data.com, 2013). The five American-based hotel brands, chosen according to the hotel class as categorized by Tripadvisor.com, included: Wynn, Park Hyatt, Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton, and Marriott. Moreover, these hotel properties all possess one or more restaurants according to Tripadvisor.com. The guests' reviews collected in this study were selected based on the order they were posted on Tripadvisor.com (i.e., reviews from most up-to-date to earlier). The coding process started from reviews posted in March, 2013 and moved back to the earlier ones in order to collect the 25 most recent reviews for each selected hotel property, and the earliest reviews collected in this study was posted in September, 2007. Therefore, the time frame of this study was from September, 2007 to March, 2013. This study ended up with 263 reviews collected in total.

Categories

Shea and Roberts (1998) established five primary categories for their further content analysis during the pretest process, including: (1) general descriptors, (2) purpose of the visit, (3) comments referencing resort activities, (4) resort attributes, and (5) evaluative phrases describing the experience. Some of the categories were further subdivided into several sub-categories, depending on the information provided by comments made by the hotel guests. According to suggestions made by Shea and Roberts regarding future research, the current study applied some minor modifications to the categories developed and used in their research, considering the characteristics displayed

in the data of this study. For example, since the data of this study analyzed online reviews written by only one author, the sub-category documenting the number of authors was deleted in this study. In addition, data of this study were obtained from Tripadvisor.com, and the website itself offers a rating scale indicating some aspects for the customers to evaluate; therefore, customers may be led to write something related to the categories mentioned by the rating scale. However, the category of “products” used in Shea and Roberts’ (1998) was a general concept covering all physical items customers may get in the hotel property, which was not appropriate for this study. Thus, this category was also removed from the category. The categories of this study were developed based on the research done by Shea and Roberts; however, the way they were organized was mainly according to the rating scale provided by Tripadvisor.com in order to provide convenience for the coding process that follows. The methodological concept model used in this study is available in the appendix.

The category of general descriptors in this study was used for the goal of recording demographic information of the previous guests who have posted the reviews for a certain hotel property, as well as the basic features of each review. The demographic information of the reviewers is available directly from Tripadvisor.com, which provided basic information provided by the reviewer, including: the user name of the reviewer’s account, gender, age, location of residence, travel style, traveling preference, usual purpose of traveling, the purpose of current visit, expectations regarding facilities the hotel property is going to provide, usual travel group, the travel group of current visit, length of current stay, and whether current stay is a repeat visit. The basic features of each

review included the length of the review page, review date, and travel date. The most notable issue was that the feature of “review date” referred to the date the review was posted to Tripadvisor, while the feature of “travel date” referred to the date the reviewer stayed in the hotel property.

The category of hotel attributes was further divided into seven subcategories: (1) location, (2) service, (3) room facilities, (4) cleanliness, (5) sleep quality, (6) value, and (7) restaurant/food and beverage. The former six subcategories were developed based on the categories of the rating scale provided by Tripadvisor.com (Tripadvisor, 2012), and the last subcategory was added to the provided rating scale of Tripadvisor.com for the reason that all the hotel properties examined in this study contained one or more restaurants. As a result, most previous customers mentioned their experiences regarding food, drinks, or the vibes of the restaurants or bars during their stay at certain hotel property, whereas some customers showed their consideration for the food related issues even more than the guest room itself.

In several previous studies with similar purposes of study as the present study, a category relevant to food and beverage were included as an important category documenting customers’ comments about food and drinks they experienced at the hotel restaurant (Choi & Chu, 2001; Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010). However, the point that should be noted is that this subcategory only contained content related to the restaurant belonging to the hotel property. In other words, customers’ comments about restaurants outside the hotel property were not included in this subcategory. The subcategory, location, was established for the purpose of recording guests’ perceptions and comments

about the geographic position of the hotel property. Some guests would mention the location of the hotel property they stayed in, and most of them made positive comment on the location of the hotel property for the reason that it is within walking distance to several shopping malls and good local restaurants. However, negative comments about the location mainly resulted from the inconvenience of getting to everything caused by either tiresome transportation or long distance.

The service subcategory was used to document guests' comments considering the service provided by every department of a hotel property. This subcategory was one of the most frequently mentioned in customers' comments; therefore, numerous previous studies considering hotel guests' online reviews conducting content analysis included customer service, service quality, or staff issues as one of the most vital categories or subcategories (Hidayat, 2011; Levy, Duan, & Boo, 2013; Shea & Roberts, 1998). In the pretest of this study, this category recorded customers' positive comments as well as complaints towards front desk staff, concierge, bellman, restaurant or bar tender, housekeeping service, shuttle bus service, and room service at a hotel property. Positive comments on service subcategory focused mainly on staff's accommodating attitude, behaviors, and excellent service quality provided in various venues, for example, fast check in and out performed by front desk staff. The pretest also revealed that similar words or phrases were used in the online reviews when the customers thought highly of the service provided by the hotel property. The pretest indicated that the main idea conveyed in customers' complaints about service aspects focused on the delay of service

inquiry reaction, the failure of problem handling, and bad attitude performed by some staff.

The third subcategory under hotel attributes, room facilities, categorized customers' comments on the in-room facilities and various facilities outside the guest room provided by the hotel property. Through the pretest, it was noted that previous guests generally provided a general comment on their perception of the guest room as a whole, and also commented on some in-room facilities such as the amenities, bathroom, bed, and light individually. Among the facilities outside the guest room mentioned in customers' online reviews, pool and spa were referenced with the highest frequency. The subcategory cleanliness was used to record customers' comments on the condition of hygiene of the hotel property, including the lobby, hallway, guest rooms, carpet, etc. In addition, what is noteworthy is that the pretest revealed the smell of smoke was an intangible factor that may lead to customers' negative comments for the hotel property.

The fifth subcategory was sleep quality, which was not mentioned as often as the other subcategories in the pretest; however, when an issue arose, nearly every customer made comments about it. For example, in the pretest, most guests who had stayed at the hotel property of Wynn in Las Vegas complained about the noise from the nightclub at midnight since the property was located next to a nightclub, which made a lot of noise at midnight. Reviewers complained about the negative effect of the noise on their sleep quality using relatively similar words. Moreover, in their reviews, some customers even made suggestions to potential customers of avoiding staying at this property during certain days when the nightclub was open. Thus, the subcategory of value was developed

for the purpose of categorizing customers' perception of the cost performance of the hotel property. In other words, this subcategory included customers' comments regarding the relationship between the prices of services and goods and their level of satisfaction with these products. Although this subcategory was not referenced as frequently as subcategories such as services or room facilities, it was still an important consideration of many customers while making selection of hotels to stay in.

