

Hotel Guests' Preferences and Choices: Baby Boomer, X, and Y Generations

Ning Yu

Rachel J. C. Chen *

Center for Sustainable Business and Development

The University of Tennessee, USA

Abstract

Based on various characteristics and demographics, different types of hotel guests have different wants regardless of whether the hotel is luxury, full-services, economy, resort-types, or bed-and-breakfast. Though guests of all lodgings value the quality of services, price, room quality, amenities, and locations, in order to achieve long-term revenue growth and repeat customers, businesses do need to develop smart strategies that can attract guests continuously. This paper aims to highlight the differences among three different generations of hotel guests including baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. It is vital to recognize the differences among these three populations in order to offer greater business strategies and exceed customers' expectations. The outcomes of this study benefit lodging industries' efforts to provide better facilities, operations, and services. Today's hotels and tomorrow's leading hotels are likely to be well-connected with locals, guests, multicultural surroundings, and more friendly toward mobile and Internet connections for information such as concierge, environmentally friendly facilities, greater services, and smarter buildings that exceed the needs and wants of the 21st-century business world.

Keywords: Hotel guests' preferences; baby boomer, X and Y generations

Introduction

More hotels have taken note of the importance of cultivating a green image in recent decades, and have aimed to improve their main infrastructures accordingly to be more ecological and energy-efficient. Additionally, environmentally friendly practices have been adopted and utilized in order to enhance hotels' green images and increase their competitiveness to meet the

expectations of their hotel guests (Han & Back, 2008). According to Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman(1996), age has been a vital determinant regarding customers' preferences toward their final buying decision-making behaviors. For example, younger generations are more likely to enjoy and adapt to the newest technology easily, while older generations may be less open to learning new technology and are more cautious about Internet security and safety during transactions and using a new interacting provider. Among U.S. domestic travelers, nearly 60% of those are leisure travelers while 40% are business travelers. Among the leisure travelers, more than 55% of hotel rooms were reserved by couples. Among the business travelers, more than two-thirds are males from 32 to 54 years old. Among the baby boomer generation, they are more likely to enjoy food tourism, wine tourism, and outdoor activities such as hiking (U.S. Travel Association, 2016).

Previous studies have documented the importance of understanding factors that impact customers' willingness to revisit a hotel (Lam & Hsu, 2006; Lee & Back, 2007), and how the images of hotels, services, amenities, and reputations might impact customers' final booking decisions (e.g., Easterling, Kenworthy & Nemzoff, 1996; Han & Back, 2008). Based on various characteristics and demographics, different types of hotel guests have different wants regardless of whether the hotel is luxury, full-services, economy, resort-types, or bed-and-breakfast. Though guests of all lodgings value the quality of services, price, room quality, amenities, and locations, in order to achieve long-term revenue growth and repeat customers, businesses do need to develop smart strategies that can attract guests continuously. Several main factors (e.g., quality, brand reputation, price, convenience, location, facilities, etc.) impact guests' lodging selections and decisions. Upscale hotel guests are less sensitive to the price but are more likely to pay attention to the quality of the hotel property and the whole environment where they stay. Upper-midscale guests rely on many of their family members' and friends' recommendations when making their lodging selections. Midscale guests use information on the hotel's main website and book their rooms online. Guests of economy hotels seek better prices and hotel brands with which they are familiar (Gallup, 2014).

The younger generation has been labeled as “digital natives” who rely on retrieving information and news via Internet, cell phone, social media, and their peers. The hospitality and tourism industries will need to adapt to their younger customers' habits and focus on creating and sustaining a fast-paced business ecology for the 21st-century generations. Comparatively, young generations easily embrace innovations in terms of ideas, apps, and experiences, while they also have been identified as a generation that lives in a world of interconnected-technology and frequently use on-line reservation systems, making contributions to YouTube sites to share their thoughts and experiences and to

read comments and customer reviews prior to making their travel decisions. Generation X and Baby Boomers have purchasing power and were born with no advanced technology but are now active on the Internet. These two generations enjoy reliable product brand and prefer connecting to a real person while checking into a hotel or obtaining information prior to making a purchase decision (Jaume, 2015).

