

THE SECRET ASSOCIATION OF HOTELS AND CULTURE

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Abstract

Culture appears as one (if not the most important) of the influencing factors of consumer behavior in the literature. As it recently can be experienced we are members of a service-based society. Thus, services are valorized and have an increasingly important role in our lives, since today's consumers act as warriors in the pursuit of endless experiences. However, according to some opinion, cultures are merging continuously, and today they are leading towards an emerging global culture. According to this statement, the question arises whether culture can be considered an important factor influencing the consumers of tourism services. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the role of culture and to examine the intensity of the classical and extended marketing mix elements at the Hilton Prague Hotel.

Keywords: *culture, consumer behaviour, classical marketing mix elements, extended marketing mix elements, differences*

JEL Classification: M31, L83

INTRODUCTION

According to the opinion of Luna and Forquer Gupta (2001: 47) culture "is unique to a specific group of people" and it has an implicit influence on human needs and important influence on consumer behaviour (Kotler and Keller, 2006: 246). At the same time, understanding the nature of cultural differences in economy meets a critical point (Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky and Saarinen, 1999).

Studying culture presents a more complex task when taking it to the international level. In this case, it is necessary to approach and analyze the culture on two levels:

(1) from a broader perspective, general behavioral features gain utmost importance,

(2) when studying it from a narrower perspective, emphasis should be placed on mapping relationships among a product, product group, or marketing action (Rekettye and Fojtik, 2009: 69).

But what does culture mean in tourism? Studying the relationship between culture and tourism is not satisfactory, stated Hughes in 2002 (2002: 164). However, today there is a journal entitled: Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change, besides that there are numerous journals which titles include the notion of tourism/hospitality: Journal of Travel Research, Annals of Tourism Research, Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, Revista de Turism: studii și

cercetări în turism (Journal of Tourism: studies and researches in tourism – Romanian) etc. At the same time, there are many journals which publish results of researches in the field of tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to some opinions, people are getting to resemble each other in many areas, travelling being one of the causes of this phenomenon (Randall, 2000: 162). Socio-cultural and social attitudes have a significant impact on the gained experiences and tourist demand during travelling (Kovács, 2004: 26).

Tourism, however, creates significant cultural differences affecting the perception/sensitivity of young people regarding their own culture (Anglin, 2015: 1). From this point of view research supports the following:

(1) Popular culture has a significant influence on the majority of Chinese tourists' behavior (Cui, Liao and Xu, 2017: 248).

(2) Researches of Cassel and Maureira (2017: 1) showed that: "the Indigenous tourism influences the ways in which individuals see themselves, and how they perceive their identity and culture".

(3) Researches carried out by George and Reid (2005: 88) led to the conclusion that local culture represents a value that stands as the most valuable possession of the local population.

(4) According to Richards (2014: 14) gaining

new experiences "are likely to be more bottom-up, self-organised and integrated into the local social, economic and cultural systems". Actually, the end product of the relationship between place and culture is nothing else than the tourist experience (Smith, 2015: 220).

(5) In case when culture is in the interest of socio-economic development it loses its charm and visitors of tourist resorts seek new alternatives. Therefore, in this respect, creativity is an alternative to conventional cultural tourism (Richards and Wilson, 2006: 1209). As a result, creativity "will foster learning the social and cultural structure of the destination for the tourist" said Salman (2010: 4).

The hotel is one of the most popular accommodation units, it also defines tourism sector. Therefore, it is evident to study the relationship between culture and the hotel(s) depending on this evidence. The most explored areas of culture in hotel industry are the following:

- (a) „national culture”,
- (b) „organizational culture” and
- (c) „cross-cultural comparison (Chen, Cheung and Law, 2012: 52).

The impact of national culture on the assessment of hotel services can be evaluated through the consumer/guest. The importance of the dimensions during the evaluation depends on the nationality of the guest.

According to a research conducted in Turkey, the following dimensions are highly emphasized in assessing the services provided by business hotels:

- (a) „convenience”,
- (b) „assurance”,
- (c) „tangibles”,
- (d) „adequacy in service supply” and
- (e) „understanding and caring” (Akbaba, 2006: 1).

