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Customer Complaints about Four Star Hotels in Pattaya, Thailand

The internet has increased the percentage of consumers who consult online travel reviews before making hotel reservations. Negative messages have a strong effect on tourists' willingness to reserve accommodations. This research aims to examine and to analyze the content of negative online customer comments from Booking.com focusing on four-star hotels in Pattaya, developing recommendations for hotel managers to develop their performance. One thousand three hundred and fifty negative comments about four-star hotels from Booking.com were selected. Seven categories of customer complaints are developed about hotel service, which are complaints about the staff, rooms, bathrooms, breakfast, facilities, location, and parking, sequentially. Suggestions concerning the response of practitioners to customer complaints are provided to improve service to reduce the number of complaints.

Keywords: electronic word of mouth, hotels, Thailand, customer complaints, booking.com

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Introduction

Imagine for a moment that you are planning to take a trip to another country, and are searching for nice accommodation for you or your family. In case you are not familiar with the destination, what would you do? You may ask someone who has visited the destination or read comments on the internet. It is a process of decision making; the more information received, the more confident you feel about your decision. The internet has become one of the most important tools for information searching in recent times, and new forms of word of mouth communication have appeared online.

In the hospitality and tourism industries, online transaction intentions and completeness of information can influence travelers' online satisfaction (Kim & Kim, 2004). More and more travelers use the internet for information searches and travel arrangements; the internet has become an important channel for consumers and buyers to interact without geographic boundaries and time limitations (Piccoli, Brohman, Watson, & Parasuraman, 2004). Sparks and Browning (2011) found that the overall valence of a set of hotel reviews will affect customer evaluations. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004) stated the relevance and importance of e-word of mouth (eWOM) as travelers now have the opportunity and ability to post both positive and negative consumption-related experiences and their judgments about hotels for other people to see.

Potential customers can enter booking websites and read past-purchasers' comments about accommodation before making a purchase. As eWOM has influenced customer information searches and buying decisions (Brown, Amanda & Lee, 2007), hotel managers must be more cognizant of what is written about their hotels online (Sparks & Browning, 2011). If hotel managers can contribute to customer satisfaction, customers will enjoy their stay and make

positive recommendations to others (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2006).

What happens when the service is described online as ‘not good’ or ‘uncomfortable’? Customers can share their concerns about their hotel experiences on hotel booking sites or Web-based complaint forums. Hotels may lose customers if they do not improve their service quality. Therefore, the importance of negative comments has led this research to focus solely on complaints. Hirschman (1970), developed a model of complaint behavior that showed that dissatisfied customers act to either exit or withdraw from the relationship to use the service again and voice a complaint to allow companies to attempt to repair or improve the service. Analysis of negative customer complaints can serve as valuable market research for hotels because it can demonstrate potential areas of operational improvement (Lewis & Morris, 1987).

This research aims to examine and analyze the content of negative online customer comments concerning four-star hotels in Pattaya collected from Booking.com. To answer the research question “What are the customer complaints about four-star hotels in Pattaya, Thailand?” and “What should hotel managers do in order to solve those complaints?” Hence, this study can offer valuable information for hotel managers to improve service quality in the future because negative eWOM has important implications for managers in terms of brand building, product and service development, as well as quality assurance. The effective complaint handling is positively related to customer loyalty and customer retention, which lead to long-term profitability for hotels (Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar, 1998).

Literature review

Electronic word of mouth in the tourism industry

eWOM has become an important attribute for business success since the worldwide adoption of internet technologies. In the travel industry, travelers search the internet to find

information about hotels and travel destinations. Tripadvisor.com (2011: cited in Julilvand, Ebrahimi, & Samiei, 2013) revealed hundreds of millions of potential travelers consulting online reviews as a source of information each year, and 84% booked hotel reservations by reading reviews (Travelindustrywire.com, 2007: cited in Julilvand et al., 2013). eWOM communication can be any positive or negative statement from potential or former customers about the products and service of companies on the internet (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

Information published online is considered as a source of data that influences tourists' travel intention and choice of destination (Soderlund & Rosengren, 2007). Schindler and Bickart (2005) conducted a study on a sample of frequent internet shoppers and found that the reasons why people read information from the internet are to gather information about products and services and to consult a wide audience before making a decision. Although some of them may search information for fun, it can influence their future purchase too. Many researchers have attempted to analyze and understand online traveler reviews (Julilvand & Samiei, 2012; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Lui & Zhang, 2014; Qi, Law, & Buhalis, 2013). Julilvand and Samiei (2012) examined the structural relationships of eWOM in Iran and found that eWom impacted destination images, tourist attitudes toward destinations and travel intentions.

