FACTORS INFLUENCING INTENTIONS IN HOTEL SELECTION: MILLENNIALS' PERCEPTION

Cvetanka Ristova Maglovska[1], Tanja Angelkova Petkova[2], Martin Dzambaski[3]

[1] Asis. Professor, Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, Goce Delcev University, Stip, North Macedonia, cvetanka.ristova@ugd.edu.mk
[2] Full Professor, Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, Goce Delcev University, Stip, North Macedonia, tanja.angelkova@ugd.edu.mk
[3]Second-cycle student, Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, Goce Delcev University, Stip, North Macedonia, martin.217175@student.ugd.edu.mk

Abstract
Each choice of hotel selection is never made at random; rather, they are the result of a calculated relationship between several factors that influence a guest's tastes. The complex and fascinating maze of guest behaviour in hotel selection choosing goes from the tempting appeal of positive online reviews to the subtle influence of pricing methods. Every step a guest takes as they make their way through the vast number of alternatives offers a new level of significance which influences the final decision. So, what truly influences the selection of the ideal hotel accommodation?

Kew words: behaviour, decision process, factors, guest, hotel selection, Millennials.

Introduction

The selection of hotel accommodation plays a crucial role, as an unsuitable choice might affect the guests' activities. This is because booking a hotel has a whole psychology behind it. So much so that guests have certain behaviours when it comes to making a reservation. Choosing a hotel goes beyond simply looking for a place to rest, and those behaviours present a wide range of factors and preferences that influence the guests' on selecting the best hotel option. Clearly not an easy task, given that there is a multitude of hotels, some more prestigious than others. But this shouldn't be seen as overwhelming process, simply because future travellers/guest can consider the desired criteria that can help them book the best hotel according to their needs resulting travelling with ease and convenience.

Nowadays there is a great deal of research and statistics that speak of Millennials as a new generation coming into its prime, presenting rather vast preferences, behaviours and purchasing habits while selecting a hotel accommodation (Sanchez Ruiz, 2016). But the Millennial generation has already arrived and been working for a while, making them the important buyer group worldwide. Many Millennials are now financially independent and make steady wages (Pendergast, 2010); others have even begun families, which presents even more factors that they consider and are being influenced while selecting for hotel accommodation.

Millennials also have different habits from the previous generations (Ordun, 2015), meaning they are living their lives differently and, overall, they are reaching milestones later in life, such as getting out of parents' house, marriage or becoming parents (Nielsen, 2018; Goldman Sachs, 2015) which ultimately leads to different preferences and influencing factors in the decision-making process, specifically the hotel accommodation.

Changes in lifestyle, financial independence makes Millennials more demanding and selective when choosing their accommodation. From price to amenities, several factors impact the decision to book a hotel. The immediate access to information (Feldmann *et al.*, 2019), also enables them to spend significant portion of their planning time and effort on selecting the right hotel for them.

Because of the increased importance of Millennials as generation, shaped by the socio-political events from previous generations, but thereby in turn influences on shaping the tourism and hospitality industry in today's word, this paper attempts to understand all the factors that influence Millennials when choosing hotel accommodation, based on their desires, preferences, and needs.

Literature Review

Predicting guests' hotel choice is influenced by several different factors. These are composed in dimensions which are linked to the attributes of the hotel product, marketing activities and personal characteristics of guests. Here, significant number of researchers have examined attributes of hotels and the factors that influence on the selection processes.