The majority of business managers and executives have noted the importance of integrating marketing efforts, operational management, service efficiency, guest loyalty programs, database management, and collaborative networks across business segments in the hospitality and tourism industries. Hoteliers understand the importance of staying competitive in a rapidly changing business world through understanding key business drivers and exceeding customers' needs and expectations. Hotels' general managers play vital roles in overseeing lodging business trends, keeping the owners of hotels informed in terms of revenue reports and operational management, and implement updated technology to make their hotels offer smarter services and experiences. This paper aims to highlight the differences among three different generations of hotel guests including baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. It is vital to recognize the differences among these three populations in order to offer greater business strategies and exceed customers' expectations.

Methods

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the wants and needs of powergenerations [baby boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), and Generation Y (1981-2000)] regarding their lodging experiences during their leisure trips. The powergenerations (X, Y, and baby boomers) were selected because of their purchasing power and significant market shares in the tourism and hospitality industries. In 2013, 688 individuals who are 18 and above were invited to participate in the study. Three hundred and eighty-seven (baby boomers n = 82, Generation X n = 101, and Generation Y n = 204) usable surveys were completed, resulting in a 52% response rate.

The study participants were asked to describe to what extent they experienced a number of items [check in, entertainment, amenities, furniture (in room as well as lobby and breakfast areas), bathroom (in room as well as lobby and breakfast areas), accessibility to attractions, transportation, and visitor's information] problems during their most recent stay at a hotel or resort as a leisure tourist. Using a Likert scale where 1 = not a problem and 5 = major problem, the participants who stayed at a full-service hotel reported their hotel problems by the previously listed attributes.

Results

About sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated 'check-in' to be no problem at all and 21% of the respondents rated it as a slight problem, while 5.5% of the respondents rated it neutral, 3% of the respondents rated it somewhat a problem, and 1.3% of the respondents rated 'check-in' to be a major problem. About fifty-five percent of respondents indicated 'entertainment' to be no problem at all and 15.5% of the respondents rated it a slight problem, while 17% of the respondents rated it neutral, 6% of the respondents rated it somewhat a problem, and 7% of the respondents rated 'entertainment' to be a major problem.

About sixty-six percent of respondents indicated 'amenities' to be no problem at all and 21% of the respondents rated it a slight problem, while 9.5% of the respondents rated it neutral, 3% of the respondents rated it somewhat a problem, and 2% of the respondents rated 'amenities' to be a major problem. About sixty-eight percent of respondents indicated 'furniture' to be no problem at all and 11% of the respondents rated it as a slight problem, while 12% of the respondents rated it neutral, 8% of the respondents rated it somewhat a problem, and 1% of the respondents rated 'furniture' to be a major problem.

About fifty-three percent of respondents indicated 'bathroom' to be no problem at all and 18% of the respondents rated it a slight problem, while 22% of the respondents rated it neutral, 5% of the respondents rated it somewhat a problem, and 2.3% of the respondents rated 'bathroom' to be a major problem. About fifty-five percent of respondents indicated 'accessibility' to be no problem at all and 11% of the respondents rated it a slight problem, while 16% of the respondents rated it neutral, 13% of the respondents rated it somewhat a problem, and 5% of the respondents rated 'accessibility' to be a major problem.

About fifty-two percent of respondents indicated 'transportation' to be no problem at all and 11% of the respondents rated it a slight problem, while 21% of the respondents rated it neutral, 12% of the respondents rated it somewhat a problem, and 4% of the respondents rated 'transportation' to be a major problem. About forty-three percent of respondents indicated 'visitors information' to be no problem at all and 48% of the respondents rated it a slight problem, while 7% of the respondents rated it neutral, 2% of the respondents rated it somewhat a problem, and 1% of the respondents rated 'visitors information' to be a major problem.

The study participants were asked to rank the importance of various attributes, including complimentary breakfast, exercise and fitness facilities, conference space/meeting rooms, and spa and pool services using a 1-to-5 Likert scale, with 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important. About thirty-three percent of the respondents indicated 'complimentary

breakfast' to be the most important and 10% of the respondents rated it as important, while 15% of the respondents rated it somewhat important, 12% of the respondents rated it slightly important, and 30% of the respondents rated 'complimentary breakfast' to be the least important. About twenty percent of respondents indicated 'exercise and fitness facilities' to be the most important and 24% of the respondents rated it important, while 23% of the respondents rated it somewhat important, 22% of the respondents rated it slightly important, and 12% of the respondents rated 'exercise and fitness facilities' to be the least important.

