University of Wollongong

Research Online

Faculty of Commerce - Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Business and Law

1-1-2002

Business Travellers' Hotel Expectations and Disappointments: A Different Perspective to Hotel Attribute Importance Investigation

Sara Dolnicar
University of Wollongong, s.dolnicar@uq.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/commpapers

Part of the Business Commons, and the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

Business Travellers' Hotel Expectations and Disappointments: A Different Perspective to Hotel Attribute Importance Investigation

Abstract

Hotel attribute importance studies have a long tradition in hospitality research. This study investigates the issue for business travelers by asking the respondents to state their expectations and disappointments / dissatisfaction in an open question format instead of rating the importance of attributes directly. The aim of the study is twofold: (1) to learn about expectations and past disappointments of this particular segment to provide additional insight for customizing hotel offers and (2) to investigate whether the findings reported in literature so far are mirrored or not.

Keywords

Disciplines

Business | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

Business Travellers' Hotel Expectations and Disappointments
–
A Different Perspective to
Hotel Attribute Importance Investigation

Sara Dolnicar

Hotel attribute importance studies have a long tradition in hospitality research. This study investigates the issue for business travelers by asking the respondents to state their expectations and disappointments / dissatisfaction in an open question format instead of rating the importance of attributes directly.

The aim of the study is twofold: (1) to learn about expectations and past disappointments of this particular segment to provide additional insight for customizing hotel offers and (2) to investigate whether the findings reported in literature so far are mirrored or not.

Key words: Business Travellers, Hotel Star Category, Hotel Attribute Importance, Hotel Guest Expectations, Hotel Guest Disappointments

Sara Dolnicar, Ph.D., (email: sara.dolnicar@wu-wien.ac.at) is assistant professor at the Institute for Tourism and Leisure Research at the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration. This study was supported by the Hotel Department of the Austrian Business Chamber and the Tourism Department of the Business Ministry.

Introduction

In a competitive marketplace, market segmentation is the key to success. The concept of market segmentation can be implemented best, when there is a sound basis of knowledge about the target group. This study investigates expectations and past disappointments of business travelers staying at hotels with different star rating categories. Thus, it is based on two lines of past tourism research, which will both be briefly reviewed in the following paragraphs: hotel attribute studies and business traveler descriptions.

A vast number of studies was conducted in the past investigating what the optimal hotel offer looks like. The studies turn out to be extremely heterogeneous in terms of research interest, the target segment studied, the attributes studied and the survey design. This wide variety of studies makes it impossible to draw generalized conclusions. Table 1 illustrates the heterogeneity of approaches.

Table 1: Empirical studies investigating important hotel attributes

	Focus	Valid for	Questionnaire design	Sample / response rate	Data analysis
Lewis 1984 (b)	determinants of hotel selection	business and pleasure travellers	determinance, salience and importance for the stay (66 items)	1314	descriptive statistics
Lewis 1984 (a)	grouping of choice-determining attributes, importance and perception	**business travellers**	importance for choice, importance at stay, perception, 5 point scale (66 items)	1314	factor analysis, analysis of variance
Cadotte & Turgeon 1988	critical hotel factors	hotel guests	attribute ranking by number of complaints and compliments by management	260	descriptive
Wind, Green, Shifflet & Scarbrough 1989	evaluation and preference	hotel guests	conjoint design (50 items)	601	hybrid conjoint analysis
Saleh & Ryan 1991	service quality	four star hotel guests	expectations, performance, 5 point scale (33 items)	200	gap analysis
Ananth et al. 1992	importance for hotel selection	mature segments	importance, 5 point scale (57 items)	510 / 40%	descriptive & factor analysis
Barsky & Labagh 1992	Customer satisfaction	**business** vs. pleasure travellers	importance and performance (9 items)	100	descriptive statistics
Saleh & Ryan 1992	importance for hotel choice	four star hotel guests	importance and performance, 5 point scale (29 items)	145	factor analysis
McCleary, Weaver & Hutchinson 1993	importance for hotel selection	**business travellers**	importance, 5 point scale (56 items)	433 / 14%	factor, discriminant analysis