Customer complaints and online customer complaints about hotels

Customer complaints are a major indicator of customer dissatisfaction, and negative disconfirmed expectations lead to dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1997). Dissonance theory can explain causes and outcomes of customer complaint behavior. Disconfirmed expectations bring a state of dissonance or psychological discomfort (Festinger, 1957). While Hirschman's (1970) theory of

exit, voice, and loyalty points out that complaint behavior relates to the value of voicing the complaint, the probability that the complaint will be successful, as well as the ability and willingness to take up the voice.

Complaint management is an essential task for keeping regular customers as well as encouraging new customers to use the service (Lee, Wang, & Trappey, 2014). Customer complaints can occur during or after-sales service, normally customers complain about the quality of products and the service staff (Crie, 2003). Customer complaints provide destination/hotel managers opportunities to improve their service management (Huang, Huang & Wu, 1996). However, failure to solve their complaints, their negative word-of-mouth can have catastrophic effects on the hotels' reputations and profitability (Yuksel, Kilinc, & Yuksel, 2006). Numkung, Jang, and Choi (2011) studied customer complaints in restaurants by collecting 289 questionnaires in the USA and found that customers may complain at any service stage.

In any service failure, loyal customers showed a significantly higher willingness to complain than less loyal customers. Ro and Wong (2012) conducted a study interviewing students at a university located in the southeast region of the USA, which showed that 58% of customers complain about products, 31% complain about service, and 11% complain about both products and service. In hotels, products and service are inseparable, 46% of customers complained about hotel products and 43% about service, whereas in restaurants, 64% complain about products and 26% about service. Nevertheless, the researchers also stated that customer complaints sometimes are based on evidence.

Unclear evidence refers to the employees' beliefs about customer engagement in opportunistic complaints based on their intuition, circumstances, and observations of customer behavior. For example, a customer complained about the noise from the room next door, but the

rooms around the guest's room were vacant (Ro & Wong, 2012). Assaf, Josiassen, Cvelbar, and Woo (2015) studied the effects of customer voice on hotel performance and stated that customer complaints have a stronger impact than customer satisfaction on hotel performance. Hotels should gain more from investing in lowering complaints rather than investing in customer satisfaction. However, managers of larger hotels should allocate resources to managing customer satisfaction, while managers of small hotels should minimize customer complains rather than increase satisfaction.

For online hotel customer complaints, Lee & Hu (2004) analyzed 222 hotel customer e-complaints from an internet complaint forum and found complaints were concerned with service provided not agreed upon, service declined in quality, rude staff, service never provided, overcharged, misleading advertising, unresponsive to requests for assistance, staff were confused/inefficient, unexpected/hidden fees, refused to adjust fees as guaranteed, refused to honor cancellations, service stopped, failed to credit promotional discounts, and payment was not credited. Levy, Duan, and Boo (2013) analyzed online reviews and responses of one-star hotels in the lodging market of Washington, D.C. and found the most common complaints related to front desk staff, bathroom issues, room cleanliness, and noise issues.

Credibility of online customer reviews

By consuming information from the internet, users should account for some bias from the authors of the information. First of all, people who post information may be extremely satisfied or extremely dissatisfied (Hu, Pavlou, & Zhang, 2009). Secondly, sometimes only consumers with a favorable disposition towards a product or service have the opportunity to write a review

(Hu et al., 2009). Third, it is possible that the people who wrote comments about products are influenced by factors other than objective product quality. Therefore, they may report some bias in these reviews. Fourth, some fake information can also be posted by competitors to damage the reputation of the competition (Dellarocas, 2006). Hence, the people who want to gain information from the internet should be conscious of this bias and filter the information (Banerjee & Fuderberg, 2004).