About thirty-five percent of respondents indicated 'conference space and meeting rooms' to be the most important and 13% of the respondents rated it important, while 21% of the respondents rated it somewhat important, 17% of the respondents rated it slightly important, and 15% of the respondents rated 'conference space and meeting rooms' to be the least important. About eleven percent of respondents indicated 'spa and pool services' to be the most important and 25% of the respondents rated it important, while 21% of the respondents rated it somewhat important, 22% of the respondents rated it slightly important, and 22% of the respondents rated 'spa and pool services' to be the least important.

The study participants were asked to rank quality, service, price, and layout in terms of value of a hotel and what they look for (the most important, important, somewhat important, and the least important). Nearly seventy-nine percent of the respondents ranked quality as the most important (40%) and important (38.5%), followed by price [63% (the most important = 31.5%; important = 31.5%)], service [53% (the most important = 24.8%; important = 28%)], and layout [6% (the most important = 3.3%; important = 2.5%)].

The baby boomer generation respondents indicated that they had experienced more problems at their most-stayed hotels in terms of 'check-in' (mean = 1.52), 'furniture' (mean = 2.02), bathroom (mean = 2.29), and 'accessibility' (mean = 2.45), while compared to the experiences of generations of X ['check in' (mean = 1.52), 'furniture' (mean = 1.91), bathroom (mean = 1.9), and 'accessibility' (mean = 2.29)] and Y generations ['check in' (mean = 1.43), 'furniture' (mean = 1.34), bathroom (mean = 1.66), and 'accessibility' (mean = 1.71)]. Generation X respondents indicated that they had experienced more problems in terms of 'check-in' (mean = 1.52), 'entertainment' (mean = 2.15), 'amenities' (mean = 1.75), and 'transportation' (mean = 1.75), while compared to the experiences of baby boomers ['check in' (mean = 1.52), 'entertainment' (mean = 1.96), 'amenities' (mean = 1.61), and transportation (mean = 2.27)] and Generation Y ['check in' (mean = 1.43), 'entertainment' (mean = 1.82), 'amenities' (mean = 1.41), and transportation (mean = 1.75)]. Generation Y respondents indicated that they had experienced more problems in terms of 'visitor

information' (mean = 1.8) at their most recent stayed hotels, while compared to the experiences of baby boomers (mean = 1.5) and Generation X (mean = 1.69) (Table 1). The results of the ANOVA test showed that no statistically significant relationship existed between the three generations (baby boomer, Generation Y, and Generation X) in terms of how they rated the following attributes, including check-in ($p < 0.519$) and entertainment ($p < 0.093$). The results of the ANOVA test showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the three generations (baby boomer, Generation Y, and Generation X) and how they rated the following attributes, including amenities ($p < 0.004$), furniture ($p < 0.001$), bathroom ($p < 0.001$), accessibility ($p < 0.001$), and visitor information ($p < 0.007$) (Table 2).

Table 1. Experiences' descriptive across generations: from least to major programs.
1 = not a problem and 5 = major problem

