

Perceived service quality of tourists from former Soviet states and Western countries: a comparative study

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This study investigates differences in customer satisfaction between post-Soviet and Western tourists' perceptions of hotel service quality. Because of the post-USSR split in tourists, the West has divergent experiences in developing their services. There has been little research on whether tourists from former Soviet nations perceive service quality similarly to Westerners. The study adopted a qualitative analysis to address this gap and examined online Booking.com reviews utilizing the HOLSERV Plus scale to measure perceived service quality with ten crucial quality attributes. The findings of this study suggest that tourists consider tangible aspects, such as *rooms*, *facilities*, and *surroundings*, as important to Western tourists. At the same time, they distinguish the intangible elements of hotel services, namely, *employees* and *reliability*. These results provide a foundation for further discussion on how tourists from former Soviet republics and Western countries form their perceptions of service quality, ultimately affecting hotel satisfaction.

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Introduction

Despite more than three decades since the collapse of the USSR, there is a dearth of empirical studies examining whether tourists from post-Soviet nations have attained parity with their Western peers in terms of their perception of hotel service quality. This knowledge gap is particularly concerning given the growth of the tourism industry in the region and the potential impact of customer satisfaction on the success of hospitality businesses (Tolkach & Tse 2016). In the contemporary service-driven economy, measuring service quality is critical to business success (Wong Ooi Mei et al. 1999). However, with the growing diversity of global travelers, it is increasingly important to recognize the variation in perceptions of hotel service quality according to their country of origin (Albayrak et al. 2010, Francesco & Roberta 2019). This issue has been examined in numerous comparative studies, such as those involving visitors from Asia and Australia (Reisinger & Turner 2002), different regions of Europe (Tsotsou 2021) or China (Tsai et al. 2011). The results of these studies suggest that the service quality expectations of tourists can

vary widely across nations, as evidenced by the fact that Italians may prioritize restaurant and room upgrades, while Americans may place a higher value on staff competence (Francesco & Roberta 2019). These findings highlight the importance of taking a country-specific approach to service quality in the hospitality industry and underscore the need for hotel operators to tailor their services. Despite the growing importance of the service sector in post-Soviet republics following the rapid structural changes of the 1990s and 2000s, there is a notable lack of research on how visitors from these countries perceive hotel service quality, which has been highlighted by several studies (Gnusowski 2020, Tsiotsou 2019). Identifying hotel attributes that contribute to customer satisfaction is a popular approach to evaluating how hotel guests perceive service quality. One widely used tool for measuring customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry is the HOLSERV Plus measurement tool (Boon et al. 2013), which is specifically designed to capture and assess key customer satisfaction indicators in the hospitality industry.

The study aims to address the identified research gap and explore differences in hotel service evaluations among tourists from post-Soviet states and Western countries. The first research objective is to identify ten hotel attributes of service quality that are most important to tourists from post-Soviet states and Western countries. The second research objective is to investigate service quality dimensions that may contribute to customer satisfaction of tourists from the former USSR and Western countries. The following section examines the differences between tourists from former Soviet republics and Western countries and introduces the concept of perceived service quality and the measurement tool, followed by the conceptual framework and propositions development. The methodology used for this study is covered in the following chapter, while the results are presented in a later chapter, concluding with a discussion and potential directions for future research.

Literature Review

Differences between Tourists from Former USSR and the Western Countries

Tourists from former Soviet states and Western countries have a range of historical, cultural, and economic differences that can significantly impact their satisfaction with hotels. Despite the significance of these differences, there has been relatively little research on the disparities in perceived service quality and customer satisfaction between travelers from post-Soviet and Western countries. While some studies focus on Eastern Europe (Tsiotsou 2019 2021) and Russia (Tolkach & Tse 2016), the rest of the countries dealing with post-Soviet heritage are yet to be researched. *Historical* distinctions between tourists from the former USSR and Western countries are particularly noteworthy, with tourism in the USSR being a fully state-controlled industry (Slocum & Klitsounova 2020). Furthermore, domestic tourism existed in the form of social tourism as a part of the benefit system for the working class, while outgoing tourism was heavily limited; thus, the great majority of Soviet citizens were never exposed to foreign tourist experience (Assipova & Minnaert 2014). After the fall of the USSR, 15 post-Soviet republics faced rapid and radical economic, political, and social changes, opposite to Western countries that gradually transitioned to service-driven economies. *Cultural* differences are one of the most significant distinctions between tourists from former USSR countries and Western countries. Ex-Soviet customers' perception of service quality was influenced by numerous factors, such as challenges of adjusting to the realities of the new world, lack of social trust (Gnusowski 2020), and differences in mentality (Keller 2005), to name a few. These factors translated into a somewhat contemptuous attitude towards workers in the service sector and their view as people unable to get employed for a *real* job (d  ric Jallat & Shekshnya 2000). *Economic* differences between the former USSR and Western countries can also influence tourists' satisfaction with hotels. As developing countries, many post-Soviet states have lower incomes than Western countries (Usman et al. 2021), meaning that tourists from these countries may have less disposable income to spend on hotels and hotel services.