The credibility of online customer reviews can be examined by valence and intensity or the quality of comments (Mauri & Minazzi, 2013). Valence is negative and positive comments, and balanced information is considered more credible (Cheung et al., 2009). Ye et al. (2011) reviewed a major travel agency in China and found that the valence of travelers' reviews has a significant impact on online sales of hotel rooms.

Service quality

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1985) defined service quality as a gap between customer expectations and the actual service received. Service quality is considered the lifeblood of a hotel (Min & Min, 1996). To improve service quality, Narangajavana and Hu (2008) indicated four aspects: (1) service delivery, (2) hotel employees, (3) guest amenities and surroundings, and (4) prestige. Several researchers also recommended further aspects: (1) service quality of the reception area, rooms and restaurant, (2) techniques of employee, (3) decoration and atmosphere of the lobby, rooms and restaurant (Han, Back, & Barrett, 2009; Ryuet et al., 2008), (4) safety of rooms and courtesy of attendants, and (5) savor and variation of food (6) decoration and atmosphere of the lobby, rooms and restaurant (Han et al., 2009). Therefore, this study examined customer complaints not only about service staff, but also concerning all aspects

as mentioned in the literature review.

Methodology

Tourism is the largest industry in Thailand. One of the main tourist destinations in Thailand is Pattaya, well-known for sun, sand, and beaches. In 2013, there were 9.4 million tourists to Pattaya who spent around 95,000 million baht or US\$3.166 billion. The majority of foreign tourists were Russians and Chinese, as well as visitors from the Middle East, Germany, India, and South Korea (ManagerOnline, 2013). Thailand is a significant context for the study of hotels and customer complaints as it received *The Asian Destination with the Highest Client Satisfaction Award* in 2014 and received five awards from *Travel & Leisure India & South Asia* in 2014 for best country, best wedding destination, best capital city, best leisure destination and best family destination.

This study selected Booking.com for data collection as this site only sends review invitations to customers who have not only booked but also stayed at the property; and accepts reviews only from the email address of the individual who made the booking. Vasquez (2011) stated that the average negative review is approximately 300 words in length, with shorter ones of around 50 words in length. The longest comment has around 2000 words. The methodology for selecting comments in this study was divided into four stages.

First, 10 qualified comments in 2014-2015 were selected from each hotel listing from low to high comment scores. There were a total of 1,350 people who gave comments for data analysis. Second, only comments that were written in English were coded in this study. Third, the complaints from the site were carefully selected by choosing only comments of people who wrote both positive and negative things in order to avoid data from biased persons whose

comments were extreme in some ways. According to the literature review, the credibility of online customer reviews can be examined by valence (Mauri & Minazzi, 2013). Cheung et al. (2009) stated that valence is negative and positive comments, and balanced information is considered more credible. The researchers then limited the selection to negative comments. Fourth, in order to have a variety of comments, the researchers selected guests' comments in which they mentioned many aspects rather than selected comments that mentioned only one or two topics. Each guest commented on around 4-5 topics.

The data were coded by manual coding. The data were manually screened to ensure that related phenomena had not been overlooked several times. My co-researcher and I analyzed the data together and discussed the possibility to code them into themes and sub-themes by using investigator triangulation as validity checking. This triangulation technique uses at least one researcher to evaluate the data to develop a broader and deeper understanding of how the different investigators view the issue (UNAID, 2010). Moreover, the reliability of data coding was checked by Krippendorff's alpha (α) dichotomous checking 0-1 (No/Yes). After that, it was calculated manually with the formula $\alpha = 1 - (D_0/D_e)$ when D_0 is observed disagreement and D_e is expected disagreement. Krippendorff's alpha (α) of this study was 0.810 which was highly reliable.

We created the complaint framework by first examining all data and then selecting keywords by examining the frequency of repetitions after that classifying data in specific categories (see Table 1). Data were classified into 7 themes, given letters (A, B, C, etc.) as codes: rooms (A), staff (B), bathrooms(C), breakfast/restaurant(D), parking (E), location (F), and facilities (G). Each theme also has sub-themes given letter codes as well.