The subcategory, restaurant/food and beverage, was mentioned with a high frequency in the pretest of the study. Previous customers' main concern related to this subcategory was the taste of the food provided by the restaurant.

The category of overall perception of experience was adopted in order to record customers' sentiment of the hotel property as a whole, that is to say, how they feel about the hotel property in general. From the pretest, it was found that in their reviews, customers may usually write one or two sentences describing their general sense of the hotel property using words such as "great", "nice", or "wonderful". Furthermore, these kinds of sentences were often utilized as titles of the reviews. In addition, it was interesting to note that some customers wrote a review full of negative comments although their overall feeling for the hotel property was relatively positive. This was the same case with the ratings they assigned for each subcategory under room attributes and the overall rating. In addition, the content that was classified into this category indicated a relationship with the overall rating assigned to the hotel property in the pretest.

The last category, post-purchase intention, was used to document customers' willingness to return the hotel property that was expressed in their reviews. Often, these

remarks were obtained by the end of the text of review. On one hand, reviews with an obvious positive tone probably contained these kinds of remarks in the pretest. On the other hand, references regarding the intention of not returning or visiting competitor hotel brands were considered negative comments for this category.

Coding

According to the literature, the process of coding of the data for content analysis needs to be conducted separately by at least two persons so that disagreement among different coders in categories regarding same content can be found and fixed, and thus the reliability and validity of studies conducted by content analysis can be guaranteed (Carley, 1993; Kassarian, 1977). Therefore, two independently conducted coding processes were performed in this study in order to assure the reliability and validity of the results of this study. During the coding process, words and phrases used in online reviews were first extracted from the travel-related website, and then classified manually and independently by two reviewers into categories as explained in the previous part of the methodology section.

It should be noted that words and phrases with spelling errors were corrected manually by the coders which led to some inconsistency between the coded data and the initial information displayed on Tripadvisor.com. After the data collection process, word frequency was calculated using two processes—manual and computer-aided. In the manual process, reviewers' demographic information as well as word frequencies were calculated and placed into new Excel sheets by hand. In the computer-aided process, the statistical software package SPSS was used to work on the data handled manually. Word

frequency, percentages, and certain trends revealed in the data regarding the research questions of this study were identified by using the software. After this, comparisons between the results of Chinese properties and United States properties were made and the differences were analyzed.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology used in order to conduct this study. Data was collected from Tripadvisor.com by utilizing content analysis. 263 reviews were collected and words and phrases were coded into four categories. The categories included general descriptors, hotel attributes, overall perception of the experience, and post-purchase behavior, which were determined based on the previous work by Shea and Roberts (1998). Moreover, the category, hotel attributes, consisted of seven subcategories including location, service, room condition, cleanliness, sleep quality, value, and food and beverage, which were derived from the rating scale provided by Tripadvisor.com. The next chapter will examine the results of the data analysis.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Reviews posted on Tripadvisor.com for 10 hotel properties belonging to five American-based hotel brands were analyzed using content analysis. A total of 263 online reviews were collected and analyzed. Of the 263 online reviews, 135 were written for American properties and 128 were written for Chinese properties. Since some of the Chinese properties lacked up-to-date online reviews written by International visitors, the number of reviews collected was limited, which was a major limitation of this research, and will be discussed later in this thesis. It should also be noted that most guests wrote reviews in order to warn potential customers to be careful about the potential negative aspects they would encounter in the hotel properties in both China and the United States.

Demographics

Demographic information provided by the reviewers was collected in the first phase of the coding process. Demographic information analyzed in this study was comprised of two major parts: (a) basic demographic information; and (b) specific information obtained from the website. Basic demographic information included: gender, age, location of residence, travel style. Specific information obtained from information in the reviewer's Tripadvisor profile included pre-determined categories: When traveling, I usually travel for; A great vacation includes; Usually travel with; and Travel style. When available other demographic information was obtained from the actual content of the reviews written by the customers. Additional information included: purpose of current visit, length of current stay, whether or not it was a repeat visit, and the number of

previous visits. The length of the review (Table 1), review date and travel date were also recorded during the coding process.

In order to investigate similarities as well as differences between American properties and Chinese properties, the collected information was analyzed separately according to the location of the property. As a result, some interesting results were found between demographic characteristics of U.S. guests who stayed in American properties and Chinese properties (Table 2).

First, in terms of gender of the reviewers, it was found that Chinese hotel properties had more male reviewers than American properties did (44.53% were male for Chinese properties, while only 22.96% were male for American properties). In terms of the age of the reviewers, this study did not show any significant difference between American and Chinese properties. In addition, the majority of the customers were between 35 and 49 for properties in both countries (22.96% for American properties, 29.69% for Chinese properties), followed by 25-34 (8.89% for American properties, 10.16% for Chinese properties) and 50-64 (7.41% for American properties, 12.5% for Chinese properties), with less than 5% reviewers belong to age group of 12 years old and under (0% for both American and Chinese properties), 13-17 (0% for both American and Chinese properties), 18-24 (0% for American properties, 0.78% for Chinese properties), and 65+ (1.48% for American properties, 0.78% for Chinese properties).

Considering reviewers' region of residence, the West region was revealed to be the most common residential location of the reviewers for both American (28.15%) and Chinese (32.81%) properties (Table 3).

Table 1. Page length of the review

Paragraph length	American properties		Chinese properties	
	<i>N</i>	Percentage	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Less than 250 words	65	48.15%	62	48.44%
250-499 words	61	45.19%	54	42.19%
500-999 words	8	5.93%	10	7.81%
More than 999 words	1	0.74%	2	1.56%
Total	135		128	

Table 2. Demographics

Demographic	American properties		Chinese properties	
Gender				
Female	27	20.00%	19	14.84%
Male	31	22.96%	57	44.53%
Not indicated	77	57.04%	52	40.63%
Total	135		128	
Age				
12 and under	0	0	0	0
13-17	0	0	0	0
18-24	0	0	1	0.78%
25-34	12	8.89%	13	10.16%
35-49	31	22.96%	38	29.69%
50-64	10	7.41%	16	12.50%
65+	2	1.48%	1	0.78%
Not indicated	80	59.26%	59	46.09%
Total	135		128	

Table 3. Residence region of the reviewer

American properties	<i>N</i>	Percentage	Chinese properties	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Northeast	33	24.44%	Northeast	39	30.47%
Midwest	33	24.44%	Midwest	20	15.63%
South	29	21.48%	South	26	20.31%
West	38	28.15%	West	42	32.81%
Just indicated United States	2	1.48%	Just indicated United States	1	0.78%
Total	135		Total	128	

For American properties, the Northeast (24.44%) and Midwest (24.44%) were also regions from which many reviewers came, and the percentages were same for these two regions. However, for Chinese properties, more reviewers came from the northeast region (30.47%) than those that came from the mid-west region (15.63%).