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Check-in	BB	82	1.52	.984	.109	1.31	1.74
	X	101	1.52	.795	.079	1.37	1.68
	Y	204	1.43	.800	.056	1.32	1.54
	Total	387	1.47	.840	.043	1.39	1.56
entertainment	BB	82	1.96	1.159	.128	1.71	2.22
	X	101	2.15	1.203	.120	1.91	2.39
	Y	204	1.82	1.299	.091	1.64	2.00
	Total	387	1.94	1.250	.064	1.81	2.06
amenities	BB	82	1.61	.813	.090	1.43	1.79
	X	101	1.75	1.004	.100	1.55	1.95
	Y	204	1.41	.834	.058	1.29	1.52
	Total	387	1.54	.888	.045	1.45	1.63
furniture	BB	82	2.02	1.257	.139	1.75	2.30
	X	101	1.91	1.192	.119	1.68	2.15
	Y	204	1.34	.742	.052	1.24	1.44
	Total	387	1.63	1.043	.053	1.53	1.74
bathroom	BB	82	2.29	1.242	.137	2.02	2.57
	X	101	1.90	1.054	.105	1.69	2.11
	Y	204	1.66	.936	.065	1.53	1.79
	Total	387	1.86	1.064	.054	1.75	1.96
accessibility	BB	82	2.45	1.458	.161	2.13	2.77
	X	101	2.29	1.244	.124	2.04	2.53
	Y	204	1.71	1.149	.080	1.55	1.87
	Total	387	2.02	1.284	.065	1.89	2.15
transportation	BB	82	2.27	1.218	.134	2.00	2.54
	X	101	2.42	1.306	.130	2.16	2.67
	Y	204	1.75	1.171	.082	1.59	1.91
	Total	387	2.03	1.251	.064	1.91	2.16
visitors info	BB	82	1.50	.707	.078	1.34	1.66
	X	101	1.69	.659	.066	1.56	1.82
	Y	204	1.80	.758	.053	1.69	1.90
	Total	387	1.71	.731	.037	1.63	1.78

BB = baby boomers (born between 1946-1964); X = born between 1965-1980; Y = born between 1981-2000

Table 2. Statistically Significant Analyses: ANOVA

1 = not a problem and 5 = major problem

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Check-in	Between Groups	.929	2	.464	.657	.519
	Within Groups	271.536	384	.707		
	Total	272.465	386			
entertainment	Between Groups	7.433	2	3.717	2.395	.093*
	Within Groups	595.952	384	1.552		
	Total	603.385	386			
amenities	Between Groups	8.575	2	4.287	5.570	.004**
	Within Groups	295.554	384	.770		
	Total	304.129	386			
furniture	Between Groups	38.086	2	19.043	19.152	.000***
	Within Groups	381.811	384	.994		
	Total	419.897	386			
bathroom	Between Groups	23.536	2	11.768	10.925	.000***
	Within Groups	413.647	384	1.077		
	Total	437.183	386			
accessibility	Between Groups	41.959	2	20.979	13.542	.000***
	Within Groups	594.914	384	1.549		
	Total	636.873	386			
transportation	Between Groups	35.681	2	17.841	12.043	.000***
	Within Groups	568.882	384	1.481		
	Total	604.563	386			
visitors info	Between Groups	5.260	2	2.630	5.031	.007**
	Within Groups	200.745	384	.523		
	Total	206.005	386			

*** = Significant at the 0.01 level. ** = Significant at the 0.05 level. * = Significant at the 0.1 level. Signf. = Significant level. ANOVA test.

The baby boomer generation respondents indicated that a hotel with spa facilities (mean = 2.94) is important to them while compared to the needs/wants of Generations X (mean = 2.89) and Y (mean = 2.67). Generation X respondents indicated that a hotel with exercise and fitness facilities (mean = 3.54) and bar/lounge (mean = 2.9) are important to them while compared to the needs/wants of generations of baby boomers (mean = 3.46; 2.85) and Generation Y (mean = 2.83; 2.42). Generation Y respondents indicated that a hotel with conference/meeting facilities (mean = 3.68) and breakfast (mean = 3.2) are important to them while compared to the needs/wants of generations of baby boomers (mean = 3.05; 2.65) and Generation X (mean = 3.04; 3.1) (Table 3).

Table 3. Ranking the importance of attributes across generations.

1 being the least important and 5 being the most important.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
breakfast	BB	82	2.65	1.328	.147	2.35	2.94
	X	101	3.10	1.597	.159	2.78	3.41
	Y	204	3.20	1.774	.124	2.96	3.45
	Total	387	3.06	1.653	.084	2.89	3.22
exercise	BB	82	3.46	1.407	.155	3.15	3.77
	X	101	3.54	1.229	.122	3.30	3.79
	Y	204	2.83	1.181	.083	2.67	2.99
	Total	387	3.15	1.287	.065	3.02	3.28
conference	BB	82	3.05	1.547	.171	2.71	3.39
	X	101	3.04	1.476	.147	2.75	3.33
	Y	204	3.68	1.377	.096	3.49	3.87
	Total	387	3.38	1.471	.075	3.23	3.52
spa	BB	82	2.94	1.221	.135	2.67	3.21
	X	101	2.89	1.496	.149	2.60	3.19
	Y	204	2.67	1.254	.088	2.49	2.84
	Total	387	2.78	1.317	.067	2.65	2.91
bar/lounge	BB	82	2.85	1.248	.138	2.58	3.13
	X	101	2.90	1.353	.135	2.63	3.17
	Y	204	2.42	1.100	.077	2.26	2.57
	Total	387	2.64	1.221	.062	2.51	2.76

