



Confirmatory analysis of the preference in Boutique Hotels in the city of Oporto, Portugal

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Abstract

The goal of this paper was to analyse the preferences of boutique hotels' clients in the city of Oporto, Portugal. A survey questionnaire was used and answered by 423 guests of the selected hotels. Boutique hotels are inserted in a segment where refinement, charm and luxury are its key support base. The guests of this kind of hotel value the aesthetic qualities including decoration and design, the cleanliness of the properties, range of amenities, service's quality excellence, efficient and cosy service, as well as reliability and ease of making reservations. The confirmatory factor analysis which has been performed presents seven determinant factors in the guests' choice: hospitality, safety, convenience for meetings, marketing, design, concierge service and premium quality service. The presented study makes an important contribution to the area of study. It thus deserves the attention of investors and more importantly, boutique hotels' managers and employees.

Keywords: Boutique hotel, luxury, alluring hotels, hotel appeal, exclusivity.

Introduction

In hospitality, the centre of attention should invariably be the customer. As customers and potential customers change, whether in the social or cultural aspects, or even in status, hotels also need to adapt to the new demands. Therefore, they search for a position through careful market segmentation, differentiation and price. Boutique hotels represent a growing sector of Portugal's tourism (Moreira, Tavares, Pereira, 2014). Angeli, Torres and Maranhão (2012) perceive that some factors promote boutique hotels' continuous growth, such as: a) the internet, which makes information access for guests simpler, and the new concept of accommodation; b) a great number of hotel chains entering this type of market; c) style and contemporaneity, with a unique accommodation design, full of a wide range of amenities; d) rehabilitation and re-utilization of old urban buildings. The luxury hotel segment, wherein charming boutique hotels are included, are associated with tourists with high economic capacity. In this type of hotel, the level of the provided service is required to be more personalized, sophisticated, where the entire surroundings are aesthetically bedecked, making it an elegant and exclusive type of hotel.

This industry is characterized for owning luxurious rooms, with a friendly reception area and is known for providing personalised services. Naturally, the luxury hotel's customer seeks a special and unique experience. Hotels that comprise this industry present 'perfect' service, with maximum comfort, and in an intimate atmosphere. Design and aesthetics are important in this type of hotel.

This paper's objective is to analyse the preferences of the customers of boutique hotels in the city of Oporto, Portugal. Thus, the paper is structured in five parts. After the introduction, a revision of the literature on the subject is conducted. In the third section, the methodology of the investigation referring to the followed principles in the query's processing and the confirmatory factor analysis is presented. In the fourth section, an analysis and interpretation of the query's results and the confirmatory factor analysis is carried out. In the fifth and final section, the conclusions of the paper are presented.

Revision of the literature

The literature's revision presents the recent studies on boutique hotels, and refers to the variables and factors that are valued the most by guests in this kind of industry. This revision of the literature is divided in three strands and intends to: characterize boutique hotels, know the international literature about the subject and understand which variables are the important ones as well as the key factors for the guests.

a) Characteristics of boutique hotels

Some of those characteristics are presented on Table 1. It is an industry where the provided service is more personalised and sophisticated.