To analyze the guest’s comments, the researcher carefully read and classified sentences into different themes and sub-themes because each guest’s comments had several topics. For instance, a guest from Hong Kong commented: “Had to switch rooms initially as I'd booked a 'deluxe' and got put in a standard room (coding to “A” about problems with the type of room that “Guests cannot get type of room they have booked-A-13”). Poor cleanliness (coding to “A” “Dirty rooms: carpet, floor, curtain –A-2”). Wi-Fi kept logging me out (coding to “A” “slow Wi-Fi or charging for Wi-Fi”-A-7). Never any answer when calling room service, this made me late to the airport (coding to “B” “Check-in and check-out staff/process works slow”-B-6). From this comment, the research data can be coded into four topics.

A guest from Macau wrote: “When we arrived and saw the hotel, it didn’t look like a 4-star hotel, it should have been a 2.5. It was not the same as the pictures (A-4). The room key is not a card, you have to lock your door (A-12). The staff didn’t look happy at all (B-5) and their English was not good (B-7). Breakfast was so bad and the same every day (D-2). The pool was small (G-2). The location of hotel was far away from the beach (F-6).” From these comments, the research data can be coded into seven topics.

Table 1: Online review complaint framework

Room	Front desk staff	Bathroom	Restaurant /breakfast	Parking	Location	Hotel facilities
Smell	Unfair	Old	Taste	Safety	Street	Swimming pool
Noise	Impolite	Dirty	Variety	Distance	Distance	Gym
Picture in advertisement	Unfriendly	Size	Cleanliness	Space	Safety	Elevators
Air-conditioning	Refused to solve problems	Broken	Buffet		Convenience	
Carpet and floor	Check in-out process problems	Air-circulation	Expensive			
Bedding/linens	Unable to speak English/foreign languages	Wet floor	Amount of food			
Towels		Insects	Staff			
Furniture		Flushing				

system
Keycard
Insects
Room- amenities
Internet
Television

Data analysis, results, and discussion

Of the 1,350 reviews analysed, in which some people commented on more than one topic, there were a total of 3,582 complaints. This study found that there are seven main categories of customer complaints as demonstrated in Table 2. There are also examples of customer complaints in the appendix. The first result to be analyzed was the 1,377 complaints about the staff. The majority of the guests revealed that the hotel staff could not communicate in English or other foreign languages (520 comments), and then they commented about the check-in and check-out process (210 comments) because of the slow process and mistakes in the billing system. Customers also wrote that staff could not solve problems immediately (159 comments). Also, guests complained about unfair/inattentive treatment from staff (145 comments), and that some staff were unfriendly, they did not smile or say hello when meeting or passing by customers (134 comments).

The second result was derived from 1,012 complaints about the room, with the majority of customers mentioning that the quality of the rooms did not match the value (194 comments), old and smelly rooms (150 comments), insufficient room amenities (94 comments), slow Wi-Fi or charging for Wi-Fi (93 comments), rooms and the pictures of the rooms in advertisements were different (90 comments), and both noisy and dirty rooms (85 comments).

Table 2: Customer complaints about the four-star hotels in Pattaya, Thailand.