BB = baby boomers (born between 1946-1964); X = born between 1965-1980; Y = born between 1981-2000

The results of the ANOVA test showed that no statistically significant relationship existed between the three generations (baby boomer, Generation Y, and Generation X) in terms of how they rated the services of spa ($p < 0.181$). The results of the ANOVA test showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the three generations (baby boomer, generation Y, and Generation X) and how they rated the following attributes, including breakfast ($p < 0.035$), exercise ($p < 0.001$), conference ($p < 0.001$), and bar/lounge ($p < 0.001$) (Table 4).

Table 4. The importance of listed attributes.
1 being the least important and 5 being the most important.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
breakfast	Between Groups	18.236	2	9.118	3.378	.035**
	Within Groups	1036.514	384	2.699		
	Total	1054.749	386			
exercise	Between Groups	44.873	2	22.436	14.494	.000***
	Within Groups	594.435	384	1.548		
	Total	639.307	386			
conference	Between Groups	38.626	2	19.313	9.313	.000***
	Within Groups	796.294	384	2.074		
	Total	834.920	386			
spa	Between Groups	5.937	2	2.969	1.717	.181
	Within Groups	663.830	384	1.729		
	Total	669.767	386			
bar/lounge	Between Groups	20.791	2	10.395	7.195	.001***
	Within Groups	554.837	384	1.445		
	Total	575.628	386			

*** = Significant at the 0.01 level. ** = Significant at the 0.05 level. * = Significant at the 0.1 level. Signf. = Significant level. ANOVA test.

Conclusions

Biometric verification key systems that utilized fingerprint readers for hotel guests to enter their hotel rooms and provide access control have been adopted by many hotels. Adopting technologies in the lodging industry has been foreseen as one of many opportunities that may enhance hotels' operational and service efficiencies. Hotels need to recognize what their guests need and want and strive to make guests' experiences pleasant. When hotel guests experience a positive hotel stay in terms of quality of services and properties, updated facilities, spacious guest rooms, and delicious food and beverage offerings, it is more likely that the guests will spread good words about the hotels. Quality, price, location, and convenience are proven to be the top considerations for hotel guests. Hotel guests care more about their experiences and connections with the hotels, rather than the hotels' self-promoted images and reputations. Creating a brand image with prompt responses to customers' comments would enhance customers' positive perceptions of hotels' responsiveness and reputation.

Across the hotel market segments, Generation X and Y guests are identified as the largest group in the lodging and service industries because of their economic power and decision ownership. Hotel guests are looking for opportunities to connect with their emotions through programs / places / activities to enrich their life experiences during their visit at a destination. Hoteliers may consider implementing strategic marketing plans that offer sustainable business partnerships across a variety of tourism business sectors, including events, festivals, sports, entertainments, wine tourism, heritage and historical sites, food, recreation, and many others. The younger generation (Generation Y), is more likely to use social networking sites and their lifestyles depend on technology, while Generation X and baby boomers are more likely to enjoy direct communications with real persons, and technology is simply a part of their lifestyle. The hoteliers may consider keeping their business social media active since the young guests frequently check comments and updates to stay connected. All three generations note the importance of offering Wi-Fi and accessible hotel apps for the convenience of obtaining information. Additionally, the hoteliers may utilize personalized newsletters integrated with updated web content to stay regularly and emotionally connected with their customers.

More than eighty percent of young hotel guests use consumer reviews to assist them in making their travel decisions. More than one-third of young hotel guests would make their hotel room reservations after reading others' online written comments. Hoteliers may consider utilizing partnerships with attractions, historical sites, restaurants, events/festivals, clubs, and outdoor recreation sites and offering discounted packages to entice more customers and visitors to stay overnight. Because many hotel guests use social media and photos to share their experiences, hoteliers may create a channel (e.g., photo competition, scrapbook, the "moment of happiness", travel advice, and my stories, etc.) for guests to share and post.

