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Hotel Ethical Behavior and Tourist Origin as Determinants of Satisfaction

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Abstract:

The importance of consumer satisfaction has increased in the last decades. This is why its measurement has been considered as the greatest weight indicator for defining consumer preferences and expectations. The objective of this article is to evaluate the relationship among the satisfaction levels of hotel service consumers in Colombia, their gender, place of origin and the connotation of the reviews made online as a result of hotel ethical behaviour. The applied methodology uses the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test to validate the relations between the variables. A regression model is run to better understand the causal relations. Clusters are analyzed under the biphasic cluster procedure and a previously validated ethical behaviour scale is used to classify negative comments. Messages from 356 consumers on the Booking.com platform were analyzed. The results highlight that the place of origin and the comments made online have a significant impact on customer satisfaction. In addition, the level of ethical behaviour of hotels is affected mainly by the expectations about room, price and service provided by hotel employees.

Keywords: ethical behaviour; hospitality industry; customer satisfaction; eWOM; online reviews; local and foreigner tourists.

JEL Classification: M30; M31; M15; Z32.

Introduction

One of the roles of ethics in tourism marketing is to appropriately communicate messages about the destination (Wheeler 1995). When a hotel decides to offer its services through a platform like Booking.com, it does so for this purpose; it presents information and allows its users' ratings and opinions to become a promotional scenario. In addition, these positive and negative opinions are the result of a comparison between the expectations derived from the promise of the service and the users' experience (Creyer 1997). To some extent, they show the hotels' ethical behavior. Studies on the hospitality industry ethics are limited compared to the tourism industry in general and are focused on understanding ethics from the point of view of hotel employees but little effort has been made on analyzing the user's perception (Knani 2014). Given the above, analyzing the comments left by consumers on platforms such as Booking.com will expand the knowledge in this field (the ethical behavior of hotels). Hence, this article aims to evaluate the relation between the hotel users' satisfaction levels in Colombia and their gender, place of origin and the connotation of the online comments left as a result of the hotel's ethical behavior.

1. Literature review

Customer satisfaction is defined as an outcome indicator that emerges from the buying experience but also, as a process in which customers compare their previous expectations and actual product performance with the after-purchase perception (Grigoroudis and Siskos 2010, 5; Su 2004). In this process, clients develop beliefs about products based on experience or the messages that are released with respect to their quality levels (Solomon 2013, 354; Kotler, Bowen, and Makens 1997, 205). In the context of tourism, customer satisfaction is the result of the tourist experience in a destination compared to the expectations prior to the visit (Agyeiwaah *et al.* 2016). Due to the complexity of the tourist product, tourist satisfaction is a relevant indicator but it is difficult to manage since it is composed by independent services and because the competition of this type of product is global (V. Della Corte *et al.* 2015).

One of the services that integrates touristic products is accommodation. For the hosting industry, customer satisfaction is not only a goal, it is also a tool for attracting new customers and reaching a strong position in the market (Assaf *et al.* 2015). Several studies on the variables that determine hotel users' satisfaction, for example Vicente, John, and Anita (2011), Zhou *et al.* (2014) and Liu, Teichert, Rossi, Li, and Hu (2017) demonstrate that the physical appearance of rooms, hotel infrastructure, food, price, location and the staff constitute satisfaction factors. On the other hand, Xu and Li (2016) emphasize that bed comfort, bathroom hygiene and the quality of the food are key aspects to consider. Other variables such as personalization, friendly welcome, warm conduct between hotel staff and clients, conviction towards service and comfort are also important (Ariffin and Maghzi 2012).

A study conducted in China highlights other determinants of satisfaction such as transportation facilities, proximity to tourist sites and currency, while parking, air conditioning and television were not relevant aspects (Li *et al.* 2013). This shows some differences in satisfaction determinants associated with cultural aspects and even the state of hotel infrastructure.

The levels of consumer satisfaction concerning accommodation services are also a result of comparing the hotel value promise and the user experience. According to the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, tourism agents are obliged to provide consumers with objective and truthful information about places of destination, reception, stay and ensure transparency as to the nature of the service, price and quality (World Tourism Organization 2001). It has been shown that if the attitudes of hotel employees or their behavior are perceived as unethical, users will downgrade the received service's score (Wong Chak Keung 2000).