However, to ensure that the guests feel the dedication of the staff it is necessary to provide the proper atmosphere, as it naturally determines the quality of the work performed by the staff.

According to Yang (2010: 609)

- (a) „role conflict”,
- (b) „burnout”,
- (c) „socialization” and
- (d) „work autonomy, but not role ambiguity”

have an impact on staff satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of hotel services is based on the marketing mix elements. It is important to know to what extent they contribute to the assessment of a particular hotel.

(1) the classical (product, price, distribution, promotion) or

(2) the extended marketing mix elements (people/staff, physical evidence, processes, customer, additional services).

It is also important to find out whether their significance changes according to the nationalities of the guests; or international hotel chains do not have to take culture into account because guests share similar expectations, irrespective of their national affiliation.

Based on these questions, the general hypotheses of this article are the following:

(1) In case of hotel evaluation, the extended marketing-mix elements are becoming increasingly important.

(2) Regarding the manifestation of tourism consumer behavior, culture does not play an important role nowadays.

In order to get an answer for these given hypotheses, the online reviews of the Hilton Prague Hotel were summarized, structured and analyzed.

The structure of online reviews of Hilton Prague is defined by the following points:

(1) The data was grouped based on the following variables:

- (a) nationality of the reviewees,
- (b) keywords associated to the particular hotel services,
- (c) identification of positive and negative opinions, and
- (d) the ratings given by the reviewees, meaning a scale from 1 to 10.

(2) Positive and negative opinions were also grouped according to the marketing mix element they were linked to.

(3) In order to avoid distortion of data, only Romanian and Hungarian tourists' opinions were structured.

(4) The rating interval was between 31. 03. 2015. – 28. 02. 2017.

(5) The criteria for the evaluation were the following: location, cleanliness, comfort, staff, amenities, value for money, free Wifi.

(6) Physical factor = Physical evidence/physical environment.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The structure of Table 1 is built on the following variables:

- the nationality of the reviewees,
- service evaluation based on association,
- positive reviews, depending on the classical or extended marketing mix elements,
- negative reviews, depending on the classical or extended marketing mix elements,
- the evaluation/average of the services.

Table 1. The rating of Hilton Prague Hotel

N.	Association	+	-	Ave rage
H.	Exceptional	Rich and varied breakfast, (Product), helpful staff (Staff)		9,6
H.	Very good	Great breakfast (Product)	Un-friendly staff (Staff)	8,3
H.	Pleasant	The size of room and bed (Physical factor)	Nearby highway (Place)	6,7
H.	Exceptional	Rich breakfast, (Product), nice staff (Staff)		9,6
H.	Recommended to everyone	Rich and varied breakfast, (Product), comfortable bed (Physical factor)		10
H.	AAA	Breakfast, (Product), hotel environment (Physical factor)		10
H.	Wonderful	Location, (Place) knowledge of Hungarian (Staff)	Expensive breakfast (Price)	10
H.	Exceptional	Building, inner courtyard (Physical factor)	Cold (Physical factor)	10
H.	Disappointing	Polite staff (Staff)	Far from the centre (Place)	4,5
H.	Good	Comfortable room, (Physical factor), good public transport available, (Place)	Expensive breakfast, (Price), poor management of the swimming pool (Additional service)	7,5
R.	Very good		Smoking forbidden in the bar (Physical factor)	8,3
R.	Ok		Expensive parking,	7,1

			(Price) Smoking in the hall (Physical factor)	
R.	Comfortable/expensive	Big room, comfortable, clean, (Physical factor) rich breakfast. (Product)	Expensive parking (Price)	9,6
R	Family/Christmas	Festive atmosphere (Staff, physical factor, consumer/guest)	Twice the price of the service (Staff)	9,6
R.	5 star	Smoking area, cleanness, luxury (Physical factor)		10
H.	Good			7,9
H.	Very good			8,3
H.	Good			7,5
H.	Fabulous			8,8
H.	Wonderful			9,2
H.	Wonderful			9,2
H.	Wonderful			9,2
H.	Wonderful			9,2
H.	Good			7,1
H.	Pleasant			6,7
H.	Exceptional			9,6
H.	Exceptional			9,6
H.	Exceptional			10
H.	Not bad			5,8
H.	Acceptable			5
H.	Pleasant			6,3
R	Very good			8,3
R.	Good			7,9
R.	Good			7,5
R.	Fabulous			8,8
R.	Fabulous			8,8
R.	Exceptional			10
R.	Acceptable			5
R.	Exceptional			10