Perceived Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Service quality and customer satisfaction are closely related because the level of service quality that a hotel provides can have a significant impact on a guest's overall satisfaction. Research has shown a positive relationship between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction (Shafiq et al. 2019). Using online reviews and identifying the most common keywords, hotels can pinpoint areas in hotel service that may need improvement (Kalnaovakul & Promsivapallop 2022).

Hotel Service Quality Dimensions: Tangible and Intangible

The hotel product is not solely classified as either tangible or intangible, as it is a combination of both (Maric et al. 2016, Shostack 1977). The terms *tangibility* or *physical quality* typically refer to the external appearance of hotel facilities, including their accommodation and restaurant facilities, whereas intangible attributes are primarily service-related, such as customer service, understanding and caring on the part of hotel management or assurance (Ramanathan & Ramanathan 2011), and even ambient factors such as air quality, temperature, odour, and noise level (Suh et al. 2015). In the study of selected ex-USSR countries by Albayrak et al. (2010), tangible elements of hotel products had a greater influence on overall customer satisfaction than intangible elements (except in the case of Latvia). However, Maric et al. (2016) found that Serbian tourists generally attach more importance to intangible attributes, as guests value confidence in the hotel's staff. In the case of Western tourists, specifically British guests, Ekinici et al. (1998) found that intangible elements of service quality were rated higher than tangible elements. These findings support Heide et al. (1999) argument that customer satisfaction with hotel products depends on tangible and intangible dimensions.