Due to the upsurge of social networks, hotels have implemented platforms to know the customer satisfaction indicators through the assessment of those variables and to open spaces where experiences can be shared. These platforms promote e-WOM recommendations and play a significant role in the decision-making process, especially when evaluating the purchase of an intangible product; clients take a high risk by not knowing hotel quality in advance (Mauri and Minazzi 2013, Ortiz-Rendon and Sanchez-Torres 2015). The user information and the behavior towards the information contained in the eWOM have an impact on the purchase intention (Erkan and Evans 2016); they reflect consumers' perceptions about the shopping experience. As stated by Serra Cantallops and Salvi (2014), eWOM influences organizations because it generates information that allows them to adjust their offer to maintain the desired levels of satisfaction; it also impacts consumers since it helps some of them to express the result of their shopping experience and others to improve their purchasing decision process.

1.2. Research hypothesis

The literature shows that customer satisfaction may depend on subjective and objective factors about the experience with the product or service (Valentina Della Corte *et al.* 2015). Previous studies show that there is a significant relation and consistent differences between levels of satisfaction of different demographic groups (Dewan and Mahajan 2014); this is explained due to the fact that tourists of different nationalities have different behavioral characteristics in relation to products or tourism services (Pizam and Sussmann 1995). The relation between nationality and satisfaction has also been validated in the case of those who come from different countries visiting the same destination (Kozak 2001).

Tourist satisfaction levels also include a systemic perspective (Valentina Della Corte *et al.* 2015) due to the complexity of individual perception of different tourism products; this is confirmed by studies that show how tourists' perceptions about a certain destination can vary according to their country of origin (Armstrong *et al.* 1997). Likewise, the effect of nationality on decision-making and tourist behavior has also been studied (Kozak 2001) concerning the level of perceived satisfaction of each purchase experience. Considering the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H1: There is a relationship between the level of consumer satisfaction and their place of origin.

On the other hand, the empathy among information systems, the use of technological applications, Internet, hotel competitiveness (Martínez *et al.* 2006) and the perceived satisfaction generated by the comments left on the Internet by the tourists is evident (Zhao *et al.* 2015).

Internet users value the comments that others make when evaluating their purchasing experience, they consider them useful, credible and necessary (Erkan and Evans 2016) for building their expectations and future satisfaction; it has been shown that there is an emotional process between user and online reviews (Westbrook 1987), and it is described as an influential factor in the processing of information.

Previous studies have shown that online comments impact people's satisfaction by molding their expectations (Picazo-Vela 2009). In this sense, tourists take advantage of online comments because they feel that human language can express emotions which influence shopping experience (Geetha *et al.* 2017) much more than the hotel rating assigned by a virtual platform.

There is empirical evidence indicating that the online comments tourists find in non-transactional websites impact the interaction and trust (Park and Kim 2008, Ozkara *et al.* 2016); this means that the websites containing comments made by other tourists tend to be more visited and used in the purchasing decision process. There is a positive relation between the online comments made by tourists and the increase in online transactions and reservations made by other users (Torres *et al.* 2015). Other studies confirm that online reviews from tourists are an important source of influence on satisfaction (Mauri and Minazzi 2013) and on the perceived experience in the purchasing process during the search for information in Internet (Dholakia *et al.* 2004).

Studies conducted in the service sector have found positive causal relations between the ethical behavior of sales teams and consumer satisfaction levels when trust in the organization mediates this effect (Lin 2012, Demirgüneş 2015). Also, these positive relations are directly evident between the (Román and Ruiz 2005) customer satisfaction and the core services; between the level of trust in the organization, the consumer satisfaction and sales teams (Román 2003).

Given that accommodation services are sold at the time they are consumed, and that online reviews are evidence of hotels' ethical behavior and are directly related to the level of satisfaction, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H2: There is a relationship between the level of consumer satisfaction and the positive and negative reviews left online as a result of hotels' ethical behavior.

Previously it has been proven that there is a relation between demographic variables and tourist satisfaction (Radojevic, Stanicic, and Stanic 2015), this is reinforced in some studies that reinforce the possible influence between the tourists' gender, the type of trip and the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards hotels (Xu and Li 2016). In addition, it is necessary to consider the user's gender relevance, due to its importance as a determinant variable in market segmentation strategies (Yelkur and Chakrabarty 2006).

There is an evident influence of gender, marital status and education level of the tourist on satisfaction levels (Oyewole 2001). In addition, studies conclude that gender is one of the demographic variables with the greatest influence and impact on consumer satisfaction levels (Musekiwa *et al.* 2011, Abdullah Aljasser and Sasidhar 2013).

Women report greater satisfaction than men because of their greater shopping experience (Mittal and Kamakura 2001) and their ability to compare the attributes of products. This experience allows women to identify the attributes that best fit their personal needs, which will later turn into higher levels of satisfaction than men (Everitt and Cha 1996).