Source:

http://www.booking.com/hotel/cz/hilton-prague.hu.html?aid=337486;sid=7ec420441b55f4a79d04a8e3a7789a27;dest_id=553173;dest_type=city;dist=0;group_adults=2;hpos=1;raw_dest_type=hotel;room1=A%2CA;sb_price_type=total;srfid=087a49002659f3449fcac13a994b0c67e35d3359X1;type=total;ucfs=1&#tab-reviews

Abbreviations:

N = Nationality

H = Hungarian tourist

R = Romanian tourist

+ = positive reviews

- = negative reviews

In Table 2, the reviews displayed in the above table are grouped according to the following variables: marketing mix elements, nationality, positive reviews, negative reviews.

Table 2. Cross chart: marketing-mix elements/nationality/negative and positive reviews

Marketing-mix elements	+		-		Total
	H.	R.	H.	R.	
Staff	4	1	1	1	7
Physical factors	5	3	1	2	11
Additional services	-	-	1	-	1
Customer/guest	-	1	-	-	1
Product	5	1	-	-	6
Place	2	-	2	-	4
Price	-	-	2	2	4

Based on the reviews of the guests regarding the services of the hotel it can be stated that the physical factors were the most important evaluation criterion for the Romanian and Hungarian guests, while the additional services and the behavior of the other consumers/guests were the least important.

Regarding the physical factors:

- (1) the size/comfort of the room,
- (2) the size/comfort of the bed,
- (3) the inside/outside design of the hotel has an impact on the reviews.

Smoking area possibilities have influenced the opinion and reviews of the Romanian guests in three distinct cases. In two cases they had a negative impact, and once they had a positive impact on their evaluation. In case of the Hungarian guests this criterion did not appear as a factor influencing their reviews regarding the total of the hotel services.

The additional services as factor influencing the evaluation of the hotel services were only available in case of a Hungarian citizen, but these did not increase the quality of hotel services, but rather influenced the negative evaluation of the hotel.

The behavior of other guests as a factor influencing the hotel services appeared only in the case of a Romanian guest, and with a positive content.

Based on the opinions of Hungarian and Romanian guests, the hotel's gastronomic offer had a positive influence on the guests using the services of Hilton Prague. This was expressed by evaluating the quality and the quantity of the breakfast.

Regarding the staff reviews are divided, but most of them are positive. As for Hungarians, it can be observed that most of them had positive interaction with the staff, while in case of Romanian guests negative experiences equal positive experiences. According to the Hungarian guests the staff's:

- (a) helpfulness,
- (b) kindness,
- (c) politeness and
- (d) speaking Hungarian are positive factors.

According to the Romanian guests

(a) the staff's aptitude is the most attractive feature.

Negative factors include the unfriendliness of staff according to the Hungarian guests, while in the opinion of the Romanian guests the hotel staff is responsible for any instances of inattentiveness.

In their reviews, the Hungarian guests evaluated the location of the hotel as well, but the Romanian guests did not so. Based on the present study, it can be seen that place as a classical marketing mix element appears equally in positive and negative reviews. The positive reviews refer to the:

- (a) good public transport availability, and
- (b) the great location of the hotel.

The negative reviews refer to the:

- (a) distant location of the hotel from the centre, and
- (b) the close distance to the highway.

Price appears as a negative factor in case of both Hungarian and Romanian guests. Hungarian guests had negative experience regarding the expensive breakfast, while Romanian guests complained about expensive parking. Based on the above opinions, we can conclude that the guests' evaluation of the Hilton Prague Hotel further extends the extended marketing mix elements, for example, in most reviews, the physical factor and the staff are included as an evaluation criterion; besides that, in particular cases the additional services and other guests, as factors, appear as well.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention the fact that there were opinions that could be linked to three marketing mix elements, such as "festive atmosphere" which can be created by the staff, the physical factors and other guests as well.