Table 1 – Characteristics of boutique hotels

Author (year)	Characteristics of boutique hotels
Roubi and Litteljohn (2006)	The level of the provided service is more personalized and sophisticated, and surroundings are ornamented, exclusive and elegant.
Barrows and Powers (2009)	Decoration and furniture may be exclusive of the hotel.
Wilkins, Merrilees and Herington (2007)	There are three aspects which compose the service's quality on luxury hotels, namely the physical product, the service's experience and food and beverages' quality.
Anhar (2001)	The success of boutique hotels starts with the fundamental aspects of hospitality, such as: its location, the product's quality, the identification of market demand, well defined marketing approach and effective distribution actions and reserves coverage.
Wheeler (2006)	This type of hotel is elegant and has excellent urban localization, where concern with differentiated services exists, with customized care and exclusive products, which results in an important experience for the client, which hopefully generates his loyalty. Boutique hotels offer a unique, small and intimist climate, which is hard to replicate.
Jones, Day and Quadri-Felitti (2013)	The boutique hotel is generally small and provides a modern climate and a personal connection between guests and working crew.
Mcintosh & Siggs (2005); Sangwichien and Jaroenwisan (2017).	Boutique hotels are individual, centred on design and based on small operations, on the physical structure's singularity, on high standards of service quality and individual attention given to guests.
Almeida, Ferreira, Motta and Moyses (2007) Tavares, Pacheco, Borges (2016)	The characteristics of luxury hotels are: broad facilities, well taken care of and preserved, which utilize natural materials, an ambiance that matches the hotel, both at common areas and inside the apartments, attentive service, exquisite food and availability of new technologies.
Rabontu & Niculescu (2009)	Small hotel, with luxurious rooms, furnished to welcome tourists for short periods of time, a friendly reception and customized services.
Rogerson (2010)	Relatively small physical structure and emphasis on the service's excellence, on individuality, exclusivity, and privacy, which are only possible through small establishments' development.
Swarbrooke & Horner (2002)	The luxury hotel's client seeks a special, unique experience, status and a high level of customized service.
Silva and Mota (2010)	Charm hotels value its natural beauty and cultural heritage. They care about providing quality service and perfect care. Charm hotels seek a perfect equilibrium of the service, comfort, food and landscape, through the following principles: courtesy, charm, character, calmness and kitchen.
Horner and Swarbrooke (2005);	-It is a small hotel with a more intimate atmosphere. -It emphasises designer accessories and electronic accessories.



Hussein, Hapsari and Yulianti (2018).	-Each hotel is seen as owning an individual identity, despite the brand's smooth presence under some circumstances. -Emphasis on modern styles, projected by known architects, to develop new concepts. -Customized services.
Tavares, Pereira, Moreira (2012)	There are intrinsic externalities to the project, and layout variations which must be carried out rigorously, whether by who plans it, or by who invests, because design and localization have a great impact on hotels.
Lee and Chhabra (2015)	It is something like art, hard to define, with style singularity, high standards of service, centred on the visitor.
Xie and Shi (2018)	Buildings and historic heritage's reutilization is seen as a subset of boutique hotels, developed to meet the nostalgic needs of some clients, maintaining aspects of the buildings' patrimonial identities. Historic heritage for tourism accepts the usage of new resources or creativity to reconstruct historical structures.

Source: Self Elaboration

Fundamentally, hospitality is an industry which consists on a complex mixture of tangible and intangible elements, that is, of assets and services. A boutique hotel's success starts with its location, but what gives it strength is the quality of its products, its stylishness, its distinction and its intimacy. There are authors who discern design hotels from boutique hotels, the first type being characterized by contemporary design, and the second type by classic design. The client of this type of hotel seeks luxury, a unique experience, status and a personalized service.

b) Knowledge of international literature on the subject

Several international studies on the theme have been presented. At an international level, boutique hotels are identified by the interest of developing the hospitality of the leisure industry and acknowledged as an innovative response for hotels' standardization and commoditization from the 70's and 80's (Horner, Swarbrooke, 2005; Rutes, Penner, Adams, 2001; Rogerson, 2010). Boutique hotels are a post-Fordist tourism example (Judd, 2006). These hotels' tourists are defined as individuals with judgment and distinction (Teo, Chang, 2009). Also, Sánchez Aguirre et al (2017) have analysed the experience of tourists lodged in boutique hotels in Mexico. They have concluded that there is a clear link between the physical resources, the hotel staff and the stay's experience. The client values embellishment, comfort and the bedrooms' area, all in an harmonic atmosphere. What is most valued by tourists are the human resources, who through treatment, actions and attention make the stay memorable. Herstein et al (2018) have compared the clients' satisfaction in a five stars hotel to that in a boutique hotel. The authors have concluded that brands' labels can boost satisfaction with client service in the hospitality sector.

c) Understanding which variables and factors are important for guests

Some of the variables and important factors to boutique hotels' guests are presented on Table 2.