Pannell Kerr Forster Ass. 1993	Importance	regular hotel guests			frequency tables
Weaver & Oh 1993	importance	**american business travellers**	importance, 5 point scale (56 items)	433 / 14%	mean values and group comparisons
Clow, Garretson & Kurtz 1994	importance for the next hotel decision	panel households	importance, 7 point scale (14 items)	181 / 62%	causal modelling
Schaefer, Illum & Margavio 1995	Importance	motorcoach tour operators	importance, 5 point scale (25 items)	201 / 22%	mean values and group comparisons
Tsaur & Tzeng 1995	importance, evaluation and utility	three star hotel guests	attribute importance pairwise comparison, 9 point scale (27 items)	204	descriptive statistics
Griffen, Shea & Weaver 1996	Importance for hotel selection	**business hotel guests**	Importance, 5 point scale (56 items)	433 / 14%	discriminant analysis
Gundersen, Heide & Olsson 1996	satisfaction	**business travellers**	Satisfaction, (22 items) 7 point scale	375 / 41%	causal modelling
Hartline & Jones 1996	Service quality	hotel guests	performance, service quality, service value, 5 point scales (8 items)	1351	causal modelling
Bowen & Shoemaker 1998	Loyalty building	**luxury hotel business travellers**	loyalty impact of benefits, 7 point scale (18 items)	892 / 18%	structural modelling approach
Dube & Renaghan 1999	attributes used in hotel selection	leisure, **business,** meeting, convention	open question	469	frequency tables
Dube & Renaghan 2000	value creating attributes for intermediaries	travel agents and meeting planners	open questions	194	descriptive analysis

The one most typical characteristic within this line of research seems to be, that the attributes are provided to the respondents as a list of some kind and respondents react to the features by ranking them as more or less important. One exception to this rule is provided by Dube and Renaghan (2000) choosing an open question format asking for important hotel attributes and ending up with 1275 different answers. Both approaches have advantages and drawbacks. The closed question format eases statistical testing it restricts the variety of answers and thus is in danger of ignoring possible important additional factors. The open question format asking for the importance of attributes on the other hand provides the widest possible view but makes it difficult to differentiate which attributes are core requirements and which ones only add little value to a pleasant hotel experience. The study presented in this paper takes a slightly different point of view: In order not restrict the range of possible answers, open answer format is chosen and to prevent respondents to list less relevant attributes (by asking directly which factors are perceived as important), the questions streamline the associations to expectations prior to seeing the hotel and the disappointments experienced in the past. The assumption is, that answers to these questions would help to pin down central issues of a hotel offer.

Turning from hotel attribute research to the segment of business travelers: Business travel is defined as "all non-discretionary trips which occur either explicitly for the purpose of engaging in work, or incidentally in the course of conducting work-related activities." (Ritchie, 2000). The segment of business travelers has attracted a lot of attention for decades both in tourism industry and research. The number of publications covering the issue of business travel in general is very high including text books (e.g. Thompson-Smith, 1988; Davidson, 1994), journal articles (e.g. Burkart, 1983; Snepenger & Milner 1990; O'Brian, 1992 and 1998; Kulendran & Wilson, 2000) and conference contributions (e.g. Cook, 1986; Tschikof, 1988; O'Brian, 1991).

A number of studies (marked in boldface letters in Table 1) investigated the issue of hotel characteristics focusing on business travelers in particular:

Weaver & Oh (1993) chose the group of American business travelers, finding the factors "convenience for the business", "good reputation", "friendly staff", "cleanliness" and "safety and security facilities" to range highest in the importance of this customers. Also they found a few significant differences between frequent and infrequent business travelers. McCleary, Weaver & Hutchinson (1993) questioned upscale business travelers. While only two hotel attributes ("meeting facilities" and "convenient location") distinguished between business travelers in different situations, the one factor most strongly influencing hotel selection turned out to be "location". Griffen, Shea & Weaver (1996) studied differences between business hotel guests staying at luxury and mid-priced hotels and found price to be the most important discriminator with luxury hotel guests feeling indifferent with regard to this issue. Dube & Renaghan (2000) found the top five hotel selection criteria in a business trip setting to be "location", "brand name and reputation", ""physical property", "value for money" and "guest-room design", while the top five attributes creating value during the stay were identified to be "guest-room design", physical property", "service (interpersonal)", "service (functional)" and "F&B related services". Lewis (1984a) determined the top choice-determining factors of business travelers: "location", "price", "Level of service", food quality" and "cleanliness". Bowen & Shoemaker (1998) studied loyalty factors for the segment of luxury hotel business travelers. "Providing upgrades when available" ranked first in this list of very specific statements, followed by "Check in and check out anytime" and "The hotel uses information from your prior stays to customize services for you." Barsky & Labagh (1992) investigated factors influencing loyalty as well but on a facility level, finding the services of the reception to be most influential for the return probability, followed by the general facilities, employee attitudes, services and the location. Finally, Gundersen, Heide & Olsson (1996) focused on the issue of guest satisfaction of business travellers and revealed that two factors are particularly important for overall satisfaction: the tangible aspects of housekeeping and the intangible aspects of reception.