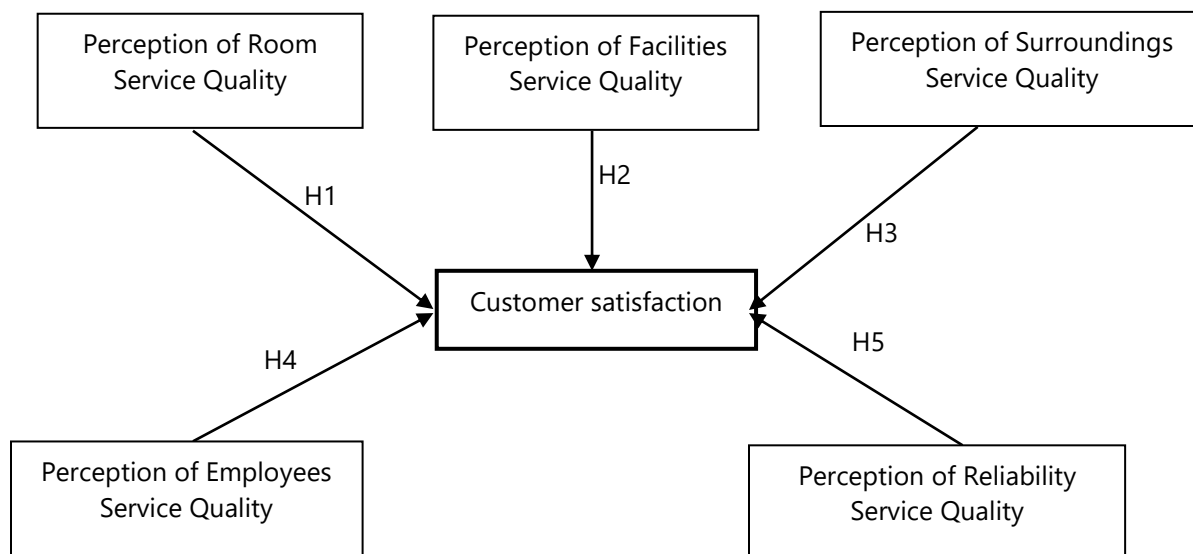
HOLSERV Plus

While SERVQUAL is a widely recognized multi-dimensional instrument (Shafiq et al. 2019), researchers have proposed alternative tools tailored to the hospitality industry. One such instrument is the LODGSERV scale, an adapted version of SERVQUAL comprising 26 questionnaire items developed by Knutson et al. (1990). However, to address the unique needs of the hotel industry, further refinement was deemed necessary, leading to the development of the HOLSERV scale by Wong Ooi Mei et al. (1999), which includes *employees*, *tangibles*, and *reliability*. The HOLSERV Plus scale is a newer alternative tool proposed by Boon et al. (2013), which is found to be particularly relevant for evaluating service quality in the hotel industry as it recognizes the tangible and intangible elements of hotel services. This newer tool consists of five dimensions described: (1) Room: Equipment, fixtures and fittings in the hotel room, services available in the room, cleanliness and user-friendliness. (2) Facilities: Facilities and services available in the hotel (outside the room) such as breakfast, restaurants and bars, pool and fitness or spa facilities. (3) Surroundings: Location of the hotel, proximity to amenities, public transport, and attractions. (4) Employees: General appearance and behavior of staff, promptness, politeness, understanding, neatness. (5) Reliability: The willingness of staff to help guests in specific situations, and the way they handle requests and complaints".

Several studies have demonstrated the tool's practical value. Bigi and Bonera (2016) have emphasized the usefulness of HOLSERV Plus in their research on tourists' perceptions of wine districts and hotels. The authors found that the distinction between the three tangible dimensions of *room*, *hotel* and *outside* helped them better understand the features that mattered most to their participants. Rus et al. (2019) have found that this scale's dimensions were more consistent than those of the SERVQUAL scale. Specifically, they utilized hotel reviews from the Traveloka website to measure sentiment toward hotel service quality. Moreover, Kalnaovakul and Promsivapallop (2022, p.21) further demonstrated "the robustness of the HOLSERV Plus model that can be applied to the online review context with some modifications" by applying topic modeling to online reviews and identifying dimensions that corresponded well to those of the HOLSERV framework.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

The proposed conceptual framework for this study posits that customer satisfaction is a function of five service quality dimensions, which are measured using the HOLSERV Plus scale. The framework was inspired by Shafiq et al. (2019), who tested the relationship between Servqual dimensions and customer satisfaction, whereas the framework adapted for this study tests the relationship between perceived service quality of HOLSERV Plus dimensions and customer relationships. As shown in the framework suggests that each of these dimensions (independent variables) has a direct effect on customer satisfaction (the dependent variable). The study hypothesizes that by measuring the salience of each dimension, it will be possible to assess how tourists from post-Soviet countries and Western states prioritize different dimensions of service quality in the hotel setting. Boon et al. (2013) have highlighted that HOLSERV Plus can be used to identify differences based on geographical location. Therefore, this study applies the HOLSERV Plus scale to measure the perceptions of service quality across the five dimensions for tourists from post-Soviet countries and Western states. Using this conceptual model, this study aims to compare the tourists' scores and identify any significant differences in their perceptions of service quality. Overall, this approach will shed light on the factors that drive customer satisfaction in the hotel industry.



Source: the authors

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Given the current lack of relevant information in English-language academic research, it is essential to consult literature pertaining to individual post-Soviet countries and the Eastern Bloc countries to formulate hypotheses.

Room

The findings of comparative studies on tourists from the former Soviet Union and Western countries indicate that "room" dimension plays a significant role in customer satisfaction. Tsotsou (2019, 2021) reported that Eastern Europeans place greater importance on room quality, cleanliness, and sleeping quality than Western and South European tourists but less than Northern Europeans. In contrast, Üngüren

et al. (2021) found that Russians prioritize hygiene and cleanliness slightly less than Germans but value room design and comfort slightly more than German tourists. When considering single-country studies, differences in how tourists prioritize hotel attributes become apparent. For example, Tolkach and Tse (2016) discovered that among eight studied themes in tourist reviews, Russian travelers ranked room amenities as the third most popular theme, with modern fittings and large room sizes receiving the highest number of comments. In contrast, the bed and sleep quality were mentioned significantly less. Comparatively, Tsai et al. (2011) found that representatives from Western countries (i.e. the UK, the USA, Australia, and France) placed less emphasis on room spaciousness and comfort of bedding, instead prioritizing cleanliness, non-smoking rooms, and soundproofing. Based on the findings of comparative studies, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H1. Tourists from post-Soviet countries place higher importance on the perceived service quality of the room dimension than Western tourists.