It was found that the most often cited travel style preference for both American (22.96%) and Chinese (29.69%) properties was to “splurge occasionally” (Table 4). This was followed by “nothing but the best” with 14.07% for American properties and 20.31% for Chinese properties. The results also showed that more U.S. guests generally travel for leisure (22.96%) than for both business and leisure purposes (20%) when they stay in American properties while a greater number generally traveling for both business and leisure (39.06%) than for just leisure (14.06%) when they stay in Chinese properties (Table 5). Reviewers of both American (20.74%) and Chinese (23.44%) properties preferred “trying to blend in with the locals” when they are traveling.

When describing the important components they look for in a hotel to have a great vacation guests tend to prefer having “great food/wine” (32.59% for American properties,

Table 4. Travel style

Preference	American properties		Chinese properties	
	<i>N</i>	Percentage	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Nothing but the best	19	14.07%	26	20.31%
Splurge occasionally	31	22.96%	38	29.69%
Middle of the road	7	5.19%	6	4.69%
On a tight budget	2	1.48%	0	0
Roughing it	0	0	0	0
Not Indicated	76	56.30%	58	45.31%
Total	135		128	

Table 5. Usual purpose of traveling

Purpose	American properties		Chinese properties	
	<i>N</i>	Percentage	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Business	6	4.44%	8	6.25%
Leisure	31	22.96%	18	14.06%
Business and Leisure	27	20.00%	50	39.06%
Not Indicated	71	52.59%	52	40.63%
Total	135		128	

32.03% for Chinese properties), “beach/sun” (30.37% for American properties, 27.34% for Chinese properties), and “museums/cultural/historical sites” (24.44% for American properties, 26.56% for Chinese properties) as shown in Table 6. Additionally, U.S. guests tend to prefer “spas” (20.74%) in American properties while they tend to prefer “outdoor/adventure” (23.44%) in Chinese properties. This difference may be caused by the differences between the purposes of domestic travel and international travel. When people travel domestically, they tend to relax and enjoy the vacation more. However, when traveling internationally, individuals tend to explore and go sightseeing at the destination more (Zhang & Heung, 2002).

Table 6. Customer preferred hotel facilities

American properties			Chinese properties		
Preference	<i>N</i>	Percentage	Preference	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Great food/wine	44	32.59%	Great food/wine	41	32.03%
Beach/sun	41	30.37%	Beach/sun	35	27.34%
Museums/cultural/ historical sites	33	24.44%	Museums/cultural/ historical sites	34	26.56%
Spa	28	20.74%	Spa	17	13.28%
Outdoor/adventure	25	18.52%	Outdoor/adventure	30	23.44%
Shopping	22	16.30%	Shopping	21	16.41%
Concerts/music festivals	16	11.85%	Concerts/music festival	13	10.16%
Theme/amusement parks	14	10.37%	Theme/amusement parks	8	6.25%
Gambling/casinos	14	10.37%	Gambling/casinos	9	7.03%
Sporting events	11	8.15%	Sporting events	6	4.69%
Golf	8	5.93%	Golf	7	5.47%
Skiing/winter sports	7	5.19%	Skiing/winter sports	12	9.38%
Not Indicated	86	63.70%	Not Indicated	84	65.63%

In terms of usual travel companions (Table 7), it was revealed that most guests generally travel with a “spouse/significant other” (31.85% for American properties, 27.34% for Chinese properties), followed by traveling “alone” (20.74% for American properties, 23.44% for Chinese properties), and then traveling “with friends” (18.52% for American properties, 15.63% for Chinese properties).

Table 7. Usual travel group

American properties			Chinese properties		
Preference	<i>N</i>	Percentage	Preference	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Spouse/significant other	43	31.85%	Spouse/significant other	35	27.34%
Myself	28	20.74%	Myself	30	23.44%
Friends	25	18.52%	Friends	20	15.63%
Business colleagues	13	9.63%	Business colleagues	15	11.72%
Family with young children	11	8.15%	Family with young children	8	6.25%
Extended family	9	6.67%	Extended family	9	7.03%
Family with teenagers	8	5.93%	Family with teenagers	6	4.69%
Pets	4	2.96%	Pets	4	3.13%
Large groups or tours	0	0	Large groups or tours	1	0.78%
Not Indicated	84	62.22%	Not Indicated	81	63.28%

The results also indicated that only guests of Chinese properties mentioned traveled with “large groups or tours” as a usual type of travel party. The statistics regarding current type of the travel group (Table 8) showed that more U.S. guests who stayed at American hotel properties travel as a couple (25.93%) than those who stayed at Chinese properties (17.97%). However, more guests who travel for business purpose

Table 8. Type of the travel group for current trip

American properties			Chinese properties		
Type	N	Percentage	Type	N	Percentage
As a couple	35	25.93%	As a couple	23	17.97%
On business	30	22.22%	On business	55	42.97%
With family	27	20.00%	With family	8	6.25%
With friends	11	8.15%	With friends	7	5.47%
Alone	6	4.44%	Alone	7	5.47%
Not indicated	26	19.26%	Not indicated	28	21.88%
Total	135		Total	128	

(42.97%) stayed in Chinese properties than in American properties (22.22%). This result

indicates that more U.S. guests travel to China for business issues than for vacation.

Similarly, the results regarding the purpose of the current visit (Table 9) suggested that

almost half of U.S. guests travel to American-based Chinese hotel properties for a

business trip (41.41%), while less than 5% travel for a vacation (3.13%), birthday

(2.34%), or anniversary (2.34%). On the other hand, only 12.59% of U.S. guests travel to

American hotel properties for business trips. However, 12.59% travel for getaways,

holidays or vacations.