Based on these reports, two findings form the basis for this study:

1. Three hotel attributes are repeatedly identified as important (from different perspectives) in studies focusing on the business traveler segment : location, reputation, price (or value for money)

2. There is an indication that price plays a different role for business travelers staying in different hotel classes.

The study at hand chooses the approach of indirectly tackling the issue of importance by asking the respondents to state their expectations and disappointments. The market

segment under consideration is business travelers (in Europe) and the attributes are not predefined but questioned in open data format.

The survey data is used to investigate whether the findings reported in literature are mirrored or not, on the one hand, and, on the other hand to learn about expectations and past disappointments in order to provide hotel industry with additional insight for the task of customizing their product by successfully reducing fearful feelings and meeting expectations as expressed by the guests.

The empirical study

The empirical study was conducted in Austria during the winter and summer season of 2001. Tourists were questioned in their hotels all over the country. The sample was not drawn in a representative manner but in a hypothesis oriented way setting quotas for winter and summer season as well as the hotel star categories.

The interviews took 15 minutes in average and included open questions on the expectations towards the hotel category visited most often and disappointments that have been experienced in the past. The open question format was chosen in order not to influence the respondents by providing ready made answers. The respondents were not limited in the number of statements they chose to make. In addition, numerous background variables as age, years of school education etc. have been asked.

The total sample size amounts to 195. 60 percent were questioned in the winter season, 40 percent in the summer season of 2001, 17 percent stayed in hotels graded one- or two-star, 35 percent in three-star, 33 percent in four-star in finally 15 percent in five star accommodation. The average age of the respondents was 40 years, the sample consisted of 72 percent male and 28 percent female business travelers.

Expectations

The question investigating the expectations of business travelers concerning the hotel was posed in the following way: "So you have a lot of experience with hotels within the .... star category. What do you expect from ....-star hotels?" The question had to address the issue of star grading, as it represents a major intervening variable in this question. The questions was posed in open question format. The respondents were allowed to state as many factors as they wanted to. After field work was finished, the statements were categorized. Under the heading "cleaniness" e.g. statements like "hygiene", "not dirty" were included. This categories are used for the following frequency distribution.

The top five expectations are given in Figure 1. Cleanliness is mentioned most often by the respondents (16 percent of all factors named were included in the category "cleanliness"), followed by friendliness, good food, a television set in the room and service. The location and the price issue rank 7th and 8th. As this as open question, the answers had to be categorized. The bias from this categorization has to be held as small as possible. Therefore e.g. the categories "good service" and "service" are listed separately. It could not automatically be assumed that high quality service was meant by respondents stating "service". In lower categories the mere existence of service personnel could have been expected.