And even though there is no universal set of criteria that inform guests' choice of a hotel, because they rather they vary from one country to the other. However, for factors such as "price" it seems that is a major determining factor that influences guest choice of hotels, no matter the country (Jeong & Jang, 2011). In practice, most customers in search of hotel room rates these days go online and compare prices. In some cases, they surf the hotel's website, and many other times visit the hotel online booking portals. The moment they find the best rate that suits them, it then become the preferred place to stay. Next, according to Clow et al. (1994), guests seem to take location into consideration in all cases when selecting a hotel. In this context, "location" refers to the area of the town where the hotel is located. Additionally, the increasing need for a wide range of "amenities and services" has made this a crucial consideration for guests when selecting hotels (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). Whatever the reason for a guest's visit, there is an unquestionable need for diversity. Studies indicate that hotels with air conditioning, a guaranteed security system, a restaurant on site, a swimming pool, and a sufficient power supply, among other amenities, have better occupancy rates. Furthermore, the prevention of health hazards, the reduction of robbery and other property crimes, and the unauthorized use of data nowadays are also a required factor which influences them when choosing a hotel (Rodrguez-Antón *et al.*, 2020). Natural hazards, economic crises, terrorist acts, and pandemics owing to new viruses are all factors that have a negative influence on tourism, so that is why "safety and security" is now perceived as necessity for a hotel to provide, in turns to be chosen by guests. There is an also a clear relationship between guest selection of a hotel and how "clean" an accommodation's facilities are. With the utmost diligence, hygiene, safety procedures, and housekeeping, requirements must be followed because they represent the highest of determining factors when choosing a hotel (Zemke *et al.*, 2015). Among other factors is also the "hotel's reputation" which can be determined by looking at its rating (Chiang & Jang, 2007). Hotels in North Macedonia are often assigned a star rating of one to five. Here, one thing is certain: the higher the rating, the better the hotel. And rregardless of the price, location and other factors, the guest will always check the hotel rating, which sometimes can affect the hotel selection over factors such as price and location.

However, when it comes to Millennials as a generation travelling and selecting a hotel, we've already mentioned that Millennials desire experiences over things. Travel and adventure are priorities for this generation. They are not traveling the same way exactly, on the same timeline, with the same technology, or with the same expectations as their parents. Their factors for hotel selection are evolving continuously, leading to more needs and desires, which justify the need to conduct research to track those evolving and changes.

There are approximately 1.8 billion Millennials in the world which equals 23% of the global population (Neufeld, 2021). Asia is home to a quarter of the global population of millennials. As for North Macedonia, according to the census from 2021, there are approximately 494.813 Millennials out from 1.83 million population (Државен завод за статистика, 2022). Evaluating the numbers worldwide and in North Macedonia furthermore provides a justification to analyze the factors influencing hotel selection. It also proves that hotels that want to stay relevant to this enormous group of adults will need to leverage the trends vital to them.

Some of the new influential factor for hotel selection that came across the literature research that we performed and which will be also mentioned in the questionnaire are: Millennials regularly use social media and read online reviews, they post almost everything on social media (Ramdage & Kumar, 2023); Clean, nonsmoking rooms are a must; Room and hotel amenities that include high-speed Wi-Fi, control center for room automation, smartphone charging stations, and tech-savvy amenities throughout the hotel (Kadam & Patil, 2020); Cultivation of relationships among them and employees and Personalization (Kim *et al.*, 2019).

Methodology

Using an online survey via Survey Monkey, an empirical study was carried out to research the factors that influence North Macedonia Millennials' selection of hotel accommodation. A link to the questionnaire was posted on the various Facebook groups targeting Millennial travelers from North Macedonia. The questionnaire was active from September 2023 to December 2023, both written and administered in Macedonian language. In the end, a total of 380 responses were recorded.

Findings

Millennials' Profile
With sample size of 380 responses, 66.2% are female, while 33.8% are male (Table 1). Given that the authors already targeted Millennials for this research, an age question wasn't present in the questionnaire, given that the age range of Millennials is already known, which is from 27 to 42 years old.

Table 1. *Gender responses*

Gender	Responses (%)
Female	251 (66.2%)
Male	129 (33.8%)
Total	**380 (100%)**

Source: Authors' research

Millennials' Occupation and Monthly Income (% of total)
Crosstab analysis shows that most of the Millennial respondents are self-employed (24.2%), following an occupation as employee (23.7%) and then managers (20.3%). Among the other occupations, the questionnaire listed public service (17.3%), part-timer employee (12%), student (1.4%) and no occupation – unemployed (1.1%). The monthly income is also shown in the crosstab analysis with occupation, resulting with a monthly income of less than 30000 denars for most of the respondents (48.4%) and from 30000 denars to 50000 denars for (34.7%) of the respondents.