It is true that classical marketing-mix elements are present in the reviews (product, place and price) but they are less emphasized compared to the other elements of the extended marketing mix. The gastronomic offer is the only classical marketing mix element that appears in several reviews.

Furthermore, based on the keywords, services were categorized according to the evaluations of these services provided by the hotel. The following three group of services outlined:

(a) "OK services": Acceptable (2 reviews: 1 Romanian and 1 Hungarian), Not bad (1 review: 1 Hungarian) Disappointing (1 review: 1 Hungarian). Total of 4 reviews: 1 Romanian - and 3 Hungarian guests

(b) "Good services": Good (6 reviews: 4 Hungarian and 2 Romanian), OK (1 review: 1 Romanian) Pleasant (3 reviews: 3 Hungarian). Comfortable/expensive (1 review: 1 Romanian), Total of 11 reviews: 4 Romanian- and 7 Hungarian guests

(c) "Premium services": Fabulous (3 reviews: 1 Hungarian and 2 Romanian) Very good (4 reviews: 2 Romanian and 2 Hungarian) Excellent (5 reviews: 5 Hungarian) Outstanding (8 reviews: 6 Hungarian and 2 Romanian), Recommend to everyone (1 reviews: 1 Hungarian), AAA (1 review: 1 Hungarian), 5 stars (1 review: 1 Hungarian), Family/Christmas (1 review: 1 Romanian). Total of 24 reviews: 8 Romanian - and 16 Hungarian guests.

The guests of Romanian nationality expressing their opinions about the Hilton Prague's services were less strict than those of Hungarian nationality.

V. CONCLUSION

(1) Based on the previous discussions, the obvious question arises: what does proper culture management mean? Could it mean the identification of possibilities that serve the widespread sale of culture? Or it might mean that the sale of culture cannot/may not come up with any compromise since culture represents the most valuable asset and property of a nation for an indefinite period; and from this point of view the fact of multiplying the potential income becomes insignificant. Short-term thinking and greed are human traits that characterize all units acting in the tourism sector, but in our opinion there is no justification for this state of mind at any single organization, since this approach would only mean abandoning long-term strategies. Moreover, this would lead to negative consequences, which would be (almost) impossible to resolve.

(2) After analyzing the reviews of Hilton Prague, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- by taking into consideration all the extended marketing mix elements, physical factors were the most frequently expressed elements found in online reviews,
 - another extended marketing mix element refers to the staff, which can significantly increase but may also reduce the quality of the service provided by the hotel,
 - from the classical marketing mix elements the gastronomic offer (product) should be mentioned, which has the most significant influence on the evaluation of hotel services. At the same time, it is the only classical marketing mix element that added value to the services and never had any negative impact on the overall evaluation of the services,
 - considering the extended marketing-mix elements, the other consumers/guests have also increased the value of the services,

- by the analysis of the averages it can be deduced that Romanian citizens as guests have returned home more satisfied (8.53) after the use of the services of the Hilton Prague Hotel than the Hungarian guests (8.29). It is worth mentioning that:

(a) the verbal evaluation found in the reviews (expressed by the notions mentioned already in Table1) was not always consistent with the evaluation expressed by the average ratings (despite the fact that negative reviews appeared besides the positive ones, yet the Hilton Prague Hotel total services review still received the highest score),

(b) the two types of evaluations are not proportionable in each case, since the inadequate location of the hotel may not always be compensated by the politeness of the staff, at least only to certain limits,

(c) the same basket of services may have received the maximum score (10), but the minimum as well (4,5).

According to the obtained results of the research, the greatest problem regarding the services is the subjectivity of the guests.

- based on the keyword evaluation, it was observed that 16 out of the total of Hungarian guests classified the services provided by the hotel as "premium services", while in the case of the Romanian guests, only 8 people considered that the hotel had earned the rating of "premium services".

The presence of globalization is indisputable, according to expert opinions. We do not question the legitimacy of this statement, but we believe that the intensity of globalization differs from the case of physical products to services.

Indeed, there are common points in the evaluation of hotel chains, but at the same time it is also true that there are some marketing mix elements which influence the attitude of the guests depending on their nationality.

We strongly believe that, although culture cannot fully preserve and sustain the special traditions and peculiarities that define it, and therefore some changes are continuously experienced, it should not be fundamentally changed.

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