Figure 1: Top 10 Expectations towards hotels (in percent of statements)
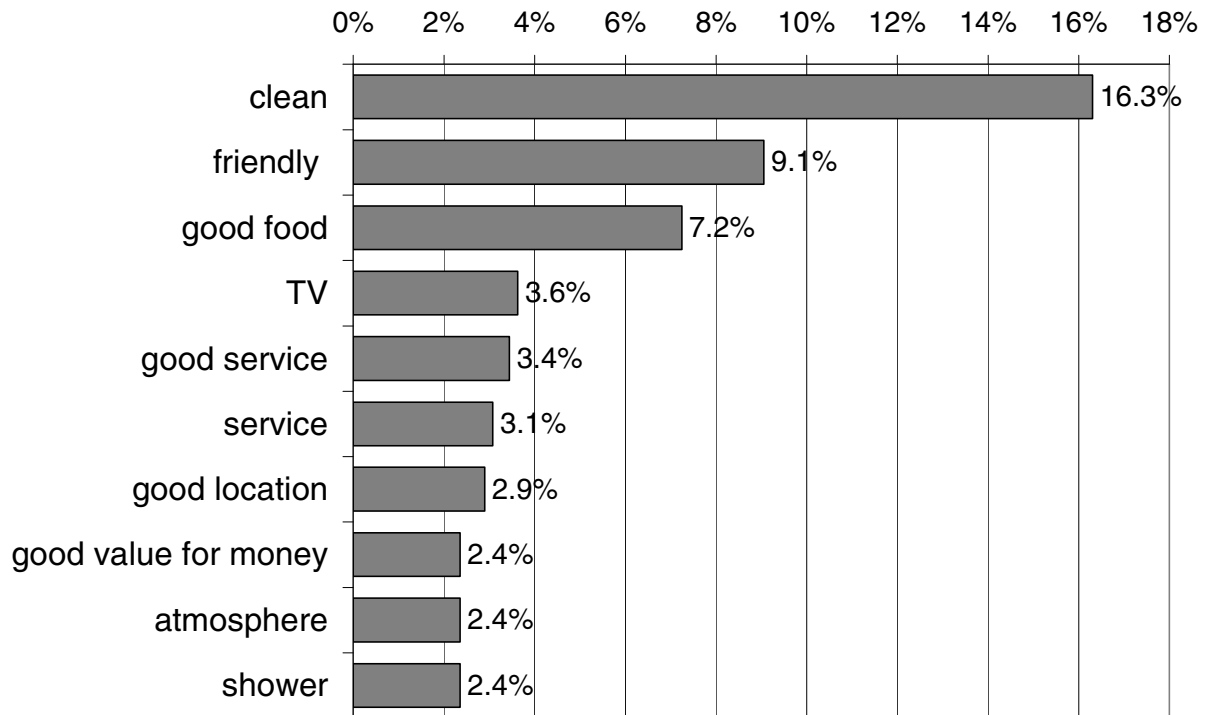
As mentioned before, expectations might strongly differ in dependence of the star category of the accommodation. Therefore, the business travelers staying in different hotel categories are compared and some interesting differences can be revealed (the Chi-square test is significant for this comparison but should not be overestimated due to the large number of cells and consequently spare data in the crosstabulation). Table 2 lists the items that differ between business travelers staying in hotels of different categories.

Table 2: Business travelers' hotel expectations by hotel star category (in percent of statements)

	* / **	***	****	*****
good food	**8.0%**	**10.0%**	5.6%	3.7%
TV	**5.3%**	**6.0%**	2.1%	0.0%
good service	1.3%	4.0%	2.6%	**4.9%**
good location	2.7%	3.0%	2.1%	**4.9%**
staff	**2.7%**	**2.0%**	1.0%	0.0%
good value for money	**5.3%**	1.5%	3.1%	0.0%
pleasant atmosphere	0.0%	1.5%	**3.6%**	**3.7%**

large room	0.0%	1.5%	**3.1%**	**3.7%**
toilet	**1.3%**	**1.5%**	0.0%	0.0%
cheap	**1.3%**	**1.0%**	0.0%	0.0%
shower	**9.3%**	1.0%	1.5%	1.2%
internet	0.0%	1.0%	1.5%	**2.5%**
high quality	0.0%	0.5%	1.5%	2.5%
food	**6.7%**	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%
comfortable bed	**2.7%**	0.0%	1.0%	1.2%
comfort	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	**3.7%**

Three conclusions can be drawn from this table. First, business travelers staying in one- or two star-hotels verbalize much more fundamental expectations than the remaining guests. They mention issues that seem to be clear in the other categories, as e.g. a shower, availability of food or a comfortable bed. With the guests staying at three star accommodations they share the expectation to get good food, have a TV in the room and an own toilet. Also the price issue is mentioned by these guests, whereas business travelers staying in higher hotel categories do not mention price or value-for money very often. Guests staying in five star hotels on the other hand expect good service, a good location, pleasant atmosphere, large rooms, comfort in general as well as the availability of internet more often.

Thus from the perspective of expectations it becomes clear that the group of business travelers is very heterogeneous and that members of this segment not only make use of different hotel categories but also express differing expectations concerning their accommodation.