In this sense, this discussion may indicate that women show a greater perceived satisfaction than men (Salleh *et al.* 2016), taking into account that men are individuals with higher expectations of tourism products than women (Ariffin and Maghzi 2012) and that gender is related to the level of satisfaction that an individual can perceive, especially in tourist products and services (where the consumer experience plays an important role). From the above, the following hypothesis is deduced:

- H3: There is a relationship between the level of consumer satisfaction and their gender.

2. Methodology

For this research data were collected from the Booking.com platform - Colombia, which offers the largest number of accommodations in different categories. This platform allows comparing various aspects such as breakfast, cleanliness, comfort, location, facilities and services, staff, value for money and free Wi-Fi service. The consumers in this platform rank products on a 1 to 10 scale (1 being very poor and 10 being fantastic), although it has been evidenced that there is a level of platform bias since they do not report ratings below 2.5 (Mellinas *et al.* 2016). Ratings are complemented with consumer reviews valued as positive or negative and associated to the shopping experience.

The statistical software IBM's SPSS Statistics 21 was used to analyze the data. The database consists of the satisfaction qualification (a quantitative variable), gender, place of origin, positive and negative comments (categorical variables). In order to find relations between the categorical variables and the quantitative variable, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to determine the application of parametric or non-parametric tests. The applied Normality tests indicated that the satisfaction scores are not weighted with a normal distribution for the categories in the qualitative variables (not even when a logarithmic transformation is made); therefore, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test is used to validate the relations between the variables. A linear regression model was run to analyze the relation between the independent variables and the level of consumer satisfaction. Clusters were also analyzed under the two-step cluster procedure, which is ideal when the number of clusters is unknown and when the variables are quantitative and qualitative (Sarstedt and Mooi 2014, 318).

2.1. Sample

The sample's size was calculated with a confidence level of 95% using a 50% proportion to maximize it. A quota sampling was used according to the number of hotels in each of the 6 cities studied; these cities stand out the most by their hotel occupancy. Then a systematic sampling was used to select one out of three hotels per city to complete the sample's size. In total, the collected data from 356 consumers who rated the experience in a hotel in Colombia were analyzed. From that sample, 133 hotels are located in Bogotá, 75 in Cartagena, 45 in Medellín, 37 in Santa Marta, 35 in Cali and 31 in Barranquilla. 68.8% were leisure trips, 19.4% business trips, 5% traveled with their couples, 2% were family trips, 0.6% group trips and 3.9% were people who traveled alone. The data were generated between January and July 2016 and collected in August, 2016.

3. Findings

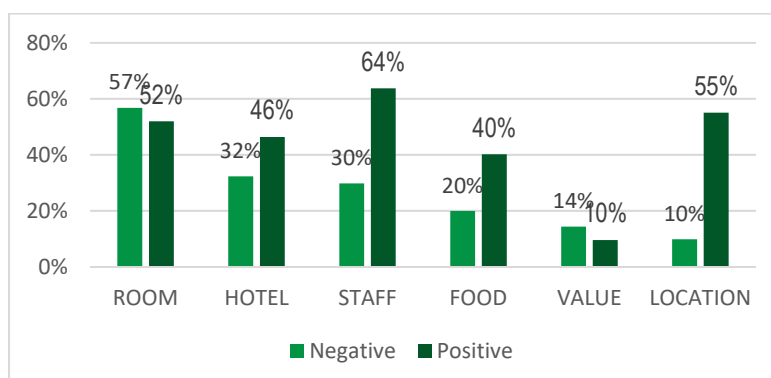
3.1. Descriptive analysis of the data

The 356-online review sample was categorized with respect to six variables which include hotel services or attributes sensitive to tourists (Zhou *et al.* 2014): the state and comfort of rooms (*room*), hotel concept and facilities (*hotel*), hotel location (*location*), service and friendliness of hotel staff (*staff*), food quality and opinion (*food*), and the relation between price and what the hotel offered (*value*). A literature review prepared from studies published between 2008 and 2012 made by Li *et al.* (2013) confirmed that the 6 variables considered are determinants of consumer satisfaction in hotel services.

Figure 1 shows the variable *room* as the most sensitive attribute for tourists. 57% of comments was negative contrasted to positive reviews which represented 52%. It was found that most of the negative reviews were related to cleanliness and order, the initial sale promise, the inaccuracy of the photos published on Internet, the rooms' comfort (including the beds, the lighting, the noise and the bathrooms).

