

## **DIFFERENTIAL PREFERENCES AMONG MEN AND WOMEN AS HOTEL CUSTOMERS. AN EMPIRICAL APPLICATION IN A MADRID UNIVERSITY**

*José Miguel Rodríguez Antón*

*María de la Soledad Celemín Pedroche*

*Luis Rubio Andrada*

*María del Mar Alonso Almeida*

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

josem.rodriguez@uam.es, marisol.celemin@uam.es, luis.rubio@uam.es, mar.alonso@uam.es

Gender studies have proliferated in tourism sector in recent years —Álvarez & Asugman (2006). In these it is considered that there are two groups or clusters, existing in one of them, denominated «Risk-averse planners» and formed primarily of women. This group shows a greater predisposition to travel in package tours; to lodge in four and five star hotels; less involved in their holidays and little tendency to return to the same destinations. Kim et al. (2007) analyzed the differences between the attitudes and behaviours of both men and women in order to search information online to organize their travels. Woodside & Lysonski (1989), Um & Crompton (1990), Stabler (1995) and Beerli & Martín (2004) showed that personal characteristics of tourists, such as gender, has a significant influence on the tourist's perception of a destination. Laumann et al. (1994) and Herold et al. (2001) determined that there are differences related to gender in the customer behaviour when they travel —there is still not an appropriate scientific bibliography which can support the differences among men and women according to their tastes, needs and preferences when they order a product or service—.

In this sense, the present study analyzes the tastes, needs and specific preferences of hotel customers since a gender viewpoint. These preferences must be taken into account by hotel establishments in order to give satisfaction in the best possible way to their customers.

Although there have been no scientific studies that analyze, in a specific way, tastes, needs and preferences of the hotel customers by gender, there is an acceptable ratio of studies focused on the analysis of generic preferences of customers. Take the case of Chung et al. (2004) who made a customer preferences analysis of luxury hotels; Gu & Ryan (2008) highlighted the main variables which determine the customer satisfaction are the hotel environment conditions, the reputation and the room cleaning. Kuo (2008)

showed that Taiwanese tourists mainly appreciate more friendship and staff enthusiasm in their hotel stay, Japanese tourists give a special value to staff courtesy and decorum and north American tourists values more quickness and efficiency.

Once it has been shown differences of behaviours and needs of tourists according to gender and it has been highlighted different types of hotel customer's preferences, it is necessary to determine if there are different customer's needs related with gender. In order to achieve this goal, it was designed a survey with closed questions in a Likert scale of five points, where 1 is any impact and 5 is a total impact. The survey was structured in seven blocks focused in the different hotel facilities, products and services —Preferences related with rooms; preferences related with leisure and recreation activities; preferences related with restaurants; preferences related with SPA or wellness services; preferences related with special services; preferences related with facilities or infrastructures and preferences related with hotel shops— and it was supported in other questionnaires of previous studies (Rodríguez Antón et al., 2000 y Rodríguez Antón et al., 2008).

Through survey, two hypothesis were contrasted:

H1: Women value more than men products and services offered by hotels.

H2: There are significant gender differences regarding tastes, needs and preferences of hotel customers.

This survey was sent to Professors, administrative and Tourism students of the Economics Faculty at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. From a population of 295 professors, 13 administrative and 418 students, was got a sample of 119 professors, 7 administrative and 191 students. Response rate was 44.35 per cent, in which men represented 34.6 per cent and women 65.4 per cent. Average age of the respondents was 29 years, 56.2 per cent of the sample was working and they had been stayed at 3-star hotels —54.5 per cent— and 4-star hotels —55.8 per cent—.

Following a descriptive analysis was developed. It was observed that preferences have not followed the same pattern for women and men. One first difference is appreciated in the given ratings by men and women in the considered variables. Most of these variables have been more valued by women than by men. Only the variables Room desk; TV Teletext; hotel garage; heated pool and banquets are highly regarded by men than by women. The rest of variables are more valued by women than by men. Thereby, it is contrasted positively the first hypothesis «Women value more than men products and services offered by hotels».

In order to determine if the evidenced differences in the preferences by gender are significant, a two way analysis of variance (Two Way ANOVA) has been run, considering as independent variable gender and dependent variables each one of the analyzed preferences.

A large number of products, services, facilities or infrastructures and activities are desired in a different way by men and women. The existence of Jacuzzi or whirlpool in the room, the placement of a vanity mirror, the possibility to Booking shows and cultural activities, the possibility to make excursions, to participate in entertainment programs, the existence of buffet, other restaurants, nursery, animal accommodation, transfers available to customers, boutique, newsstand and hairdresser are the preferences that show different opinions between men and women about their importance. All these variables have been better valued by women than by men.

In order to check the validity of the results of the ANOVA test, nonparametric tests were performed. Specifically, it was considered to run a Mann-Whitney test which is the equivalent non parametric of the test-t and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for two samples. So after doing these tests, it is verified again that there is a lot of products, services, infrastructures or facilities and activities are desired in a different way by men and women. Of all the preferences the existence of Jacuzzi or whirlpool in the room, vanity mirror, programming excursions, availability of nursery, animal accommodation and hairdresser in the hotel highlight for being very different the opinion of their importance. Most of them had been detected before. All these analyzes allow testing the second hypothesis formulated in a positive way «There are significant gender differences regarding tastes, needs and preferences of hotel customers».

The survey based on the opinions of 322 teachers, administrators and students from a university in Madrid have shown that men and women have different preferences when they are staying in hotels.

Women value more than men the different products and services that a hotel can provide. With the exception of a reduced number of services such as having a desk, TV-Teletext, garage, heated pool and banquets, the remaining fifty-two products or services analyzed were more valued by women than by men.

In conclusion, starting from the existence of differential preferences, hotels should use this knowledge to adapt, in a right way, their specific facilities, products and services of their customers according to gender.