Facilities

The *facilities* dimension is highly variable, making comprehensive discussion challenging. However, comparative studies have shown that Russian tourists prioritize such hotel attributes as beverage variety, aquaparks, spas, parking, and pools, while German travelers prioritize buffet variety (Üngüren et al. 2021). Single-country studies have identified insightful differences. For instance, Tolkach and Tse (2016) found that food and beverage was the second most common theme in Russian tourist reviews (44%), with a particular emphasis on tasty food (20%) and a variety of dishes and cuisines (10%). This contrasts with Western tourists, as demonstrated in Torres et al.'s (2014) study, where the average percentage of reviews mentioning culinary options in room service and restaurants was only 11-13 percent per country (i.e. USA, Northern Europe, Canada). Other facilities, such as spas, gyms, and saunas, were cited less frequently by Russian tourists, with less than 5 percent of reviews (Tolkach & Tse 2016) in contrast to Westerners who referenced them in up to 23 percent of reviews (Torres et al. 2014). Leaning to the findings of single-country studies, we propose the following:

H2. Tourists from post-Soviet countries place higher importance on the perceived service quality of the facilities dimension than Western tourists.

Surrounding

The *surrounding* dimension has received relatively little attention in academic literature. Tsotsou (2019) reported that Eastern European tourists gave the location the lowest rating compared to Northern, Western, and Southern Europeans. However, Üngüren et al. (2021) found that beaches and landscaping were more important to Russians than Germans. According to single-country studies, Russian tourists appear to place more emphasis on location, including scenic views and accessibility (Tolkach & Tse 2016), while Western tourists highly prioritize convenience in tourist attractions (Tsai et al. 2011), which was the second most important attribute among 11 overall attributes for tourists from the USA and UK, with *ambience* and *near MTR station* ranking fifth and sixth, respectively. Thus, we propose the following:

H3. Tourists from post-Soviet countries place relatively lower importance on the perceived service quality of the surroundings dimension than to Western tourists.

Employees

The *employees* dimension of the HOLSERV Plus scale pertains to intangible aspects of hotel services. Comparative studies have shown that Eastern Europeans rank service slightly higher than other Europeans (Tsotsou 2019 2021). Üngüren et al. (2021) found that Russian and German tourists valued "employee's

attitude and behavior" similarly. Single-country studies have shown that Russian tourists tend to rank employees (22% of all reviews) lower than other service quality categories, with emphasizing attentiveness (8%), friendliness (7%), and speed of service (3%) (Tolkach & Tse 2016). Simultaneously, Georgian tourists have shown a higher level of appreciation for the *responsiveness* (22%), *empathy* (16%), and *assurance* (11%) dimensions of hotel service (Todua & Jashi, 2016). In contrast, tourists from the US, Northern Europe and Canada showed a greater emphasis on services. Specifically, they emphasized a high importance on accommodating or flexible service (32-53% of cases), friendliness (52-79%), professionalism (16-58%), needs fulfillment (34-42%), personalized services (3-16%) and efficiency/timeliness, (20-32%) (Torres et al. 2014). Furthermore, Tsang and Ap (2007) reported that Western tourists preferred proactive aspects of service, such as *made to feel welcome* and *willingness to help*. Based on the relatively lower ranking and percentage of tourists from the ex-USSR in comparative studies, we propose the following:

H4. Tourists from post-Soviet countries place lower importance on the perceived service quality of the room dimension than to Western tourists.

Reliability

Due to the scarcity of extant literature, it is challenging to conclude the significance of the *reliability* dimension. However, single-country studies shed some light on this matter. For instance, Russian tourists value staff's ability to respond to enquiries, with five percent of all reviews mentioning this aspect (Tolkach & Tse 2016). Additionally, Georgian tourists rated reliability as the most critical aspect, assigning it a 32 percent share in the SERVQUAL study (Todua & Jashi 2016). In comparison, tourists from the US, Northern Europe, and Canada emphasized *problem resolution*, with shares of 26.4 percent, 42 percent, and 42 percent, respectively (Torres et al. 2014). Moreover, "responding effectively to enquiries" was identified as a significant aspect by guests from the US, Australia, and Canada (Tsang & Ap 2007). Based on the studies, we suggest the following:

H5. Tourists from post-Soviet countries place lower importance on the perceived service quality of the reliability dimension than to Western tourists.