Disappointments / Dissatisfaction

The same conclusion can be drawn for the disappointments stated by the business travelers. Disappointments regarding different star categories are very distinct. The question was posed in the following manner: "What were – for you personally – the main reasons for -dissatisfaction in ...-star hotels?"

Figure 2 gives the resulting critical factors stated first for the business travelers in percent of statements. Again, the lack of cleanliness is in the lead. Nearly one fifth of all answers given by the respondents touch the issue of hygiene and cleanliness, followed by weaknesses in the fields of room design and setup, personnel and service. Both location and price do not represent major factors of dissatisfaction, as these issues only amount to 5 percent of the statements, 4 percent respectively.

.

Figure 2: Disappointments / factors of dissatisfaction´(in percent of statements)
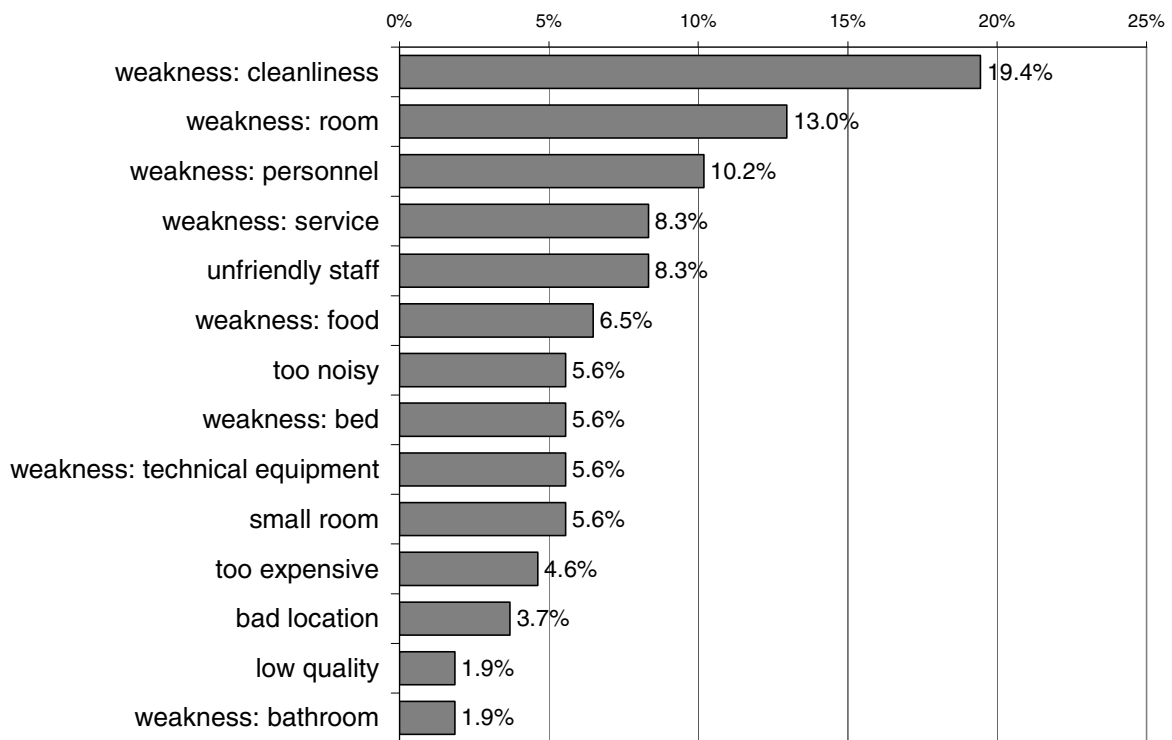

Table 3 lists distinct disappointments for business guests staying in hotels with different star ratings. Again the highly significant Chi-square test for the crosstabulation with the star ratings should be taken as indicative only. The most distinct differences include the feeling that the offer war bad quality. This statement is made by business guest staying in five star graded accommodation only. Similarly this group of business travelers states to have been disappointed by the service and the personnel in general far more than the others. On the other hand, cleanliness and noise problems are mentioned by guests staying in the lower three categories more often. Finally the basics "bed" and "food" are stated most often by members of the one- and two-star accommodation group among the business guests.