In terms of length of each stay (Table 10), most guests stay at a property for no more than three nights in both American properties and Chinese properties. Additionally,

most of the guests reported their current visit as their first visit to the hotel property

(11.85% for American properties, 12.5% for Chinese properties) (Table 11). For both

American and Chinese properties, less than 5% U.S. guests mentioned have visited the

Table 9. Purpose of current visit

American properties			Chinese properties		
Purpose	<i>N</i>	Percentage	Purpose	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Business trip	17	12.59%	Business trip	53	41.41%
Getaway/holiday/vacation	17	12.59%	Vacation	4	3.13%
Birthday	8	5.93%	Anniversary	3	2.34%
Conference	6	4.44%	Sightseeing/tour	3	2.34%
Anniversary	3	2.22%	Birthday	3	2.34%
Annual vacation	3	2.22%	Honeymoon stay	2	1.56%
Concert	2	1.48%	Wedding anniversary	1	0.78%
Zoo sightseeing	2	1.48%	Travel through China	1	0.78%
Combination of work and personal visit	2	1.48%	In between business and sightseeing	1	0.78%
Business convention/conference	2	1.48%	Business event	1	0.78%
Attended conference with family	2	1.48%	A side trip during a business trip Hong Kong	1	0.78%
Weekend vacation	2	1.48%	Medical conference	1	0.78%
Relaxing evening after Christmas shopping	1	0.74%	As a break from a trip to Hong Kong	1	0.78%
Small business meeting	1	0.74%	Christmas break	1	0.78%
Attend a meeting	1	0.74%	Only for gambling	1	0.78%
Attend sister's wedding	1	0.74%	Family's wedding banquet	1	0.78%
(twice-a-year) vacation	1	0.74%	Cousin's wedding	1	0.78%
Yearly visit for meeting	1	0.74%	Yearly/annual vacation	1	0.78%
Event at convention center	1	0.74%	Poker trip	1	0.78%
Mini family/friend reunion	1	0.74%	Not indicated	47	36.72%
Staycation	1	0.74%			
Anniversary weekend	1	0.74%			
Birthday and anniversary	1	0.74%			
Visiting family over Christmas	1	0.74%			
Birthday weekend	1	0.74%			
National convention	1	0.74%			
Weekend trip	1	0.74%			
Not indicated	54	40%			

Table 10. Length of stay for current trip

American properties			Chinese properties		
Length	<i>N</i>	Percentage	Length	<i>N</i>	Percentage
1 night	11	8.15%	1 night	6	4.69%
2 nights	17	12.59%	2 nights	6	4.69%
3 nights	1	0.74%	3 nights	6	4.69%
4 nights	12	8.89%	4 nights	4	3.13%
5 nights	2	1.48%	5 nights	2	1.56%
Non-specific	4	2.96%	7 nights	1	0.78%
			8 nights	1	0.78%
			Non-specific	8	6.24%
Not Indicated	88	65.19%	Not Indicated	94	73.44%

Table 11. Repeat visit

American properties			Chinese properties		
Amount	<i>N</i>	Percentage	Amount	<i>N</i>	Percentage
1 st visit	16	11.85%	1 st visit	16	12.50%
2 nd visit	7	5.19%	2 nd visit	4	3.13%
3 rd visit	2	1.48%	3 rd visit	1	0.78%
4 th visit	4	2.96%	4 th visit	1	0.78%
Greater than 4 th visit	1	0.74%	Greater than 4 th visit	1	0.78%
Multiple visits (Non-specific)	15	11.11%	Multiple visits (Non-specific)	16	12.5%
Not Indicated	90	66.67%	Not Indicated	89	69.53%
Total	135		Total	128	

property on multiple previous occasions. This could indicate that customer loyalty is not largely a consideration for guests of five-star hotels. It is important to note that approximately 10% U.S. guests who had experience in both American and Chinese properties belonging to a same hotel brand tend to compare their current experience with the previous experience. In this study, for example, it was found that 6.25% guests who stayed in Wynn Macau mentioned their previous stay in Wynn Las Vegas. However, because of the limitation of sample size, this phenomenon was only found in guests' reviews written for Wynn Macau and Park Hyatt Beijing. Further research in the future needs to be done to examine a larger sample in order to prove that guests tend to compare two properties belonging to one hotel brand in their evaluation process for certain hotel property.

By classifying words and phrases regarding location aspects coded from the collected reviews and comparing the statistic results of Chinese and American hotel properties, Table 12 reveals that 29.69% of guests thought positively concerning the general location of the hotel properties in China, while 6.25% thought negatively about the general location. However, for hotel properties in the United States, about 42.22% of guests wrote positive comments regarding the general location, while only 1.48% wrote negatively. This difference indicates that guests tend to be more satisfied with the location selection made by American properties, and those who responded for American properties frequently used words and phrases such as “within walking distance”, “central to everything”, and “convenient” to describe their perceptions in terms of the location of the properties. Considering activities or facilities close to the hotel property, most of the

Table 12. Proximity to various features

Chinese properties				American properties			
		<i>N</i>	Percentage			<i>N</i>	Percentage
Location / general	Positive	38	29.69%	Location / general	Positive	57	42.22%
	Negative	8	6.25%		Negative	2	1.48%
Nearby activities/ facilities	Positive	44	34.38%	Nearby activities/ facilities	Positive	73	54.07%
	Negative	3	2.34%		Negative	3	2.22%
Transportation	Positive	19	14.84%	Transportation	Positive	10	7.41%
	Negative	6	4.69%		Negative	1	0.74%
Security	Positive	0	0	Security	Positive	1	0.74%
	Negative	0	0		Negative	0	0
Quietness	Positive	0	0	Quietness	Positive	3	2.22%
	Negative	0	0		Negative	0	0

U.S. guests were satisfied with them (34.38% for Chinese properties, 54.07% for American properties), while only less than 5% were not satisfied with the nearby activities or facilities (2.34% for Chinese properties, 2.22% for American properties).

Public transportation such as subways, cabs, or shuttle buses was another important factor in evaluating the location of a hotel property which was frequently mentioned by U.S. guests in their online reviews. 14.84% of guests wrote positive aspects of the public transportation for Chinese properties, and 4.69% wrote negative aspects. For American properties, 7.41% wrote positively, and 0.74% wrote negatively. Finally, only guests of American properties mentioned conditions regarding security and quietness aspects of the location.

Service provided by each department in a hotel property is one of the main focuses in the online reviews left by guests for both American and Chinese properties. Based on the content of the reviews collected from Tripadvisor.com, the service category

was divided into 12 subcategories in the coding process as displayed in Table 13, including service in general, staff in general, specific staff mentioned by name, front desk service, concierge service, room service, door/bell service, services at other facilities (e.g. pool, spa, massage, casino, cabana, banquet, stores, gym and shuttle), special offers (e.g. complementary birthday cake, flowers, fruits, etc.), restaurant and bar service, security service, and service provided by hotel management personnel (e.g. general manager, guest relations, etc.). For both American and Chinese properties, approximately half the guests positively mentioned the overall service quality they experienced during their recent stay. These results showed that guest perceived Chinese properties as providing a higher quality in terms of the overall service than they did at American properties. Moreover, it was found that in describing positive service experience, guests tended to use similar words such as “excellent”, “great”, “top notch”, and “fantastic” for both Chinese and American properties. In addition to service in general, staff is a frequently included components in guests’ online reviews for both American and Chinese properties.