Table 2. *Occupation and monthly income crosstab*

	Monthly Income			
	<30000 denars	30000-50000 denars	50000+ denars	**Total**
Employee	12.4%	8.2%	3.1%	**23.7%**
Manager	1.1%	10.5%	8.7%	**20.3%**
Part-timer	9.7%	2.3%	/	**12%**
Self-employed	13.5%	5.6%	5.1%	**24.2%**
Public Service	9.2%	8.1%	/	**17.3%**
Student	1.4%	/	/	**1.4%**
No occupation (Unemployed)	1.1%	/	/	**1.1%**
Total	**48.4%**	**34.7%**	**16.9%**	**100%**

Source: Authors' research

Millennials' factors influencing hotel bookings
Ten factors were included in the questionnaire following the Tangible factors (Cleanliness, Location, Room amenities and Facilities) and Intangible factors (Hotel brand, Price-quality, Friendliness of staff, Responsiveness of staff, Online reviews, and Perceived privacy/safety). Each of the factors included items, total of 43 from which Millennials had a possibility to choose.

As shown by the results in this research, the Cronbach's alpha of the intuitive scale all scored above 0.6 (0.620–0.840) which is acceptable reliability.

Table 3. *Factors' Cronbach's alpha*

Tangible Factors	Cronbach's α
Cleanliness	0.74
Location	0.70
Room amenities	0.79
Facilities	0.62
Intangible Factors	**Cronbach's α**
Hotel brand	0.84
Price-quality	0.70
Friendliness of staff	0.76
Responsiveness of staff	0.77
Online reviews	0.71
Perceived privacy/safety	0.72

Source: Authors' research

Following the next table, mean statistics show that factors such as Cleanliness (4.23), Room amenities (4.25) and Price-quality (4.06) are among the important selections for hotel reservations. The factor Facilities (3.24) scored the lowest statistics, having been the least of importance while selecting a hotel from Millennials.

Table 4. *Factors' statistics*

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Tangible Factors		
Cleanliness	4.23	0.63
Location	3.64	0.56
Room amenities	4.25	0.61
Facilities	3.24	0.65
Intangible Factors		
Hotel brand	3.98	0.79
Price-quality	4.06	0.56
Friendliness of staff	3.81	0.67
Responsiveness of staff	3.77	0.62
Online reviews	3.84	0.60
Perceived privacy/safety	3.78	0.62

Source: Authors' research

The gender difference in the variables was examined using the independent-samples t-test. The means for male and female respondents on the ten factors are displayed in Table 5. There are statistically significant differences between the male and female Millennial travelers for two factors: *price-quality* (Sig=0.005<0.05) and *room amenities* (Sig=0.013<0.05). In the first factor, *price-quality*, even though the relationship is of equal importance by both genders, it is women who find it crucial if the price is adequate to the quality. Quality provided by the hotel is one of the determining factors for women who

focus on details, which also leads us to the second factor *room amenities*, where women pay more attention to features associated with the hotel room.

Table 5. *Factors' influence by gender*

Factor	N	Gender	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err. Mean
Cleanliness	Female	251	4.2329	.65754	.02886
	Male	129	3.8500	.58052	.04008
Location	Female	251	2.9957	.49271	.05080
	Male	129	3.0857	.51038	.04409
Room amenities	Female	251	4.2500	.62625	.09026
	Male	129	3.9957	.59271	.05080
Facilities	Female	251	2.8300	.62830	.05086
	Male	129	3.2843	.66878	.04413
Hotel brand	Female	251	3.5800	.75852	.04008
	Male	129	3.6429	.77071	.04782
Price-quality	Female	251	4.0457	.57492	.04126
	Male	129	3.9571	.56140	.01693
Friendliness of staff	Female	251	3.5571	.66284	.05527
	Male	129	3.6843	.68087	.06901
Responsiveness of staff	Female	251	3.2729	.62436	.07853
	Male	129	3.3357	.64633	.07581
Online reviews	Female	251	3.8571	.61814	.08719
	Male	129	3.2729	.60436	.07853
Perceived privacy/safety	Female	251	3.6429	.60771	.04782
	Male	129	3.4000	.63811	.02984

Source: Authors' research

Conclusion

The decision on whether to book a hotel is the result of a careful evaluation of multiple factors. Modern consumers are looking for personalised and satisfying experiences. That's why hotels that understand and adapt to these factors attract new customers. This research attempts to understand the crucial factors affecting hotel selection providing a beginning steps on understanding to what do hotels need to focus. It should be noted that for Millennials, cleanliness, room amenities and price-quality remain as one of the most important factors for hotel selection. Also, Millennials have different have different expectations and preferences depending on gender.

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