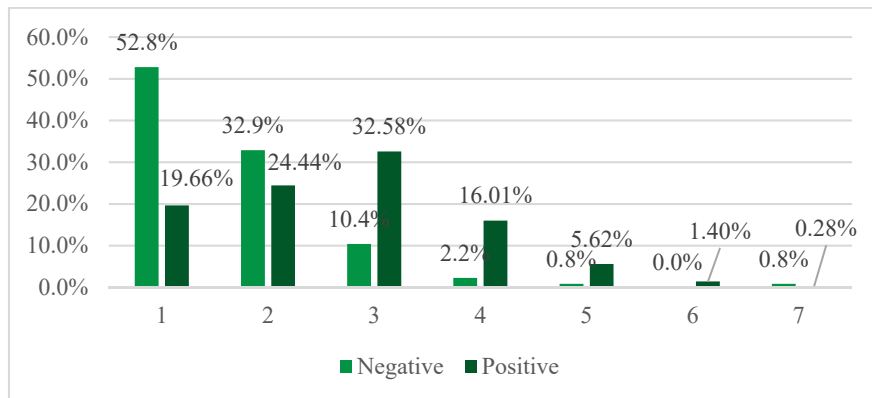
Regarding comments with positive appreciations, the attribute related to *staff* is the one that receives the most comments with 63.8%. This variable included sub-variables such as honesty, kindness, friendliness, efficiency, diligence and availability.

Figure 1. Negative and positive comments frequency



An additional analysis detailed in Figure 2 presents that 52.8% of tourists gave negative opinions to one attribute, while 32.9% did so to two attributes; 10.4% and 2.2% did the same to three and four attributes respectively.

Figure 2. Negative and positive comments



In the case of positive opinions, it can be seen that 19.6% of tourists gave a positive opinion to only one attribute, while 24.4% did so to two; 32.58% and 16% gave positive opinions to three and four attributes.

3.2. Relation between gender and tourist satisfaction

According to the Normality Test shown in Table 1, given that the p value is <0.05 , the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that the distribution of the gender variable is not normal.

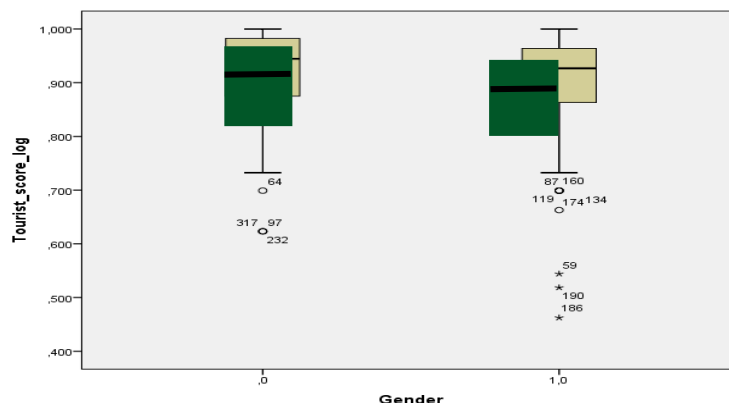
Table 1. Normal test for tourist score according to gender

| | Gender | Kolmogorov-Smirnova | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|-------------------|--------|---------------------|-----|------|--------------|-----|------|
| | | Statistic | Df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| Tourist_score_log | Woman | ,183 | 176 | ,000 | ,863 | 176 | ,000 |
| | Man | ,162 | 180 | ,000 | ,823 | 180 | ,000 |

a. Lilliefors significance correction

Before applying the non-parametric test, the box-plot of the consumer satisfaction rating according to gender is presented in Figure 3. It can be observed that the mean scores between the two genders are similar, even the average for both cases is above 9; these graphical aspects lead to deduct that there is no difference between the means.

Figure 3. Box-plot of Tourist score according to Gender



When the binomial test (Table 2) is applied, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the satisfaction levels given by men and women ($p\text{-value} = 0.874 > 0.05$). Therefore, there is no significant relation between the user satisfaction and their gender.