Among the reviews for Chinese properties, 71.09% reflected guests’ satisfaction towards the service provided by staff members, while 18.75% showed guests’ negative feelings for the experience with the staff. However, for American properties, 83.7% guests commented positively on the staff related issues, and only 5.19% wrote negative comments. This may be because that the hotel properties this study looked at belonged to American-based five-star hotel brand. As such, guests tended to compare Chinese properties with their American counterparts since guests may tend to feel more comfortable staying in properties in their home country than staying abroad.

Table 13. Service provided

Chinese properties				American properties			
		<i>N</i>	Percentage			<i>N</i>	Percentage
Service general	Positive	66	51.56%	Service general	Positive	61	45.19%
	Negative	13	10.16%		Negative	9	6.67%
Staff general	Positive	91	71.09%	Staff general	Positive	113	83.70%
	Negative	24	18.75%		Negative	7	5.19%
Specific staff mentioned by name	Positive	1	0.78%	Specific staff mentioned by name	Positive	6	4.44%
	Negative	0	0		Negative	0	0
Front desk	Positive	27	21.09%	Front desk	Positive	47	34.82%
	Negative	15	11.72%		Negative	22	16.30%
Concierge	Positive	21	21.09%	Concierge	Positive	18	13.33%
	Negative	3	2.34%		Negative	0	0
Room	Positive	19	14.84%	Room	Positive	27	20.00%
	Negative	12	9.38%		Negative	14	10.37%
Bell/door service	Positive	11	8.59%	Bell/door service	Positive	24	17.78%
	Negative	1	0.78%		Negative	3	2.22%
Other facilities service	Positive	17	13.28%	Other facilities service	Positive	13	9.63%
	Negative	5	3.91%		Negative	6	4.44%
Special offers	Positive	10	7.81%	Special offers	Positive	11	8.15%
	Negative	0	0		Negative	0	0
Restaurant/bar service	Positive	9	7.03%	Restaurant/bar service	Positive	20	14.82%
	Negative	4	3.13%		Negative	8	5.93%
Security service	Positive	0	0	Security service	Positive	1	7.41%
	Negative	0	0		Negative	2	1.48%
Service provided by management	Positive	4	3.13%	Service provided by management	Positive	2	1.48%
	Negative	1	0.78%		Negative	2	1.48%

Moreover, it is interesting to note that some guests chose to stay in a Chinese property only because they were the fans of the hotel brand, or they had previous positive experience at the American properties that belonging to the same hotel brand as the Chinese property. For example, 8 guests who wrote reviews for Wynn in Macau, China mentioned their previous experience at Wynn in Las Vegas, United States, and did some

comparison between these two properties. Additionally, the majority (75%) of the guests who made comparison between the two properties mentioned their positive experience at the previous hotel properties. Therefore, certain bias may have existed in the guests' evaluation process.

Specific names of the staff in the properties were mentioned in reviews for both American and Chinese properties, and both were mentioned because of positive interactions between the staff and the guest who wrote that review. As the department which has the most service encounters with the guests, the front desk was frequently commented on by U.S. guests in terms of the service provided. 21.09% of guests of Chinese properties positively commented on the service offered by the front desk, and 11.72% commented negatively, while 34.82% of guests of American properties positively remarked on service provided by the front desk, and 16.30% wrote negative comments.

Room service was also highly commented on by guests for both American and Chinese properties. For both American and Chinese properties, approximately 20% of guests commented positively about the experience, while nearly 10% of guests noted negative items about the experience. Considering the word usage in positive comments, "housekeeping" and "room service" were the two words/phrases used with the highest frequency in this category. On the other hand, dirty towels, dirty beddings, and bad service provided by housekeepers were the major causes of guests' dissatisfaction about the services related to the guest room.

As the first impression of the hotel property, door/bell service was commonly mentioned by U.S. customers, and most of the comments were about the warm and

welcoming attitude as well as the assistance with luggage that was offered by the door persons on arrival. Additionally, since nearly 20% of guests commented on the door/bell services received in American properties, however, less than 10% of U.S. guests mentioned the door/bell services in Chinese properties. Therefore, it could be inferred that American properties provided more and better door/bell services than Chinese properties did. Approximately 15% of guests (16.19% for Chinese properties, 14.07% for American properties) mentioned their experiences in other hotel facilities such as the pool, casino, club, spa, gym, etc. for both American and Chinese properties.

In both Chinese and American five-star hotel properties guest indicated receiving special offers including complimentary birthday cakes, flowers, fruit baskets, etc. from the properties for their birthday, anniversary, or family reunion. These comments on the special offers were always in a positive nature.

Service provided by restaurants or bars in the properties was both mentioned by guests of American and Chinese properties. However, guests who stayed in American properties tended to refer to issues related to food service more often than guests who stayed in Chinese properties did.

Security service was mentioned only if certain specific issue occurred, and the comments concerning this issue were always written in negative tone by customers. As such, only guests of two American properties mentioned issues associated with the security services of the hotel property. One was at the Wynn in Las Vegas, where a noise issue was taken care of by the hotel security department, and the other one is also at the Wynn in Las Vegas, where a case of theft was not well taken care of by the security

department according to the guest. Finally, some guests also indicated service encounters with the hotel management such as hotel managers, in-house PR directors, and guest relations persons. Guests of American properties also made some suggestions regarding the management strategies for the hotel management to examine further in their reviews.

The condition of in-room and out-of-room facilities was another aspect among the most important features guests care about and, thus, several comments were made. In this study, the category of room facilities was divided into subcategories according to the content of the online reviews left by guests. Table 14 reveals that these subcategories included: the room, in general bed & bedding, bathroom; frequently visited out-of-room facilities (i.e., pool, spa, massage, sauna, steam room, casino, stores, fitness center, gym, workout room, club, etc.); the view; dining area/bar/fridge/counter; furniture; electronics; invisible features (i.e., décor, ambience, space, day lighting, temperature, humidity, etc.); room amenities; other in-room facilities (i.e., telescope, table minimums, slot selections, ice maker, door, curtains, mirror, window blinds, etc.); other out-of-room facilities (i.e., elevator, grounds, lobby, common area, public area, lounge, building, concierge lounge, etc.); and other parts of the guest room (i.e., entryway, foyer, luggage area, living room, kitchen, etc.).