Table 2 – Determining factors when searching for a boutique hotel

Authors	Determining factors
Mcintosh & Siggs (2005)	- The uniqueness of the property; - Personal touch; - The hotel's cosy surroundings; - The provided services' high quality; - The nature of the aggregate value of localization and hosts' knowledge and culture.
Choochote (2014)	- Economy and market; - Localization; - Services; - Facilities.
Khosravi, Yussof, Bahauddin, Mohamed (2012)	- Individualization and personal services; - Quick help's availability from a guest friendly staff; - Cosy ambient; - Unique architecture.

Source: Self Elaboration



Therefore, following the presented items, it is possible to observe that decision and guests' choice of variables are related to the fact that these are unique hotels, with a cosy, personalized ambience, with high quality standards. Usually, these are well located hotels, with unique architecture, where permanent, quick help from the staff exists, which is guest friendly, turning the atmosphere into a welcoming ambience.

Methodology

In order to study the looked-for characteristics in boutique hotels which have been underlined in the literature's revision, a questionnaire has been elaborated. This was placed in boutique hotels, in the months of July, August, September and October of 2016, in order to be filled by individuals who were guests in boutique hotels in the city of Oporto, Portugal. A total of 423 responses was received.

In the present study, we also resort to Confirmatory Factor Analysis to evaluate the measurement model (Marôco, 2010). For this purpose, the software SPSS AMOS 21.0 has been utilized.

The measurement model, which establishes the relations that connect constructs to indicators, and constructs with each other, has been estimated through the already mentioned software and using the estimation method of Maximum Verisimilitude, a robust method even when there is a violation of the normality of data (Hair Jr., Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). For the model's adequation evaluation, we used a set of adjustment indices, choosing the ones which are the most referred to in literature (Marôco, 2010), namely, the test of relative Chi-Squared (χ^2/gl), the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). About the cutting points of these indices, we consider a good model adjustment when: (1) the value of χ^2/gl is less than 2 or 3; (2) the values of CFI, TLI and GFI are greater than 0.90 (for GFI are considered as acceptable values greater than 0.80, according to Hu and Bentler (1999) and Brown (2006); (3) the RMSEA value is less than 0.10 (Marôco, 2010).

The evaluation of convergent validity has been followed (if the studied construct is positively and significantly correlated to other constructs which are theoretically parallel and the items which compose it present positive and high correlations), as well as discriminant validity (if the items which reflect a construct are not correlated with other constructs) (Marôco, 2010).

In the present study, in order to evaluate the convergent validity, we follow the recommendation of Fornell and Larcker (1981), who propose its measurement through Average Variance Extracted (AVE), factorial loads and Composite Reliability (CR). According to Hair Jr., Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010), the factorial load must be greater or equal to 0.50, whereas an acceptable value for CR is of at least 0.70, and for AVE of 0.50.

$$\widehat{CR}_j = \frac{(\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_{ij})^2}{(\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_{ij})^2 + \sum_{i=1}^k \varepsilon_{ij}}$$

$$\widehat{AVE} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_{ij}^2}{\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_{ij}^2 + \sum_{i=1}^k \varepsilon_{ij}}$$

Where:

$\sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_{ij}^2$ represents the standardized coefficients;

$\sum_{i=1}^k \varepsilon_{ij}$ represents the measurement errors.

Discriminant validity has been evaluated by the method which was recommended by Fornell & Larcker (1981), which consists on the comparison between the Average Variance Extracted



(AVE) of the construct and the square of correlation coefficients with the remaining constructs, wherein AVE must present a greater value.

Analysis of boutique hotels demand factors

Descriptive analysis of boutique hotel results

A total of 423 responses were obtained relating to the boutique hotels' query, with an average age of 37.0 years. In this type of hotel, it is verified that most guests are married or live together, and have a high average income. It has been observed that most prefer to be lodged above the 2nd floor in the hotel, or even on the top floor, and most have a level of qualifications above that of an undergraduate and they tend stay in the boutique hotel for two to three nights. The boutique hotel's attributes that influence the process of choice are the lodging's cosy ambience, the service's high-quality standards, good reputation, a high quality of the provided services and the design and hotel general aesthetics (among others). On prices and values of boutique hotels, despite being clients with some financial availability, they care about the lodging price, the service's value, breakfast and free parking. The aspects of least importance to the boutique hotel's guests are the existence of free newspapers or the possibility of free telephonic local calls.