Table 2. Gender binomial test

| | | Category | N | % | Test proportion | Significance (bilateral) |
|--------|---------|----------|-----|-----|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Gender | Group 1 | Woman | 176 | 49 | ,50 | ,874 |
| | Group 2 | Man | 180 | 51 | | |
| | Total | | 356 | 100 | | |

3.3. Relation between place of origin and tourist satisfaction

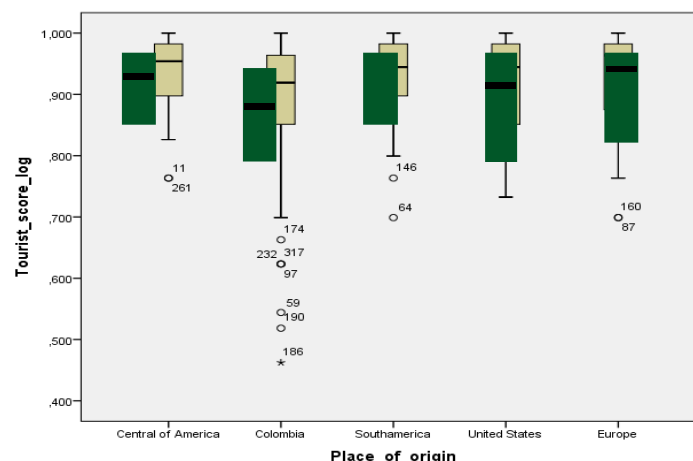
Table 3 shows that when the Normality Test is performed, only the ratings given by US tourists have a normal distribution ($p\text{-value} = 0.14 > 0.05$). Therefore, it will be necessary to use a non-parametric test to validate if there is a relation between the tourist origin and the satisfaction level concerning accommodation services.

Table 3. Normal test for tourist score according to gender

| | Place_of_origin | Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|-----|-------|--------------|-----|------|
| | | Statistic | df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| Tourist_score_log | Central of America | ,183 | 54 | ,000 | ,881 | 54 | ,000 |
| | Colombia | ,161 | 200 | ,000 | ,848 | 200 | ,000 |
| | South America | ,173 | 72 | ,000 | ,892 | 72 | ,000 |
| | United States | ,217 | 9 | ,200* | ,875 | 9 | ,140 |
| | Europe | ,266 | 21 | ,000 | ,784 | 21 | ,000 |
| *. Lower limit of true significance. | | | | | | | |
| a. Lilliefors significance correction | | | | | | | |

The box-plot in the Figure 4 indicates that the average satisfaction ratings of each place of origin are similar, some ranges even overlap. However, atypical cases may interfere with the calculations of the average and generate differences.

Figure 4. Box-plot of Tourist score according to Place of origin



The non-parametric test presented in Table 4 shows that, with a 90% confidence level, it can be affirmed that there is a significant difference between the place of origin and the tourist satisfaction score ($p\text{-value} = 0.063 < 0.1$). However, as shown in Table 5, when the variable *place of origin* is reduced to 2 categories (Colombian and foreign), the level of significance increases; with a 95% confidence level there is a statistically significant association between the provenance of tourists and their accommodation level of satisfaction ($p\text{-value} = 0.04 < 0.05$).

Table 4. Statistical contrast for Place of origin^a

| Statistics | Tourist_score_log |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Chi-square | 8,938 |
| Df | 4 |
| Asymptotic significant | ,063 |
| a. Kruskal-Wallis test | |

Table 5. Statistical contrast for Place of origin: Colombians and foreigners

| Statistics | Tourist_score_log |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| U of Mann-Whitney | 12864,000 |
| W of Wilcoxon | 32964,000 |
| Z | -2,857 |
| Asymptotic significant (bilateral) | ,004 |

3.4. Relation between reviews and tourist satisfaction

The non-parametric tests shown in Table 6 indicate that there is a significant relation between the online review types and tourist satisfaction ($p\text{-value} = 0.0 < 0.05$). However, the types of comments will be analyzed according to the categories proposed by Zhou *et al.* (2014).

Table 6. Statistical contrast for negative and positive comments ^a

| Statistics | Tourist_score_log (negative) | Tourist_score_log (positive) |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Chi-square | 50,974 | 32,554 |
| Df | 5 | 5 |
| Asymptotic significant (bilateral) | ,000 | ,000 |
| a. Kruskal-Wallis test | | |

Table 7 shows that the hotel attributes that turned out to be non-significant according to the number of reviews received were related to the physical aspects of hotels, the negative comments about food and the comments associated to location. The other variables are significant ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$) and are related to tourist satisfaction. Attributes like *room* and *staff* are the ones that receive the most negative and positive reviews in contrast to *price*. Hotel location also stands out within the positive comments while the negative present the lowest indicators. This may be related to the optimal location of hotels in the sample or it can be a variable that is valued but not a determiner in the shopping experience of the tourist type in the sample.