Continuous two-way communication encourages hotel guests to enroll in loyalty programs that allow customers to make customized choices and lead to better investment in greater experiences. For example, guests may earn extra award points through longer night reservations, referral, leaving comments, and sharing photos on branded social media apps hosted by the hotels. Furthermore, the hotels may consider offering an exclusive preferred guest loyalty program to create unique experiences for loyal guests. Those potential exclusive experiences may include complimentary tickets to events, complimentary drink/spa services, in-room gifts/fruits, room upgrades, and shopping advice/discounts.

Many hotels spend hundreds of thousands of dollars conducting projects that collect information regarding the trends and wants of their hotel guests such as market segmentations, technology needs, strategic staffing, changing

demographics, and sustainability. The mature/World War II generation (40.3 million) is comprised of individuals who were born before 1946. Baby boomers (81.5 million) are individuals who were born between 1946 and 1965. Generation X (61 million) are individuals who were born between 1966 and 1980. Generation Y (85.4 million) are individuals who were born between 1981 and 2000. Because of the very small number of participants who represented the mature/World War II generation, this study mainly focused on comparisons among three generations about what they want and need when they stay overnight in hotels.

Generation Y are at the stage of preparing their academics or entering their rising professional careers. They are open to adventures, seek lifestyle hotels, have limited budgets for trips, and enjoy staying with friends when they are more budget-sensitive. Generation X are heading to or are at the peaks of their career, with obligations to their families such as saving college funds for their children and trying to pay off their mortgages. This Generation X needs to prioritize their career goals and family life while making commitments to necessary business trips for their companies and scheduling leisure trips for themselves and for their families. Baby boomers are more likely to be retired and may face the need to spend smart for their travel budgets. This baby boomer generation is budget-conscious, is also facing certain health challenges, and needs to prepare their nest eggs without sacrificing quality of life.

Hoteliers need to make smart investments to ensure that the expenditures of installing innovative technology do not overshadow the importance of securing revenues and exceeding guests' needs and wants. And yet, human hospitality and interactions cannot be replaced by technology. Retaining staff that can provide excellent guest services and represent the image of the company's brand is as crucial as providing innovative technology. On many occasions, a front-desk employee is involved with multiple tasks whenever there are needs such as being a bookkeeper and greeter, setting up meals, cleaning the lobby or even assisting with housekeeping when there is a shortage of staff. Hotel guests are more likely to pay attention to hotels' sustainability efforts compared to the green movement one decade ago. Hoteliers may consider making proper investments that will increase hotel revenue by decreasing energy waste and establishing low-cost but high-efficiency infrastructures to reduce hotels' carbon footprints.

Many marketing strategies focus on product, price, place, and promotion, and have been adopted by the lodging industry as well. Researchers also have emphasized the importance of other Ps, including people, program, partnership, performance, etc. For a well-rounded marketing strategy, lodging industries need to pay attention to the price range, promotional package, sensitivity toward seasonality, various attractive programs, networking, making information accessible to hotel guests, and well-trained staff and visionary

leaders that can connect to market trends and make every hotel experience satisfactory for their customers.

The tourism and hospitality industries are facing challenges with respect to trends like sustainability, multicultural integration, innovative higher education, security, unpredictable political stability, and labor costs. The tourism and hospitality industries are changing at an exponential rate in terms of individuals' preferences for their travel plans and lodging selections. The outcomes of this study may benefit lodging industries' efforts to provide better facilities, operations, and services. Today's hotels and tomorrow's leading hotels are likely to be well-connected with locals, guests, multicultural surroundings, and more friendly toward mobile and Internet connections for information such as concierge, environmentally friendly facilities, greater services, and smarter buildings that exceed the needs and wants of the 21st-century business world.

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About the Authors

Ning Yu is a PhD candidate in the Department of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management at the University of Tennessee, USA.

Dr. Rachel J. C. Chen, Professor of Department of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management, the University of Tennessee, 246 Jessie Harris Bldg., Knoxville, TN37996-1911, USA. E-mail: rchen@utk.edu