Methodology

Data Collection

The data were collected from online reviews posted on Booking.com pages of selected hotels between November 2018 and December 2021 through the web scraping technique using BeautifulSoup. This Python library allows online data extraction (Egger et al. 2022). Forty-three hotels located in 12 former Soviet countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan) and operating under one of the world's largest and renowned hotel brands were chosen as the analysis sample. The customers' reviews were separated into two categories based on the reviewers' countries of origin: fifteen former Soviet republics and select Western countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). In total, 11,609 reviews were sourced: 10,591 for former USSR and 1,018 for Western countries.

The results of web scraping were stored in Microsoft Excel for processing. First, the data were cleaned by filling in missing scores, country of origin and reviews. Second, the non-English reviews were identified and labeled according to their respective language names by utilizing langdetect. This Python-based library is a direct port of Google's language-detection library (Egger & Gokce 2022). Once the language of the reviews was identified, the reviews were then translated into English using TextBlob, a Python library

suitable for performing translations (Bonta et al. 2019). Then, the text mining approach was adopted via SpaCy, a Python package, for distinguishing word couples (Egger & Gokce 2022). The next four steps have been suggested in some studies (Khotimah & Sarno 2018). First, the tokenization technique was applied to cut text into a couple of words. Second, the words were given their basic forms by being removed from affixes and reduced to their roots via stemming algorithms. Third, the lemmatization technique was adopted to group the synonymous forms of words into single root forms for further analyses. Lastly, stop words (i.e. conjunctions, *hotel*, the hotel's brand) were eliminated, and punctuation removal was applied.

Data Analysis

Two-word clouds (one per country group) were produced in Python as a means to visualize the terms that tourists use to convey their satisfaction (Seočanac & Čelić 2020). It should be emphasized that only terms that could be classified according to the HOLSERV Plus dimensions were included in the subsequent analysis. For instance, the popular term *comfortable* was mentioned in relation to both rooms and facilities in the reviews, making it an ambiguous attribute, and, therefore, it was excluded from the analysis. To identify the ten most frequently mentioned hotel attributes among tourists from the former Soviet Union and Western countries, attribute salience was calculated using a formula adopted from Kalnaovakul & Promsivapallop (2022):

$$\text{Attribute salience} = \text{Number of Reviews} / \text{Total Number of Reviews}$$

Attribute salience represents the percentage of reviews containing a particular attribute divided by the total number of reviews. A higher attribute salience indicates that a larger proportion of reviews are related to a particular hotel attribute compared to the total number of reviews. Further, the dimension salience was calculated by summing the hotel attributes falling under each of the HOLSERV Plus dimensions.

Results

Table 1 illustrates the ten hotel attributes that were most frequently mentioned.

Table 1. Hotel Attributes

<i>Dimension/attribute</i>	<i>USSR Salience (%)</i>	<i>West Salience (%)</i>
Room	52.53	45.78
Facilities/breakfast	45.51	39.49
Employees/staff	27.29	34.97
Surrounding/location	18.36	23.48
Room/bed	16.32	16.70
Facilities/spa	11.09	13.46
Facilities/parking	10.25	12.87
Employees/friendliness	10.18	12.57
Facilities/restaurant	9.76	10.90
Surrounding/window	9.46	9.53

Source: the authors

The findings indicate that eight out of the ten hotel attributes were consistently important for both groups of tourists, namely: *room*, *breakfast*, *staff*, *location*, *bed*, *spa*, *friendly*, and *restaurant*. However,

tourists from the former USSR have identified *parking* and *window* as the two most important attributes, while Western tourists have prioritized *service* and *helpful* hotel attributes. In terms of ranking, the study found that tourists from the former Soviet Union consider the importance of dimensions influencing hotel service quality in the following order: *facilities*, *room*, *employees*, and *surroundings*, with *reliability* not being regarded as significant. In contrast, Western tourists place importance on the dimensions in the following order: *employees*, *facilities*, *room*, *surroundings*, and *reliability*.

Table 2 compares the importance of each dimension for tourists from both the former Soviet Union and Western countries and enables the confirmation or disconfirmation of propositions through the depiction of dimension salience values. The results of the study indicate that all propositions, except for one (H3), received support from the data.