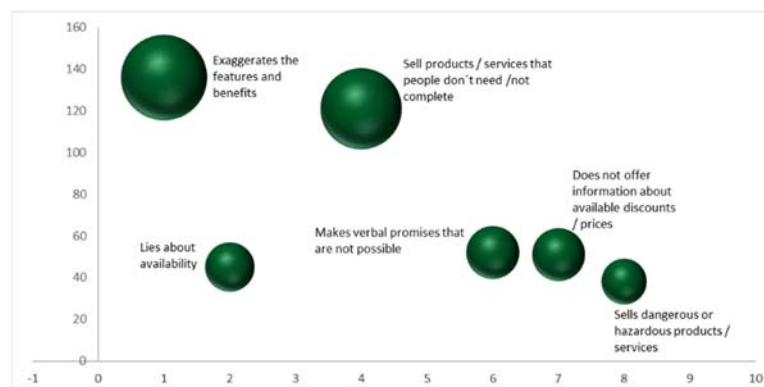
Table 7. Statistical contrast for hotel attributes

| Attribute category | Negative comments | | Positive comments | |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------|-------------------|--------|
| | P-value | N | P-value | N |
| Room | 0,00 | 202,00 | 0,01 | 185,00 |
| Hotel | 0,47* | 115,00 | 0,16* | 165,00 |
| Food | 0,10* | 71,00 | 0,00 | 143,00 |
| Value | 0,00 | 51,00 | 0,05 | 34,00 |
| Location | 0,56* | 35,00 | 0,80* | 196,00 |
| Staff | 0,00 | 106,00 | 0,00 | 227,00 |

* Not significative

Based on the Ethical Salesperson Behavior Scale designed by Lagace *et al.* (1991), 8 items were selected; these are related to the behavior of the service team in a hotel. The lies about competition and the falsification of product testimonials were not obvious items in the negative comments analyzed. Figure 5 shows that the main unethical behaviors are associated with the exaggeration of hotels characteristics and amenities, and the sale of incomplete services (or services that consumers do not need).

Figure 5. Unethical items in negative comments



3.5. Linear regression model

When a linear regression model was run to explain the level of tourist satisfaction in terms of gender, place of origin (Colombian or foreigner) and number of positive and negative comments, it was confirmed that gender is not significant to explain satisfaction (see Table 8). Positive reviews (which increase satisfaction) and negative ones (which decrease satisfaction) are significant in the model. On the other hand, the place of origin is also significant

and has a positive impact on the level of satisfaction since the variable's coding was zero for Colombians and one for foreigners; this shows that satisfaction is increased with the presence of foreigners.

Table 8. Regression model

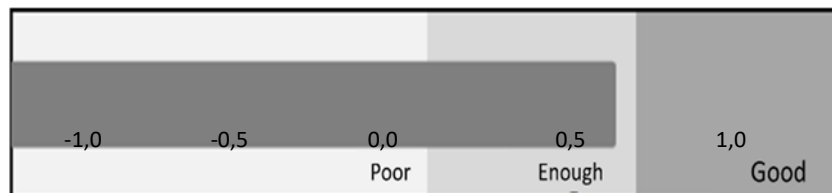
| Dependent variable: Tourist score | Coefficientes | Error tip. | t | Sig. |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------|--------|------|
| (Constant) | 8,500 | ,242 | 35,080 | ,000 |
| Gender | -,231 | ,135 | -1,705 | ,089 |
| Place of origin | ,338 | ,136 | 2,486 | ,013 |
| Negative comments | -,620 | ,081 | -7,645 | ,000 |
| Positive comments | ,285 | ,056 | 5,073 | ,000 |

R² adjusted: 0,223. Durbin-Watson 1, 97.

3.6. Cluster analysis

When applying the two-stage algorithm and after analyzing the quality of the clusters, it was found that the highest silhouette measure of cohesion and separation was for the clusters conformed by the origin, gender and customer satisfaction variables (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Cluster quality



The *place* of origin is the most important predictor (1.00), followed by *gender* (0.30) and to a lesser extent, *customer satisfaction* (0.02). As indicated in Table 9, the largest conglomerate is called "Female Colombians" because it covers all Colombian women in the sample (29.2%), the second was named "Male Colombians" because it includes all Colombian men (27%), the third conglomerate collects all foreigners of whose origin was other than South America and was called "Other Foreigners" (23.6%) and finally, the "South American" (20.2%). This confirms the significant differences in the tourist satisfaction rating (according to their origin) and shows that South Americans can also represent a group with different evaluation criteria.