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	%	Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	%	
A Complaints about the rooms (1,012 complaints or 28.28 %)	Old and smelly rooms (A-1)	150	14.82	B Complaints about the staff (1,377 complaints or 38.45%)	Unfair/ inattention treatment from staff (B-1)	145	10.53	
	Unprotected noisy rooms, dirty rooms (carpet, floor, curtains) (A-2)	85	8.40		Negative impression of hotel security guards/no guard (B-2)	84	6.10	
	Quality of the rooms did not match the value (A-3)	194	19.17		Staff cannot solve problems Immediately (B-3)	159	11.55	
	Rooms and pictures of rooms in advertisements were different(A-4)	90	8.89		Impolite staff (B-4)	125	9.08	
	Air-conditioners did not work or were not cold (A-5)	77	7.61		Unfriendly staff (B-5)	134	9.73	
	Pillows and beds were dirty (A-6)	22	2.17		Not impressed check-in and check-out process (B-6)	210	15.25	
	Slow Wi-Fi or charging for Wi-Fi (A-7)	93	9.19		Staff could not speak English and other foreign languages (B-7)	520	37.76	
	Small televisions and few channels (A-8)	32	3.16					
	Beds too hard/soft (A-9)	31	3.06					
	Towels were dirty (A-10)	14	1.38					
	Broken furniture (A-11)	12	1.19					
	Keycard system did not work properly (A-12)	15	1.48					
	Guests cannot get the type of room they have booked (A-13)	58	5.73					
	A lot of mosquitoes and insects (A-14)	45	4.45					
	Insufficient room amenities (A-15)	94	9.30					
C Complaints about the bathrooms	Old and dirty bathrooms (C-1)	197	32.45	D Complaints about the	Breakfast was not delicious (D-1)	98	30.25	
	Narrow bathrooms (C-2)	58	9.56		Breakfast had few choices/no traditional food for some nationalities (D-2)	85	26.23	
	Water heaters did not work properly (C-3)	55	9.06			14	4.32	

(607 complaints or 16.95 %)	Broken equipment (such as taps, bath tubs, showers) (C-4)	127	20.92	restaurant/ Breakfast (324 complaints or 9.04 %)	Food was not clean and unhealthy (D-3)		
	No air circulation in the bathrooms (C-5)	54	8.90		Breakfast was not a buffet (D-4)	42	12.96
	Toilet did not flush (C-6)	12	1.98		Breakfast was expensive (D-5) Breakfast	16	4.94
	Poor water quality and quantity (C-7)	35	5.77		food was not enough (D-6)	24	7.41
	Wet floor (C-8)	19	3.13		Staff was unhelpful (D-7)	34	10.49
	Water logged after showering (C-9)	14	2.31		Restaurants were not well-cleaned (D-8)	11	3.40
	Insects in the bathroom (C-10)	36	5.92				
E Complaints about parking (52 complaints or 1.45 %)	No car park/no free parking (E-1)	5	9.62	F Complaints about the location (96complaints or 2.68 %)	Streets to hotels were too narrow (F-1)	10	10.42
	Unsafe car park (E-2)	6	11.54		Difficult to find the hotels (F-2)	24	25.00
	Car park was too far from the hotel (E-3) Street to the car park was too narrow(E-4) Insufficient parking (E-5)	13	25.00		Hotels are located far from main roads (F-3)	26	27.08
	No handicapped parking spaces (E-6)	8	15.38		Streets to hotels are very dark (F-4)	9	9.38
		16	30.77		no signs to the hotels (F-5)	4	4.17
		4	7.69		Far from tourist spots (F-6)	23	23.95
G Complaints about hotel facilities (114 complaints or 3.18 %)	No/small swimming pool (G-1)	8	7.01				
	No kid's pool (G-2)	12	10.53				
	Swimming pool was unsafe/unclean (G-3) Hotel gym is small, dirty and broken equipment (G-4)	44	38.60				
	Elevators are dirty/small/unsafe/ slow (G-5) No elevator (G-6)	32	28.08				
		12	10.52				
		6	5.26				

Examining the results concerning the bathroom, there were 607 complaints, the majority regarding age and cleanliness (197 comments), broken equipment, such as showers, bathtubs, shower cabins, taps, etc. (127 comments), the bathrooms were too narrow (58 comments), water heaters did not work properly (55 comments), and no air circulation in the bathrooms (54 comments).

There were 324 complaints about breakfast and restaurants, the majority of guests wrote that breakfast was not delicious (98 comments), breakfast had few choices/no traditional food for some nationalities (85 comments), breakfast was not a buffet (42 comments), restaurant staff was unhelpful (34 comments), and breakfast was expensive (54 comments). Hotel facilities, such as pool, gym, and elevator are important elements for serving customers, and there were 114 complaints about unsafe/ unclean swimming pools (44 comments), small/dirty/broken equipment in gyms (32 comments), no kid's pool (12 comments), dirty/small/unsafe/slow elevators (12 comments), and no/small swimming pool (8 comments).