Table 14. Room condition

Chinese properties				American properties			
		<i>N</i>	Percentage			<i>N</i>	Percentage
Room general	Positive	78	60.94%	Room general	Positive	87	64.44%
	Negative	7	5.47%		Negative	4	2.96%
Bed & bedding	Positive	28	21.88%	Bed & bedding	Positive	29	21.48%
	Negative	3	2.34%		Negative	6	4.44%
Bathroom	Positive	59	46.09%	Bathroom	Positive	54	40.00%
	Negative	9	7.03%		Negative	9	6.67%
Out-of-room facilities	Positive	71	55.47%	Out-of-room facilities	Positive	30	22.22%
	Negative	8	6.25%		Negative	9	6.67%
View	Positive	60	46.88%	View	Positive	37	27.41%
	Negative	3	2.34%		Negative	7	5.19%
Dining area	Positive	4	3.13%	Dining area	Positive	6	4.44%
	Negative	4	3.13%		Negative	0	0
Furniture	Positive	8	6.25%	Furniture	Positive	11	8.15%
	Negative	3	2.34%		Negative	5	3.70%
Electronics	Positive	15	11.72%	Electronics	Positive	11	8.15%
	Negative	14	10.94%		Negative	22	16.30%
Club	Positive	11	8.59%	Club	Positive	8	5.93%
	Negative	3	2.34%		Negative	3	2.22%
Invisible features	Positive	58	45.31%	Invisible features	Positive	56	41.48%
	Negative	11	8.59%		Negative	9	6.67%
Room amenities	Positive	12	9.38%	Room amenities	Positive	15	11.11%
	Negative	0	0		Negative	4	2.96%
Other in-room facilities	Positive	3	2.34%	Other in-room facilities	Positive	6	4.44%
	Negative	0	0		Negative	2	1.48%
Other out-of-room facilities	Positive	13	10.16%	Other out-of-room facilities	Positive	31	22.96%
	Negative	5	3.91%		Negative	2	1.48%
Other parts of room	Positive	3	2.34%	Other parts of room	Positive	6	4.44%
	Negative	1	0.78%		Negative	0	0

The results indicated that approximately 65% guests commented either positively or negatively on the room aspects for both American and Chinese properties. The words used most frequently to describe positive attitude toward the room conditions included: “wonderful”, “great”, “beautiful”, and “comfortable” for both American and Chinese properties. Additionally, the condition of the bathroom was mentioned most frequently by

guests for both American and Chinese properties (46% & 53%, respectively). Aspects such as the tub, toilet, sink, shower, towel and bath amenities were also major focuses of guests in terms of room condition.

It was interesting to find that guests commented more on the “pool, spa, massage, sauna, casino, stores, fitness center, gym” (61.72% for Chinese properties, 28.89% for American properties) and “view of the different parts of the properties” (49.22% for Chinese properties, 32.6% for American properties) for Chinese properties than they did for American properties. This indicated that Chinese properties tended to impress guests more than American properties did regarding the out of room facilities and the view of different parts of the properties.

Food and drink provided by the restaurants in the hotels were mentioned frequently by guests in their reviews for both Chinese and American properties. Based on the statistical results analyzed from the data collected, more than half the guests indicated their perceptions regarding their experience in the restaurants for both Chinese (57.78%) and American (54.43%) properties. Reasons mentioned for providing negative comments included the taste of food and drink, the number of selections of food on the buffet, the freshness of the food and drink, and the value of the food. One thing worthy to be noted from the statistics is that guests who stayed at a Chinese property tended to care more about the taste of food offered by the hotel restaurant, while guests who stayed at an American property tended to consider more of the value of the food. This may be because of the different expectations U.S. guests had for American and Chinese properties. It is most likely that for Chinese properties, many guests who were U.S. natives expected to

eat authentic Chinese food since Chinese food has relatively high popularity all over the world, thus they tended to expect more on the taste of food from Chinese properties.

However, while staying at American properties, these same guests just expected a clean and comfortable dining area with sufficient number of food options to choose from and reasonable prices to pay for, thus they focused more on the value rather than the quality of the food.

As shown in Table 15, for both American and Chinese properties, most reviewers mentioned their overall perception of the hotel properties at either the beginning or the end of the review text. The guests' negative or positive attitudes expressed in this part of review were almost always related to the overall rating the reviewer assigned to the property. Words used with highest frequency to express positive attitude included "great" (19.53%), "best" (17.97%), and "new" (10.16%) for Chinese properties, and "great" (24.44%), "love" (12.59%), and "nice" (11.85%) for American properties.

Table 15. Overall perception

American properties			Chinese properties		
Positive	<i>N</i>	Percentage	Positive	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Great	33	24.44%	Great	25	19.53%
Love	17	12.59%	Best	23	17.97%
Nice	16	11.85%	New	13	10.16%
Wonderful	12	8.89%	Excellent		
Enjoy	11	8.15%	Beautiful	12	9.38%
			Love	11	8.59%
			Good		
			Luxury		

On one hand, for both Chinese and American properties, words “love” (8.59% for Chinese properties vs. 12.59% for American properties) and “enjoy” (5.47% for Chinese properties vs. 8.15% for American properties) were used often when guests wrote positive comments. On the other hand, in negative comments, words or phrases used with the highest frequencies were similar for Chinese and American properties. “Not/no” (4.69% for Chinese properties vs. 5.93% for American properties) was the word used most often by guests when they had negative perceptions on their stay. “Disappointed/disappointing” (2.34% for Chinese properties vs. 1.48% for American properties) was the word used with the second highest frequency. This result showed that guests tended to use similar words to express their negative feelings, however, to express positive feelings they tended to use various words or phrases.

Considering post purchase intention (Table 16), not as many guests mentioned this aspect as those who mentioned their overall perceptions about the properties. It was found that only guests who had relatively excellent or poor experience at the properties mentioned their willingness of returning or decision of not to return in the future. In positive comments, guests either recommend or express their plan to go back to the properties sometime in the future. Words used with high frequencies included “stay again” (6.25%), “highly recommend” (6.25%), “will be back” (4.69%), and “next” (4.69%) for Chinese properties, and “stay again” (11.11%), “highly recommend” (6.67%), “will be back” (5.93%), and “definitely” (5.93%) for American properties. It can be easily noticed that the first three words or phrases with the highest frequencies were

Table 16. Post-purchase intention

American properties			Chinese properties		
Positive	<i>N</i>	Percentage	Positive	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Stay again	15	11.11%	Stay again	8	6.25%
Highly recommend	9	6.67%	Highly recommend	8	6.25%
Will be back definitely	8	5.93%	Definitely	6	4.69%
Next	7	5.19%	Next	6	4.69%
Return	6	4.44%	Will be back	6	4.69%

same for Chinese and American properties, which means that guests tended to use similar words or phrases to express their intention to return in the future. Additionally, in expressing their intention to return, guests tended to use words with strong emotions such as “highly”, “definitely”, “absolutely”, “wholeheartly”, or “truly”. On the other hand, negative comments regarding return intention can be divided into two groups: intention to choose other hotel brands, and intention not to visit current hotel property any longer. This was true for both American and Chinese properties.