Table 9. Clusters

| Cluster | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Label | Colombian Female | Colombian Male | Other foreigners | South American people |
| Size | 29,2% (104) | 27% (96) | 23,6% (84) | 20,2% (72) |
| Content | Place_of_origin Colombia (100%) | Place_of_origin Colombia (100%) | Place_of_origin | Place_of_origin Southamerica (100%) |
| | Gender Woman (100%) | Gender Man (100%) | Gender Man (60,7%) | Gender Woman (54,2%) |
| | Tourist_score_log 0,91 | Tourist_score_log 0,89 | Tourist_score_log 0,93 | Tourist_score_log 0,93 |

4. Discussion and conclusions

This research work found that gender has no significant impact on hotel user satisfaction levels, although men's rating presents more atypical data than women's (and below average); in this case, hypothesis 3 has been rejected. Tourists' gender is deduced from the name entered on the platform, which may lead to some level of error and affects the ratings. On the other hand, hypothesis 1 is accepted given that the origin of tourists significantly affects the customer's satisfaction and that the score given by Colombians is lower than the one given by foreigners; this suggests that the exigency levels in service tend to be higher among the local tourists. It also suggests that by understanding exigency, the foreigners' satisfaction levels can be fulfilled as well. Finally, hypothesis 2 is partially accepted because in the comments left by tourists both, hotel attributes, infrastructure and location are not significant. Hotel's levels of ethical behavior are affected mainly by the expectations about rooms, price and service provided by hotel employees. The information about the first two categories is usually issued in advance by hotels through their communication and promotion systems. The information about hotels' levels of service is received

from previously read reviews and the experiences of relatives and friends. According to the Ethical Salesperson Behavior Scale designed by Lagace et al. in 1991, it is evident that hotels exaggerate their amenities and accommodation features, and sell incomplete services or offer services that are not valued by consumers. The quality of the food is not an attribute that negatively affects the reviews but it is significant in the positive comments. It should be noted that the comments left by tourists gather different attributes which are interrelated and lead to assess the shopping experience; and some of them, are intentionally left so they can be read in the future by people who are making their purchasing decisions. This is evident when at the end of these reviews it can be read: "do not miss the opportunity to visit..." or "definitely do not recommend...".

Previous studies confirm that the tourist's place of origin has an impact on the perception of the place visited (Armstrong *et al.* 1997). This is because local tourists are more critical of the service since they have more knowledge about the destination; they pay relatively higher prices than a foreign tourist and value the local tourist offer differently. When assessing the relation between customer satisfaction and gender, the results contradict previous research where significant differences were found (Musekiwa *et al.* 2011, Abdullah Aljasser and Sasidhar 2013). It is even claimed that the satisfaction indicators associated to women are considerably older than the ones associated to men (Salleh *et al.* 2016). However, the data source of these studies are not virtual platforms and this may be one of the reasons for differences to arise, because different segments of tourists are likely to exist according to the shopping channel used. On the other hand, the positive effect of e-WOM has been confirmed, as well as the increase of consumer expectations facing positive reviews made on digital platforms (Mauri and Minazzi 2013) and the satisfactory relation with aspects such as room, price, service and facilities (Li, Ye, and Law 2013). Alternatively, Zhou *et al.* (2014) disaggregate the attributes and confirm that the variables associated with location and infrastructure are not significant to explain customer satisfaction, which is consistent with the findings of this study.

The results in general show that there are coincidences in previous studies, especially if they also used as a data source virtual platform. The analysis of satisfaction levels of hotel services can be complemented with the evaluations carried out in virtual environments; it is an opportunity for tourists to feel more committed to leave their reviews when sales channels suggests them to do so. While hotels have an established evaluation instrument at the time the customer checks out, the evaluation performed through platforms is visible to other people who are in the process of buying, and this condition empowers consumers and contributes to the valuation of hotels' ethical behavior.

The present study focused on the analysis of the visible variables on Booking.com. It does not allow to review the evaluation made by each tourist to the predetermined variables in the platform: breakfast, cleanliness, comfort, location, facilities, amenities, staff, value for money relation and free Wi-Fi access. Since hospitality is a tourist product and its demand tends to be seasonal, this study's results were subjected to comments dating back from January to July, focusing on the last three months; this can lead to some level of bias in the satisfaction valuation and the levels of hotel ethical behavior.

According to the findings, hotels in Colombia should consider that the fact that there is lack of a significant relationship between the tourists' gender and their satisfaction levels does not imply that hotels should not distinguish the offer for men and women. Hotels should understand that the evaluation criteria are increasingly more similar. Even the valuations may have been made by two people of different gender so the perception represents an average. Alternatively, adjusting the hotel services portfolio to the attributes that determine the purchasing decision of Colombian tourists is a key aspect since they are more demanding at evaluating experiences than the foreign tourists. Although aspects such as the hotels' location and infrastructure were not significant, these findings do not imply that they do not influence customer satisfaction. Since they constitute variables that can be easily evaluated by tourists before traveling, they do not have as much weight when assessing experiences.