As far as the characteristics of boutique hotels are concerned, guests value cleanliness, the hotel's aesthetic feel and the existence of a pool. They do not value the existence of photocopying machines and a fax machine, shops, gaming areas or library. The characteristics of the food and beverages' service must be that of a high quality, hygienic feel and a good variety of offerings, with good surroundings, and ideally inside exquisite restaurant facilities. In boutique hotels, the presence of vending machines is definitely not valued, and it may even be detrimental to the hotel's image. Marketing should be sustained by an assured quality image, which is sustained on the price's adequation, where mouth-to-mouth advertising also has much impact and is a reference point. There are not many guests reading or caring about the hotel's newsletter. In boutique hotels, safety is a fundamental aspect, from the rooms' safety, to the hotel's general security and the area in general being safe. About the characteristics of the service, the staff's niceness and attention is pre-eminent, as well as the offering of professional, quality service, where there is relative ease in making reservations and quick a check-in and equally quick check-out, a quick service, and with extra help, if necessary. The boutique hotel's least valued characteristic is long distance calls at no additional costs.

Inside the rooms, all service must be exquisite and detailed, from a hygiene and cleanliness perspective, to the beds' comfort, with soundproof rooms, easy internet availability, air conditioning, good quality towels, large beds and natural beauty that can be observed from the rooms where possible. The least valued items inside the rooms are the existence of a CD/cassette/video player, a computer, the possibility of having a small kitchen or ironing board. The surrounding landscape's beauty has a strong impact on the business' rentability, and therefore a boutique hotel must have a convenient localization, with generous space and well-illuminated public areas.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The measurement model which was initially used presented itself as unsatisfactory, since some adjustment indices revealed an unsatisfactory adjustment: $\chi^2/df = 2,918$; GFI = 0.801; CFI = 0.881; TLI = 0.871; and RMSEA = 0.067 (see Appendix). All items present high factorial loads, greater than 0.50 (Marôco, 2010). Using modification indices, it has been possible to observe high values for the covariance between the errors associated to the variables H9 and H12, H2 and H3, H7 and H8, H1 and H3, all items belonging to the factor *Hospitality*. Taking these results into account, and with the objective of improving the model, it has been re-



specified, correlating the errors of the referred variable pairs, which were inserted in the same factor.

There have been seven confirmed factors. The first factor is hospitality, presenting this factor the items related to that content. In this factor are related items such as comfort and cleanliness, the service quality, quality of amenities and lodging. The second factor is safety, where items such as alarms, video surveillance, safety equipment and police surveillance are presented. The third factor is about meeting convenience, inter alia, secretarial services and various support services. This factor is explained by people who understand the possibility of arranging work meetings, workshops and conferences in this type of hotel. The fourth factor is communication and marketing which is performed by the boutique hotel. A very strong quality image of brand is connected to this type of hotel, of focused segmentation, proximity and familiarity. The fifth factor is composed by the variables which are related to architecture, decoration and the hotel's excellences.