Table 2. Hypotheses

No	Hypotheses (Service quality of)	Former USSR (%)	Western Countries (%)	t/p values	Result
H1	Room	68.84	59.23	4.52/.00	Supported
H2	Facilities	76.62	62.48	4.50/.00	Supported
H3	Surroundings	27.82	23.48	.19/.84	Unsupported
H4	Employees	37.47	64.54	-7.63/.00	Supported
H5	Reliability	0.0	10.90	-7.54/.00	Supported

Discussion

There is little doubt that understanding the ways tourists perceive hotel service quality allows hotel managers to work toward improvement of customer satisfaction. Tourists from post-Soviet states may have distinct perceptions of hotel service quality due to cultural differences, such as their mentality, experiences, and expectations (déric Jallat & Shekshnya 2000, Gnusowski 2020), which highlights the need for hotel managers to adapt their strategies for this customer segment in comparison with Western travelers. Around 30 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there is still a lack of empirical research on tourists' perceptions of hotel service quality. Thus, one justification for this study is to address that shortage. The study found that there were relatively minor differences in perceived service quality of tangible elements (i.e. room, facilities, and surroundings) between tourists from post-Soviet Union and Western countries, while more significant differences were observed in intangible aspects (i.e. employees and reliability). Upon examining the importance assigned by tourists from the ex-USSR, it is evident that while two tangible dimensions are of utmost importance, one intangible dimension holds greater significance than the third tangible dimension. These findings are somewhat at odds with Albayrak et al. (2010) claim that tangible elements of hotel services had a greater impact on overall customer satisfaction than intangible elements (except for Latvia) in their study of selected ex-USSR countries. Still, they align with Maric et al.'s (2016) finding that Serbian tourists placed greater importance on intangible attributes. For Western tourists, the study supports Ekinci et al. (1998) conclusion (among British guests) that intangible elements of service quality were rated higher than tangible elements. Our study complements the work of Gnusowski (2020), who investigated service markets (e.g. retail, financial) among citizens in Eastern bloc countries, while our study focuses on tourists from fifteen former Soviet republics and their perceptions of hotel service quality.

As the relevant academic literature pertaining to tourists' understanding of service quality is limited to scarce research on Eastern Europe and Russia, our discussion relies on the knowledge of tourist perceptions of service quality from other parts of the world. The room hotel attribute in the "room" dimension is the most important attribute for travelers from both ex-USSR and Western countries, as hotels primarily serve as a place to sleep when away from home. However, tourists from ex-USSR place

greater importance on the room and bed attributes than those from Western countries. Therefore, it is advisable to prioritize the preferences for room design and bed quality of tourists from the post-Soviet Union when necessary. At the same time, hotel managers must always strive to offer satisfactory quality rooms and beds, which would benefit the satisfaction of tourists from both country groups. The importance of breakfast in the *facilities* dimension reinforces its significance for perceived service quality, as it is consistently highlighted as a crucial hotel attribute in other studies (Seočanac & Čelić 2020). As breakfast is more important to tourists from former Soviet countries than Western travelers, hotels should prioritize catering to this preference. On the other hand, since spa facilities are slightly less important to tourists from ex-USSR, hotels should pay closer attention to the preferences of Western guests regarding this aspect. Parking is a distinct hotel attribute that stands out in reviews from tourists from ex-USSR, potentially indicating their preference for independent travel and do-it-yourself culture, as discussed by Gнусowski (2020).

Hotel managers have no control over the location of their property, which is a key attribute in the *surroundings* dimension. Therefore, they can either leverage the location to their advantage by promoting scenic views and proximity to popular attractions or mitigate its negative impact by providing shuttle services. The higher importance of location to Western tourists may be attributed to their unfamiliarity with the countries of the former Soviet Union. Interestingly, tourists from ex-USSR place a higher value on windows, consistent with the findings of Tolkach and Tse (2016), who noted the tourists' appreciation for scenic views. Hotel guests from ex-USSR countries place less importance on the staff and friendly hotel attributes belonging to the *employees* dimension. In contrast, Western tourists' high appreciation for personalized service has been highlighted in previous studies (Torres et al. 2014; Tsiotsou 2021). Therefore, it is critical for hotel managers to ensure the highest level of personalized service possible when dealing with Western guests. Although personalized services must be offered to all guests regardless of their origin, Western tourists would be the ones to appreciate it the most. The *reliability* dimension, represented by the helpful hotel attribute, is only highly appreciated by guests from Western countries. The study by Tsang and Ap (2007) confirms that Western tourists highly value hotel employees' eagerness to help. Therefore, it is critical for hotel managers to ensure that personnel attitude and willingness to help and effectively handle guests' requests and complaints are of the highest level when dealing with Western guests. This does not mean that guests from post-Soviet countries do not value helpful staff, but rather that they may be less likely to ask for help due to their low-trust societies and DIY culture (Gнусowski 2020).