There were 96 complaints about the location, the majority of guests stated that the hotels are located far from main roads (26 comments), difficult to find (24 comments), far from tourist spots (23 comments), streets to hotels were too narrow (10 comments), and streets are very dark (9 comments). The last category has 52 complaints about the car park because of insufficient parking (16 comments), the car park was too far from the hotel (13 comments), narrow street to the car park (8 comments), unsafe car park (6 comments), and no car park/no free parking (5 comments).

Discussion

Social media plays an increasingly important role as sources of information for travelers (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), and eWOM is a more effective marketing tool than advertising and promotional activities in influencing consumer decision making (East, Hammond, & Lomax, 2008). The persuasiveness of eWOM may depend on the way a sender wrote the message through logical and emotional appeals (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2012). eWOM communication can be any positive or negative statement from previous customers about products and services of companies on the internet (Julilvand et al., 2012). Advances in internet technologies have meant rising numbers of travelers are using the internet to find destination information and reserving accommodations.

Online travel reviews written by consumers are usually available online and can be used as information for travel-related decisions (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Customers can review both negative and positive comments of previous customers to gain information for their decision making for hotel reservations. Although there are both positive and negative comments, the negative complaints have more influence on customer attitudes than positive messages (Assaf et al., 2015). According to the data collection from 1,350 customer reviews on Booking.com there are seven categories of customer complaints about hotel service found in this study, including complaints about the staff, hotel rooms, bathrooms, breakfast/restaurants, hotel parking, location, and facilities.

Complaints about the staff

Customers mainly mention that they were not impressed by the front office staff and hotel security because the staff could not communicate in English or solve problems immediately, they were impolite, unfriendly, or there were insufficient staff while checking-in and the process was slow. Geronikolas (2012) reported factors in the hotel industry most

likely to drive customers away, which included untrained and perceived rudeness. This is supported by Lee & Hu (2004) who also found that being unresponsive to requests for assistance was a problem.

Complaints about the rooms

Some guests said that they could not get the type of room they had booked and the quality of the rooms did not match the value or pictures of the rooms in the advertisements. According to Pagel and Aebli (2015), commercial pictures result in involvement, implying motivation to process and attention towards the stimulus. However, commercial pictures cannot be trusted completely when compared to pictures that are posted by customers on websites. Moreover, rooms were reported as small and smelly with old carpet and curtains, dirty and uncomfortable bed, towels and pillows, and insufficient room amenities. Mosquitoes and insects, noise, broken air-conditioners, broken furniture, malfunctioning keycard system and the Wi-Fi was slow or at a cost. The results are supported by the research of Lee and Hu (2004) that demonstrated some problems with misleading advertising. Levy, Duan, and Boo (2013) found the most common complaint related to room cleanliness (including linens/carpets/furniture), guestroom noise issues because of inadequate soundproofing, and also the size of the room.

Complaints about the bathrooms

The results of this study reflect the study by Levy, Duan, and Boo (2013), who found the most common complaints related to bathroom issues were problems with the showers, bathtubs, sinks, and toilets. This research also found that the bathrooms were old, dirty, and narrow, water heaters did not work properly, and some broken equipment such as taps, bathtubs, showers, water heaters and sometimes the toilets did not flush. Other problems

included no air circulation in the bathrooms and no separate spaces for wet and dry sections.

Complaints about the restaurant and breakfast

Soriano (2002) showed how important restaurant service quality is by categorizing restaurant service quality into four dimensions which are quality of food (fresh, variety of food and cleanliness), quality of service (equipment and staff), cost/value and the appearance/atmosphere of the place. This study found that the comments reported that restaurants may not always perform a high level of service. Customers mentioned that breakfast was not delicious and there were few choices as well as being too expensive. Sometimes breakfast was not a buffet, the food and restaurant itself were not clean, the food was not enough, and the staff was unhelpful. The service failure can impact negatively on health, disrupting trips, and tarnishing destination reputations (Pendergast, 2006). If hotels can provide reliable and responsive service quality, the service providers can enhance the restaurant's competitive advantage as a marketing tool (Dwyer, 2003).