Table 3 - CFA resulting from the boutique hotels users' preferences

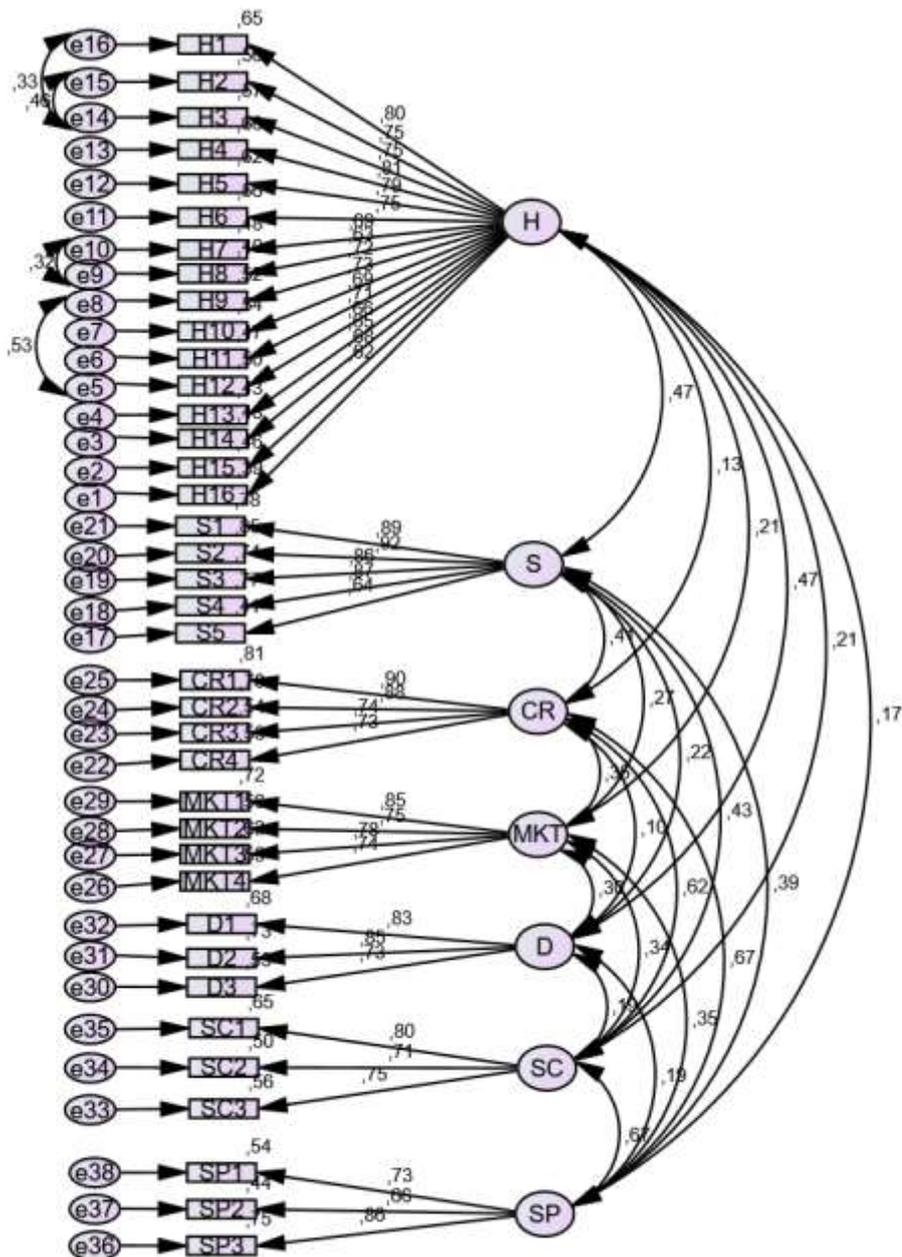
Associated variables	Code	
– Cleanness	– H1	Hospitality
– Available hot water	– H2	
– Cleanness of the bathroom	– H3	
– Comfort	– H4	
– Quiet/Soundproof rooms	– H5	
– Comfortable beds	– H6	
– Air conditioning	– H7	
– Internet service's availability	– H8	
– Welcoming service	– H9	
– Well preserved furniture	– H10	
– Good quality towels	– H11	
– Reception	– H12	
– Cleaning service	– H13	
– Reserve's reliability	– H14	
– Food service's quality	– H15	
– Bathroom's amenities	– H16	
– Audible fire alarm	– S1	
– Safety equipment	– S2	
– Working video surveillance	– S3	
– Safety against fires	– S4	
– Police surveillance on the area	– S5	Meeting convenience
– Audio-visual equipment	– CR1	
– Meeting rooms	– CR2	
– Lighting equipment	– CR3	
– Secretariat services	– CR4	Marketing
– Brand's image	– MKT1	
– Recommended brand	– MKT2	
– Segmentation of the brand's image	– MLT3	
– Brand familiarity	– MKT4	Design
– Hotel's architecture	– D1	
– Hotel's decoration	– D2	
– Hotel's beauty	– D3	Concierge service
– Concierge service	– SC1	

- Luggage transport service	- SC2	Premium service
- Service bell	- SC3	
- Entertainment	- SP1	
- Check out inside the room	- SP2	
- Computer	- SP3	

Source: Self Elaboration

The sixth factor is the concierge service. These are the variables related to concierge service and luggage transport. Finally, the seventh factor is premium service. This factor is related to the quality and added value to the boutique hotel's client/s.