Implications for Managers

The findings of this study offer two key benefits for hotel managers. Firstly, by identifying the specific aspects that guests from post-Soviet Union and Western countries value most highly, hotel managers can more efficiently tailor their services and amenities to meet these preferences. Secondly, it is recommended that hotel managers utilize the HOLSERV Plus scale to evaluate customer satisfaction and measure service quality as perceived by their guests. To satisfy guests from both the former Soviet Union and Western countries, hotel managers should ensure the basic quality of tangible elements of hotel services (room, facilities and surroundings) and effectively differentiate intangible aspects (employees and reliability). For instance, as eight hotel attributes are featured on the list of the ten most frequently mentioned hotel attributes by both groups of tourists, it is crucial to ensure satisfactory service levels to satisfy guests from the former Soviet Union and Western countries. Additionally, tourists from the ex-USSR prefer rooms with windows that offer scenic views. Therefore, accommodating these guests in rooms with scenic views could result in higher customer satisfaction. Furthermore, guests from Western countries place a high value on the competency and reliability of staff members, which is not as crucial for tourists from post-Soviet states. Therefore, hotel managers should prioritize staff training to ensure they can meet the expectations

of Western tourists. Additionally, self-service technology such as kiosks providing various information (e.g. tourist attractions, hotel facilities) or services (e.g. check-in/check-out) may be more suitable for guests from post-Soviet countries.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine differences in hotel service quality satisfaction between tourists from former Soviet states and Western countries using Booking.com reviews for 43 hotels in post-Soviet countries. The study facilitates a comparison of customer satisfaction using five dimensions of the HOLSERV Plus scale, designed to measure hotel service quality through a qualitative analysis of hotel evaluations. Two lists of the ten most frequently mentioned hotel attributes comprised tourists from former Soviet states and Western countries. The findings indicate significant similarities in perceived service quality between tourists from ex-USSR and Western countries, as eight out of ten hotel attributes are common to both groups of tourists. The study revealed that tourists placed comparable importance on tangible aspects (room, facilities, and surroundings) while distinguishing intangible elements of hotel services (employees and reliability), which presents opportunities for service customization. This study provides a basis for further discussion on how tourists from former Soviet republics and Western countries form impressions of service quality that influence their satisfaction with hotels.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

The study acknowledges several limitations with respect to its scope, sample size, and analysis. Firstly, the study was restricted to data obtained from Booking.com, which resulted in partial information and excluded tourists who may have been unwilling to share their opinions online or who did not book accommodation through this platform. Thus, the study's results cannot be generalized to the entire tourism industry. Additionally, as the study is limited to English references only, other sources in different languages could have significantly improved the research and provided perspectives or insights not available in English sources. Furthermore, it is possible that some errors occurred while translating the original reviews into English, given the scope of the translated languages and the potential loss of language nuances in translation. Finally, some hotel attributes may have been classified into alternative dimensions of the HOLSERV Plus scale, as the classification was subjective in some cases.

Future research should be conducted using various data sources to examine the findings of this study, which has the potential to have greater applicability by utilizing other sources and exploring various factors that may impact tourist satisfaction. For instance, in addition to Booking.com, another popular website such as TripAdvisor could be used to gather tourists' opinions. Additionally, sentiment analysis of hotel attributes would enhance the discussion of customer satisfaction and perceived service quality by differentiating tourists' positive, negative, or neutral attitudes toward such attributes. Also, exploring the perception of service quality based on trip modes, such as business trips, family vacations, or couples' gateways, would provide insight into tourist satisfaction from both country groups. Moreover, analyzing hotel attributes based on star ratings would clarify distinctions between these tourists. Finally, investigating the hotel attributes most frequently mentioned in online reviews by tourists from the former Soviet Union and Western countries who stay in Western hotels (rather than in the ex-USSR countries) would also provide valuable insights.

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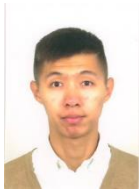
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