Complaints about the car park

Lewis (1987) stated that accessible and available car parks for hotel guests were an important issue. This research found that some hotels had car parks, but they were insufficient, unsafe, too far from the hotel, narrow entrance/exit streets, and no handicapped parking. Whereas, some hotels had no car park or no free car park. Hence, improving car park service is essential as Lindquist (1975) showed that convenient parking service had a positive relationship with store image.

Complaints about the location

Hotel location is an important aspect and Jeong and Jeon (2008) stated that location is

a strongly influential factor in the choice of lodging facilities as well as having the strongest correlation with overall satisfaction (Stringam, Gerdes, & Vanleeuwen, 2010). On the other hand, the results of this study analyzed some customer complaints about hotel location that were on too narrow streets. Hotels were difficult to find because the streets were very dark and there were no signs.

Complaints about the hotel facilities

According to Akbaba (2006), dining rooms, meeting rooms, swimming pools, and business center facilities should have adequate capacity to serve customers. This research found that complaints about hotel facilities were centered on unsafe/unclean swimming pools; the gym was dirty, and the equipment was broken; elevators were dirty/narrow/unsafe, and some hotels had no elevator.

Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008) found that negative word of mouth can have an overwhelming impact on a hotel's image since dissatisfied visitors spread unflattering comments related to their experience, which will have a negative effect on the sales and performance of the hotel. Hence, if hotels want to lead in customer retention and loyalty, they have to offer superior quality service compared to their competitors. Hotel managers should realize that something left unattended will turn into larger more complex things that will negatively affect service quality (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithamal, 1990). Therefore, it is very important for hotel managers to learn about customer complaints and utilize this information to improve hotel service.

Recommendations

According to 7 categories of complaints, this study has several implications for

practitioners. To improve staff service quality, hotel managers should focus on staff training especially on language skills because the majority of customers complained that staff could not speak English and other languages (37.76% of complaints). Also, 15.25% of complaints were about the check in-out process, so managers should develop faster and more precise check-in/check-out systems or add more staff during the busy hours. Staff should have performance reviews (complaints about inattention treatment 10.53%, cannot solve problems 11.55%, impolite 9.08%, and unfriendly 9.73%), to motivate politeness, friendliness, and service mindedness.

The quality of the rooms did not match the value (19.17%), so hotel managers should perform service appraisals at least once a year to keep the hotels up to a four-star standard. Moreover, some hotels have been established for a long time, and managers should have renovation plans (complaints about old & smelly 14.82%, noisy/dirty room 8.40%). Rooms should be checked carefully by the housekeeper as to whether the rooms are well-cleaned and free from insects; pillows, sheets, and towels should be washed properly; and room amenities should be available each day (complaints about pillows and beds 2.17%, towels 1.38%, insects 4.45%). Fast Wi-Fi should be available free of charge (complaints about slow and charging for Wi-Fi 9.19%).

Many complaints mentioned old and dirty bathrooms (32.45% of complaints), housekeepers should check carefully to make sure bathrooms are well-cleaned and equipment should be fixed (20.92% of complaints about broken equipment, 9.06% of comments about heaters). Bathrooms should have proper air-circulating systems (8.90% of complaints about no air-circulation). 30.25% were concerned with the deliciousness of breakfast, cleanliness also attracted complaints (12.96%), as did choice (26.23%), no buffet (7.41%) and expense (10.49% complaints about expensive meals). Breakfast may have fewer choices, but it should be delicious, enough for guests and the restaurant should be clean. Many guests come from

different cultures, for instance, guests from Arabic countries or guests from South Asia, therefore, they should have halal food and other ethnic foods such as they should have some Indian meals.

Swimming pools should be well-cleaned and have a lifeguard as the majority of guests wrote about unsafe/unclean pools (38.60%). Equipment in gyms and elevators should be fixed and cleaned (28.07% of complaints about gyms and 10.53% of complaints about elevators). Hotel signs should be noticeable or provide customers with GPS locations as guests mentioned that hotels are located far from main roads (27.08% of complaints) and difficult to find (25% of complaints). Sometimes guests cannot find a parking space as hotels are limited by land. However, it should be safe by providing security and cameras (30.77 of complaints about insufficient parking, 25% parking is far from the hotel, and 11.54% parking is unsafe).