Table 3: Business travelers' disappointments by hotel star category (in percent of statements)

	* / **	***	****	*****
weakness: cleanliness	**33.3%**	**22.5%**	17.9%	5.6%
too noisy	**8.3%**	**10.0%**	2.6%	0.0%
weakness: service	0.0%	7.5%	2.6%	**27.8%**
weakness: bed	**8.3%**	5.0%	5.1%	5.6%

8

weakness: food	**25.0%**	2.5%	5.1%	5.6%
too expensive	0.0%	2.5%	7.7%	5.6%
bad quality	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	**11.1%**
weakness: personnel	16.7%	0.0%	12.8%	**22.2%**

The dissatisfaction question very strongly mirrors the expectation question. Although there is some asymmetry in the general frequency distribution (E.g. friendliness and good food are expected much more often than stated in the list of dissatisfaction factors.), the investigation of differences between star categories of the hotels mirrors the results arrived at from the expectation point of view. Again, the fundamental issues are named more often by business guests staying in lower hotel categories, whereas luxury hotel business travelers express their disappointment with intangibles as e.g. service, quality in general and personnel far more often.

Conclusions

The study investigates the issue of hotel attribute importance for business travelers by asking the respondents to state their expectations and disappointments / dissatisfaction in an open question format. The empirical data consisted of 195 business travelers questioned in their hotels with quotas imposed on the star category, in order to be able to control for this intervening variable expected to have major influence on the results.

The aim of the study is twofold: (1) to learn about expectations and past disappointments of this particular segment in order to provide hotel industry with additional insight for customizing their product by meeting expectations and avoiding disappointments as expressed by the guests and (2) to investigate whether the findings reported in literature so far are mirrored or not.

Concerning the central hotel attributes, the factor "cleanliness" is in the lead, no matter whether the issue of hotel attribute importance is seen from the expectations or the dissatisfaction perspective. Friendliness and good food still account for more than five percent of the statements on expectations each. From the dissatisfaction point of view, weaknesses in the fields of room personnel, service and staff have amount to more than eight percent of the answers each. Strong differences between business travelers staying in different hotel categories can be detected both from the expectation and the disappointment perspective. The general finding concerning these differences is, that guest in lower categories are more concerned about the fundamental hotel components, whereas luxury business travelers emphasize the intangible aspects more.

The conclusions drawn in prior studies on the issue of hotel attribute factor importance for the segment of the business travelers are not mirrored very well in this study. Location and reputation were not an issue at all, while price ranked rather low. The reason for this is the form of the question drawing the attention to other aspects than by asking the typical question that is used in hotel attribute studies which directly requires importance ratings.

The finding that price plays a different role for business travelers staying in different hotel

categories is supported by this study. Good value for money is expected far more often in low hotel categories. Price disappointments, on the other hand, are reported more often in higher hotel categories.

While the approach of studying open expectation and dissatisfation statements does draw the respondents attention to other issues and thus generates some interesting findings for hotels specializing on business travelers, generalizations of this findings should be made with great caution only. In order to increase generalizability, the survey would have to be conducted in more countries and obviously a larger sample size would increase the power of statistical tests. Another highly interesting field of further research would be to investigate asymmetries in expectation and disappointment statements as e.g. revealed in the case of friendliness or good food. Within the framework of this study it nor possible to understand why they emerge, only hypotheses can be formulated as e.g. such factors being satisfactorily provided by the majority of hotels or differences in importance weighting depending on negative or positive surprises. Finally, as the straight question of importance was not included in this survey, direct comparison of the direct importance questioning and the approach chosen here unfortunately was not possible. But future work including all three perspectives could shed more light on this conceptual link between the constructs "expectation", "dissatisfaction" and "importance".

References

Ananth, Mangala, Frederick J. DeMicco, Patrick J. Moreo and Richard M. Howey (1992) Marketplace Lodging Needs of Mature Travellers. **The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Quarterly**. August 1992: 12-24.

Barsky, Jonathan D. and Richard Labagh (1992) A Strategy for Customer Satisfaction**. The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly** Oktober 1992: 32-40.

Bowen, John T. and Stowe Shoemaker (1998) Loyalty: A Strategic Commitment. **The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly** February 1998: 12-25.

Burkart, A.J. (1983) Trends in UK business travel. **Tourism-Management** 4: 1, 54-57.

Cadotte, Ernest R. and Normand Turgeon (1988) Key Factors in Guest Satisfaction. **The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly** February 1988: 45-51.