Summary

This chapter discussed the results derived from the data analysis using content analysis. Words and phrases extracted from Tripadvisor.com were categorized and analyzed, and word frequencies and percentages were calculated. Information regarding customers’ demographic characteristics was collected and certain patterns in customers’ age and residency region were discovered.

In addition, word frequencies considering pre-determined categories were also analyzed and found that locations close to shopping malls or local restaurants were mostly preferred, a flexible check-in and check-out time policy was highly demanded by customers, the bathroom was talked about by many customers when it comes to room condition issues, food quality and value was also a hot topic in customers reviews, and moreover, authentic local food was preferred by most customers who traveled internationally to properties in China.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study yielded interesting and helpful information that can be useful for hotel managers to improve the service provided to customers as well as the strategies in terms of staff training and management. In addition, the results also indicated there are issues related to different cultural settings of hotels that might be beneficial for the management to design different management modes for properties in different countries considering the differences in customers' expectations and perceptions. Some of the possible implications of this study are listed as follows.

Findings

First, considering the results related to customers' demographic backgrounds, it was revealed that more customers were in the age group ranging from 35 to 49 years old than those in the other age groups for both American and Chinese properties. The potential reason for this phenomenon may be because people within this age range have higher possibility to travel since they have higher level of motivation for traveling for business or vacation. In addition, financially they have higher levels of motivation of traveling since most of them have stable jobs at this age. As such, they have stronger financial power to afford travel related costs than people who are in their 20's or 60's age-wise.

Another interesting issue in terms of demographic information was that more U.S. guests travel for leisure purposes than for both business and leisure purpose when they stay in American properties, while for Chinese properties it was just the opposite case. It

can be inferred from the results that, when U.S. guests travel internationally to a country outside the United States (China in this case), they tended to add some sightseeing during their business trips instead of just staying at the hotel property while attending business conferences. Therefore, it may be beneficial for the management group of Chinese properties to make some efforts to combine business and leisure functions of the properties. For example Chinese hotels may wish to consider offering services related to conference centers as well as shopping and tourism suggestions at the front desk to international guests, or to select locations close to both convention centers and shopping malls and local attractions.

Another issue that might need to be addressed is that, in some of the guests' reviews for Chinese properties, people mentioned travel with a large group or tour, which indicated that Chinese properties might need to offer services oriented to the special needs of travel groups, such as offering more connecting rooms in the property.

The last item worth mentioning regarding the demographic information is that some guests who stayed in Chinese properties tended to compare their experience with their previous experiences in American properties under the same hotel brand. Other guests indicated that they decided to try a specific Chinese hotel property for the only reason that they had quite a positive experience in its American counterpart. Therefore, it may be beneficial for the Chinese hotel management to work on improving the negative aspects mentioned in the reviews written by U.S. guests so that they can offer more standardized services and facilities to international travelers to which they are accustomed.

Second, most customers responded positively regarding the location aspect of the hotel property in their reviews when the property was located close to or within walking distance to many facilities such as shopping centers, restaurants, public transportation stations, clubs, grocery stores, etc. Specifically, shopping centers or malls and local restaurants were mentioned with the highest frequency by guests in their positive comments about the location aspect of both American and Chinese hotel properties. Regarding this, hotel developers should attempt to select locations close to major shopping areas and restaurants as locations of new properties. On the other hand, for business guests (i.e., guests who indicated that they travel “on business”), a location was highly recommended in their reviews if it was closed to a convention center. Therefore, it is important for hotel developers to consider a location near a convention center if the target customer of a new property is business travelers.

Third, the attitude and service quality of the staff were frequently referenced. In addition, the speed of check-in and checkout, the quality of door/bell services, room services, as well as the way unexpected issues were handled all counted for determining whether the guests’ perception of service perspective was positive or negative. Additionally, there are several specific items that are worthy of note in terms of service perspective. First, some guests mentioned that they were satisfied with the fact that their request for early check-in were fulfilled, while others indicated that their request for late checkout was not satisfied therefore they were dissatisfied with the service. Considering this, hotel management should evaluate the policies and procedures the flexibility of check-in and checkout time to provide guests with the widest latitude possible while still

being able to meet the needs of the hotel housekeeping staff. Moreover, the way unexpected issues were handled tended to affect guests views of the quality of service provided by the hotel property. Therefore, it is important for the hotel management to consider training staff to improve their skills as well as provide them with the tools needed for fast responses in dealing with unexpected issues, especially issues that may cause negative eWOM if not handled successfully.

Additionally, negative comments in regards to room facilities were shown to mainly be a result of poorly cleaned guest room, an uncomfortable bed, the poor condition of the bathroom facilities, or improperly functioning in-room technologies. Therefore, it is important for hotels to make a greater effort to improve their housekeeping standards as well as to check the functionality of their in-room technologies such as the internet connection, lights, TV remotes, etc. on a more frequent schedule.

Another area of note is that several guests mentioned the condition of restaurants during their stay at the hotel. What is interesting about the comments made of the hotels' restaurants is that many guests paid more attention to the food quality offered by the hotel than to the actual guest rooms. Additionally, some guests even mentioned that they would return to the property just for the excellent local food provided by the restaurant in the hotel. Therefore, it is vital for the hotel management to employ high caliber local cooks and to pay attention to the training of the cooks in order to offer local food with higher quality in the hotel restaurant. Moreover, since some of the guests who left negative comments regarding the restaurants complaint that the food provided by the hotel was not as authentic as they expected, it is essential for the hotel management to make efforts to

offer local food by utilizing recipes from regional Ares and hire cooks experienced in the preparation of such cuisine. Furthermore, considering the different expectations of guests reflected in their reviews for American and Chinese properties, American hotel managers should try to make their food and drink more affordable and of greater value for the guests, while Chinese hotel managers need to make improvements in the quality of food and drink offered at their restaurants.

The vibe of the hotel was another factor mentioned frequently by previous customers. Specifically, the aspects of vibe in this study included the space, decorations, lightening, and smell of the guest rooms. Several guests commented on the space and decorations of the guest rooms for both American and Chinese properties. In addition, some guests complaint that the decorations in Chinese properties were not very Chinese in style. Therefore, managers and developers of Chinese properties need to think about decorating their room and other facilities in a more “Chinese” tone when designing new properties. In addition, a good vibe would encourage customers to return in the future and promote positive comments as well. Therefore, hotel management should make efforts to improve the vibe of the property by improving the inner decorations, promoting positive service, and having friendly employees.

Finally, the results revealed that when an obvious issue, especially a negative one arose, most of the customers who were bothered by that issue would complain online. As a way to ensure high quality service and increase the likelihood of customers’ intentions to return, hotel management should attempt to obtain information regarding customers’

major complaints from travel-related website and find ways to solve the problems mentioned in order to improve future customers' satisfaction levels.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study revealed aspects hotel managers need to pay attention to in future management strategies, specifically those hotel brands with both American and Chinese properties. Since the results of this study revealed that guests from the United States have different expectations for properties in two different countries, it is important to make note of these differences and make changes to current properties as well as to the design for new properties in the future regarding the location and décor of the properties.