This exploratory study extends the existing knowledge because it gives importance to the information generated on Internet by hotel users; it confirms causal relations among the variables related to customer satisfaction; it links the reviews made online as evidence of hotels' ethical behavior and complements the findings of previous studies conducted in countries other than Colombia. This paper also encourages the hotel industry to continue to explore customer assessment of virtual platforms such as Booking.com. This research can likewise motivate other sectors with similar sales channels to take advantage of the methodology and results.

Future research may compare these results with those obtained through other platforms or other channels and analyze if there are differences. In addition, since most studies have been conducted in the developed countries, it will be interesting to contrast results to the ones from the developing countries where hotel infrastructure and tourism products, in general, may have disadvantages. The comments made online broaden the analysis

perspective about ethics in the accommodation industry; this information can represent an input to create indicators for measuring the levels of ethical behavior and contribute to improve competitiveness levels.

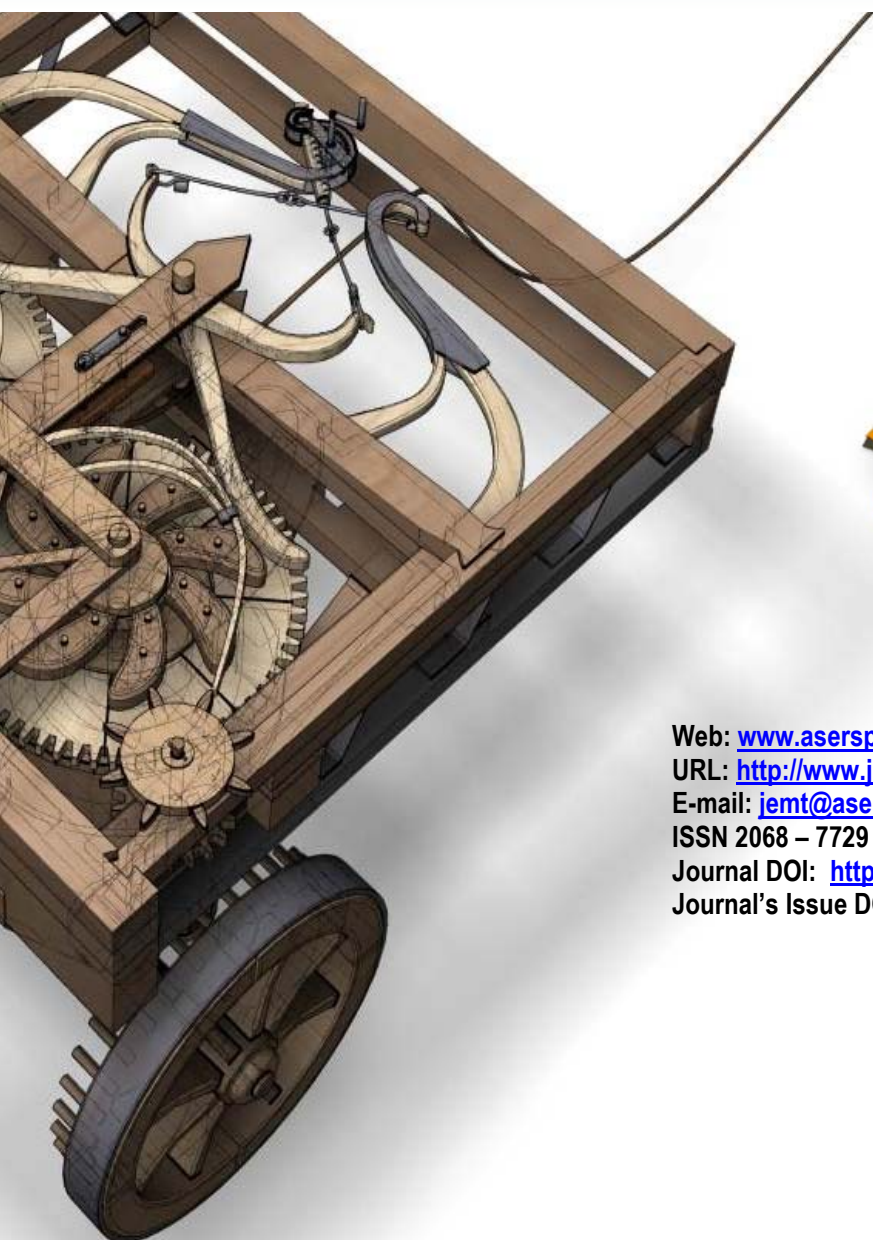
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