Clow, Kenneth E., Judith A. Garretson and David L. Kurtz (1994) An Exploratory Study into the Purchase Desicion Process Used by Leisure Travellers in Hotel Selection. **Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing** 4: 53-71.

Cook, S (1986) Business travel trends. Proceedings of the twelfth travel outlook forum, October 10, Miami Beach, 59-71.

Davidson, R. (1994) **Business travel**. Pitman Publishing Limited: London.

Dube, Laurette and Leo M. Renaghan (1999) How Hotel Attributes Deliver the Promised Benefits. **The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly** Oktober 1999: 89-95.

Dube, Laurette and Leo M. Renaghan (2000) Creating Visible Customer Value – How Customers View Best-practice Champions. **The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly** February 2000: 62-72.

Griffin, Robert K., Linda Shea and Pamela Weaver (1996) How Business Travellers Discriminate Between Mid-Priced and Luxury Hotels: An Analysis Using a Longitudinal Sample. **Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing** 4: 63-75.

Gundersen, Marit G., Morten Heide and Olsson Ulf H. (1996) Hotel Guest Satisfaction among Business Travellers. **The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly** April 1996: 72-81.

Hartline, Michael D. and Keith C. Jones (1996) Employee Performance Cues in a Hotel Service Environment: Influence on Perceived Service Quality, Value, and Word-of-Mouth Intentions. **Journal of Business Research** 35: 207-215.

Kulendran, N. & Wilson, K. (2000) Modelling business travel. **Tourism-Economics** 6: 1, 47-59.

Lewis, Robert C. (1984a) Isolating Differences in Hotel Attributes**. The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly** November 1984: 64-77.

Lewis, Robert C. (1984b) The Basis of Hotel Selection**. The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly** May 1984: 54-69.

McCleary, Ken W., Pamela A. Weaver and Joe C. Hutchinson (1993) Hotel Selection Factors as they relate to business travel situations. **Journal of Travel Research** Fall 1993: 42-48.

O'Brien, K. (1991) The European business travel market - a market of immense size and value which is difficult to research. Seminar on travel and tourism in transition: the research challenge, Dublin (Ireland) 29th-31st May 1991, 87 98.

O'Brien, K. (1992) European business travel in the 1990s. **Travel and TourismAnalyst** 1, 77-89.

O'Brien, K. (1998) The European business travel market. **Travel and Tourism Analyst** 4, 37-5.

Pannell Kerr Forster Associates (1993) Factors influencing the design of hotels. **International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management** 5:17-19.

Ritchie, Robin J.B. (2000) Business Travel. In: Jafari, Jafar (ed.) **Encyclopedia of Tourism**. London: Routledge, p 63.

Saleh, Farouk and Chris Ryan (1991) Analysing Service Quality in the Hospitality Industry Using the SERVQUAL Model. **The Service Industries Journal** 11:324-343.

Saleh, Farouk and Chris Ryan (1992) Client perceptions of hotels. **Tourism Management** June:163-168.

Schaefer, Allen, Steve Illum and Tom Margavio (1995) The Relative Importance of Hotel Attributed to Motorcoach Tour Operators. **Journal of Hospitality and Leisure**

Marketing 3: 65-80.

Snepenger, D. & Milner, L. (1990) Demographic and situational correlates of business travel. **Journal of Travel Research** 28: 4, 27-32.

Thompson-Smith, J.M. (1988) **Travel agency guide to business travel.** Delmar Publishers Inc.: Albany, New York.

Tsaur, Sheng-Hshiung and Tzeng Gwo-Hsiung (1995) Multiattribute Decision Making Analysis for Customer Preference of Tourist Hotels**. Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing** 4:55-69.

Tschikof, J. (1988) 1989 outlook for business travel. Proceedings of the fourteenth annual travel outlook forum, October 4, 1988, Denver, Colorado, 91-95.

Weaver, Pamela A and Heung Chul Oh (1993) Do American Business Travellers Have Different Hotel Service Requirements? **International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management** 5: 16-21.

Weaver, Pamela A and Heung Chul Oh (1993) Do American Business Travellers Have Different Hotel Service Requirements? **International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management** 5: 16-21.

Wind, Jerry, Paul E. Green, Douglas Shifflet and Marsha Scarbrough (1989) Courtyard by Marriott: Designing a Hotel Facility with Consumer-Based Marketing Models. **Interfaces** 19: 25-47.