Figure 1 - Confirmatory factor structure of boutique hotel's clients' preferences





After re-specifying the model (Figure 1), good results were obtained for all adjustment indices ($\chi^2/df = 2.444$; GFI = 0.833; CFI = 0.911; TLI = 0.903 and RMSEA = 0.059). In this new model, it was observed that all items presented factorial loads which were higher than 0.50.

Convergent validity and discriminant validity

As can be observed on Table 4, the CR values are greater than 0.70, and the obtained values for the AVE (in the diagonal of Table 4) are greater than 0.50, being therefore verified the scale's convergent validity.

The discriminant validity was tested through the criteria of Fornell and Larcker (1981), which consists on the comparison between Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of the construct and the square of the correlation's coefficients with the remaining constructs (remaining entries on the Table 4), being that AVE must present superior values. According to the data presented on Table 4, there have not been detected any cases of absence of discriminant validity.

Table 4 – Composite Reliability (CR), Average Extracted Variance (AVE) and the square of the correlation between constructs

	CR	SC	H	S	CR	MKT	D	SP
SC	0.799	0.571						
H	0.944	0.045	0.514					
S	0.924	0.187	0.216	0.710				
CR	0.887	0.382	0.016	0.167	0.664			
MKT	0.862	0.116	0.046	0.072	0.123	0.610		
D	0.845	0.037	0.226	0.050	0.009	0.092	0.647	
SP	0.799	0.448	0.031	0.149	0.452	0.123	0.035	0.573

Conclusions

The query for the present study has been conducted on a season of high demand for boutique hotels in the city of Oporto, Portugal. However, the demand for boutique hotels continued to increase. The query's results prove that this is an industry where in fact, perfect service is sought, as well as exquisiteness and personalization, with maximum comfort, and having a more intimate atmosphere than the average hotel.

The guests present an average age of about 37 years old, most possess upper education. These guests, in the process of choice, value the lodging's welcoming ambient, the high standards of service quality and also the hotel's reputation. As far as the boutique hotel's characteristics are concerned, cleanness is valued, as well as the hotel's decoration, amenities, and the pool. This type of hotel's guests value hygiene and service quality, naturally existing concern about the price's adequation, and choose hotels of an assured quality image. About the characteristics of the boutique hotels' services, guests' concerns are related to the staff's sympathy and attention, cleaning service, efficient service, cosiness, reliability, reservation easiness and quick check in and check out. In boutique hotels, the surrounding landscape with amenities and diverse attractivities, and simultaneously close to the city centre is the guests' preference.

The confirmatory factor analysis performed to the answers about the boutique hotel guests' preferences present satisfactory results as far as validity and reliability of the measurements is concerned. The confirmatory factor analysis has therefore corrected the factorial structure of seven factors, being that the final measurement instrument presents 38 questions, which is a reduction in relation to the items of the query which was presented to the guests and resultant of the literature's revision.



As far as the determining factors of this type of hotel's choice are concerned, the first factor is hospitality. In a boutique hotel, the aspects related to cleanness, comfort, lodging, quality, and ambient are an important factor of the choice. The second factor is the hotel's safety and the variables which are associated to this factor. The third factor is meeting convenience. Boutique (charm, luxury) hotels are also generally looked for corporate meetings, which explains the importance given to the variables that compose this factor. The fourth factor is marketing. This type of hotel's guests care about variables such as the brand's image, familiarity with the brand and choosing a recommended brand. The fifth factor is design, and it reveals the importance given by guests to architecture, decoration and hotel's beauty. The sixth factor is the concierge service, namely the concierge itself, luggage transport availability or even the service bell. The seventh factor is premium service. Being a luxury hotel, premium service is present in variables related to entertainment, by allowing checking out inside the room, and facilitating the access to a computer.

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