Conclusion

Numerous tourists selected four-star hotels as their accommodation while visiting Pattaya, Thailand. Travelers use the internet for information to make travel arrangements and read previous customer comments before making a decision. Several research papers mentioned that negative comments affect tourists' willingness to book hotels. This research aimed to examine and to analyze the content of negative online customer comments concerning four-star hotels in Pattaya from Booking.com and give recommendations to hotel managers to develop their performance. The data was derived by randomly selecting 135 four star hotels in Pattaya from Booking.com and a total of 1,350 comments. The results show that there are seven themes of customer complaints, which are staff could not speak foreign languages, slow check-in and out process, the inability of staff to solve problems, Unfair/ inattention/ unfriendly staff. The quality of the rooms did not match the value, and

they were old, smelly and dirty with insufficient amenities. The bathrooms were old and dirty with broken equipment and no air circulation. Breakfast was not delicious, few choices, not a buffet, and expensive, while staff was unhelpful. The hotel facilities such as swimming pools were unsafe/small/dirty, gyms and elevators were dirty and had broken equipment. The locations were located far from main roads and difficult to find, while parking was insufficient and unsafe. Hence, hotel managers should focus on staff training and performance reviews. The rooms and bathrooms should be well-cleaned and renovated. Hotels should provide a variety of clean, delicious food. Car parks and other facilities should have some maintenance and improve security systems.

Limitations/further research

This research used comments from Booking.com only. Therefore, it is limited by the ideas of customers. Further research could include data collected from other sites as well as in-depth interviews with customers who submit online hotel reviews.

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Appendix

Complaints about the rooms:

Examples of comments:

"The room was not so big compared to the price."

"The hotel was old and outdated. The water pressure for the shower was weak. The worst thing was the super cold air-conditioning which didn't change even if it was adjusted."

"The TV channels were 95% in Thai."

Complaints about the staff:

Examples of comments:

"The staff would not take my stuff down to the taxi when I checked out, I myself went down, dragged a trolley and pulled my stuff to reception by myself and the staff was very rude. I would think twice before I selected this place as my hotel."

"The staff was unable to deal with situations with proper behavior, whereas the hotel manager left in the middle of the day and was not there."

"The staff did not speak English very well."

Complaints about the bathrooms:

Examples of comments:

"A lot of smell coming from the drain in the bathroom, when I called reception to tell them,

they replied that they know and cannot do anything about it!"

"The hot water in bathroom was intermittent. I was on 6th floor, the lower floors might be better. The bathrooms need "makeovers"."

"The bathroom quality was poor, after taking a shower water was on the floor. Ants were all over the bathroom. The ventilation in bathrooms was bad, it felt humid."

Complaints about the restaurant/breakfast:

Examples of comments:

"The Indian food was definitely not cooked by an Indian chef. It was horrible. Either the ingredients were of poor quality or the chef had no formal training in Indian cuisine or both."

"The breakfast could have been better. The juices seemed artificial. The bacon was soft, not crispy."

"The complimentary breakfast and food to order did not have any variety and were not tasty, and the price was rather high."

Complaints about the car park:

"The car park wasn't big enough."

"Parking spaces for the handicapped were provided by the hotel, but they had been reserved by other cars."

Complaints about the location:

"A little bit far from all the nightlife, and the taxi fare was 120 to 150 baht each way."

"The hotel was hidden behind another hotel. Access to the hotel was pretty bad, since the road was only wide enough for one car."

The location was a little far away from the city center for walking."

Complaints about the facilities:

"Just be careful about the children's pool. There is a nice slide on it, my boy goes on it but the depth is a little bit higher than 120 cm. and they should have lifeguard, but they didn't."

"The elevators were terrible, we waited 10-20 minutes in the morning to get an elevator."

"The gym was far too small and the equipment was too old for a hotel of this size. The gym really did lower the hotel's standard."