Considering China is expected to become one of the most prominent travel markets in the next two decades (World Travel Organization, 2012), major cities within China would be logical choices for locations for American-based hotel companies to build new properties. The results provided by this study can serve as a source of information for design of the properties as well as the development of management strategies for the new properties. From an academic perspective, this study may indicate a potential direction for future research in this field to look at customers' eWOM behaviors as well as post-purchase behaviors by comparing two cultures through content analysis.

Limitations

This study was conducted using content analysis to extract words and phrases from Tripadvisor.com. It is anticipated that 25 reviews for each of the ten hotel properties that were selected would be collected. However, for some Chinese properties, less than 25 reviews were available, which resulted in the variations in the total number of reviews

collected for American and Chinese properties. As a result, 135 reviews were collected for American properties, while 128 reviews were collected for Chinese properties by the end of this study. This may cause bias in comparing the results between the two countries regarding frequencies and percentages. In addition, the lack of enough up-to-date reviews for Chinese properties led to a large time gap in the database for this study, which may influence the accuracy of comparison between the two countries.

Additionally, since a small amount of reviews for some Chinese properties were posted in 2007, when the rating scale of Tripadvisor was slightly different from that after 2007. This may affect customers' evaluation since customers may to some extent organize the content of their reviews according to the rating scale provided by the website. Therefore, the focus of the reviews may be slightly affected by the differences in the rating scale.

Since the categories were developed based on previous study by Shea and Roberts (1998), and were modified according to the rating scale provided by Tripadvisor.com, they cannot cover all the words and phrases collected from the actual reviews. As a result, in conducting this study, words and phrases that cannot fit into any of the pre-determined categories could only be removed from the database, which may cause some bias in the data analysis.

In the data analysis process, in order to calculate the word frequencies and percentages in each category, the categorized words and phrases were further divided into certain aspects which were determined by the content of the reviews, which was a

subjective process because different people may view a certain word as belonging to different aspects regarding the content of the review.

This study only looked at reviews posted on Tripadvisor.com, which may cause certain biased results from the rating scale provided by this specific website. Moreover, reviewers of this website may have certain common characters, for example, age, travel style, or travel purpose, which may cause problems to replicate this study since few differences might be found for a different class of hotels evaluated by the same group of people. Additionally, only five hotel brands were examined, which may cause some problem in generalizing some findings of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

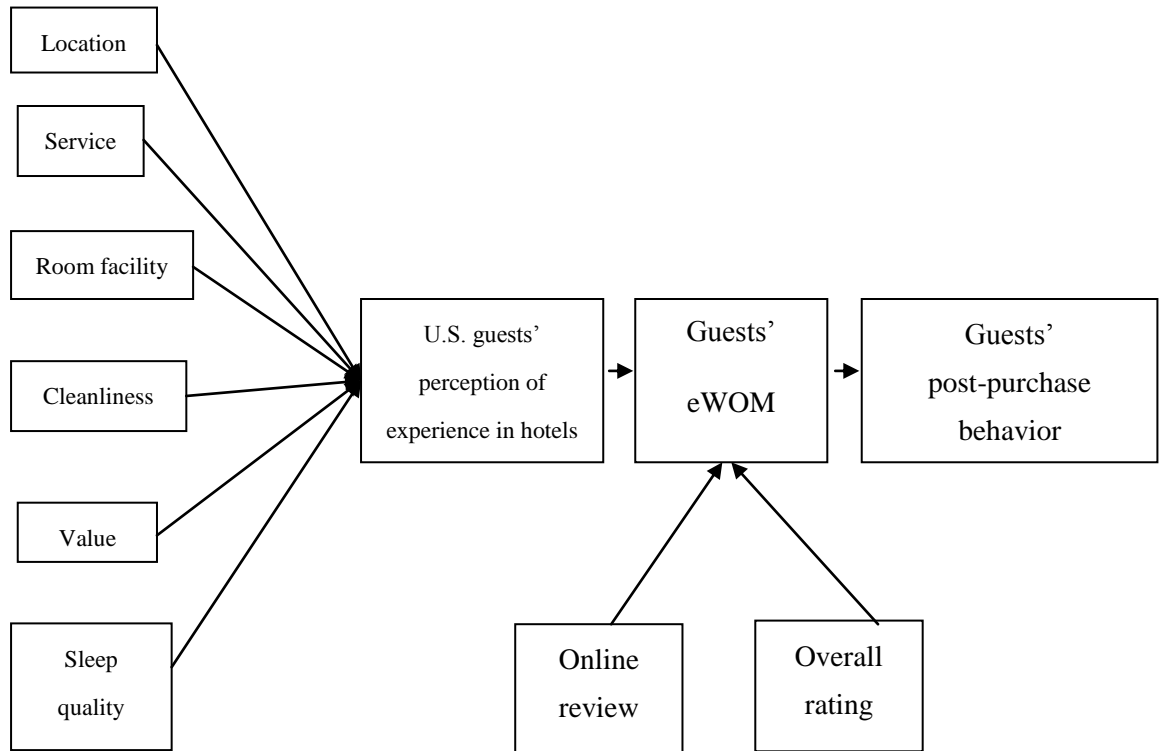
Regarding the limitations of this study, future research focusing on the comparison of customers' eWOM between properties located in two countries but belong to the same hotel brand may consider using more than one travel-related website in order to find more online reviews for analysis in a valid time period. Additionally, future research in this area may consider including more than five pairs of cities for comparison in order to get more information regarding either the differences or the similarities for the purpose of exploring customers' eWOM and post-purchase behaviors in a more rigorous way.

Furthermore, a larger sample size is recommended for future research, for the purpose of proving that guests tend to compare two properties belonging to one hotel brand in their

evaluation process for certain hotel property, especially when given that they had a relatively positive previous experience at one of the counterpart properties.

Future research may consider conducting a similar study using content analysis as a main method, and combining interviews as well as surveys together in order to get more information than merely depending on the analysis of the content of reviews which is relatively subjective. Also, future studies may focus on a certain travel groups to see whether there are any patterns among travel groups, such as business travelers. Interviews with hotel managers could be added into future studies with similar purposes as this study so that the data could be analyzed from a managerial perspective as well.

Future research may also develop the categories in a different way, or more categories could be added into the coding process in order to include more words and phrases in the database, so that less words and phrases need to be removed from the database, and more findings that differ from those of this study could be obtained.

APPENDIX. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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