

Hotels' self-positioned image versus customers' perceived image: a case study of a boutique luxury hotel in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to take boutique luxury hotels as its research subject to enrich the view on the self-positioned image of luxury hotels and simultaneously compare this image with the one perceived by customers. It also investigates whether a gap exists between the two images.

Design/methodology/approach – The best-rated boutique luxury hotel in Hong Kong is selected as the case hotel. Through the interpretation and discussion of high-frequency wordlists and semantic co-occurrence network charts, major topics in the hotel's self-presented image and customers' perceived image are identified accordingly.

Findings – Five dimensions (event making, exquisite food, excellent amenities and services, special function venue and promotion) used by hotels to form their boutique luxury image are recognised. Between hotels' self-positioned image and customers' perceived images, minor similarities such as the recognition of excellent amenities and services were confirmed but considerable differences were identified, indicating the ineffective marketing by the boutique luxury hotel despite its success in terms of ranking. Managerial suggestions on how to address the image discrepancy were proposed.

Originality/value – This study contributes insights into hotel image discrepancy among social media platforms in luxury hotel segments by adding the category of boutique luxury hotels. It also identifies the implications for enhancing the development of a hotel image to meet customers' needs and expectations.

Keywords Self-positioned image, Perceived image, Boutique luxury hotel, Comparative study

Paper type Research paper

酒店自我定位形象与顾客感知形象——以香港某精品豪华酒店为例

摘要：目的：本研究试图以精品豪华酒店为研究对象，丰富豪华酒店自我定位形象的视角，同时将其与顾客感知的形象进行比较，考察二者之间是否存在差距。

设计/方法/途径：本文选取香港评分最佳的精品豪华酒店为案例酒店。通过对高频词表和语义共现网络图的解读和讨论，识别出酒店自我呈现形象和顾客感知形象中的主要话题。

结果：酒店利用五个维度（活动打造、精致的食物、优质的设施和服务、特殊的功能场所和促销）来塑造其精品豪华形象。在酒店的自我定位形象和顾客的感知形象之间，发现了一些细微的相似之处，如对优质设施和服务的认可，但差异之处相当大，表明尽管精品豪华酒店取得了优秀的排名，但其营销效果不佳。本文提出了解决形象差异的管理建议。

原创性/价值：本研究通过增加精品豪华酒店类别的案例，有助于深入了解豪华酒店细分市场中社交媒体平台之间的酒店形象差异。本文还确定了促进酒店形象发展的影响，以满足客户需求和期望。

关键字：关键词 自我定位形象，感知形象，精品豪华酒店，比较研究

Imagen auto-posicionada del hotel versus imagen percibida por los clientes: un estudio de caso de un hotel boutique de lujo en Hong Kong.

Propósito : Este estudio se esfuerza por tomar a los hoteles boutique de lujo como tema de investigación para profundizar en el conocimiento sobre la imagen de los hoteles de lujo y comparar el posicionamiento presentado por el hotel con el que perciben los clientes. También investiga si existe una brecha entre las dos imágenes.

Diseño / metodología / enfoque : Para el caso se selecciona el mejor hotel de lujo calificado en Hong Kong. A través de la interpretación y discusión de listas de palabras de alta frecuencia y gráficos de redes de coincidencia semántica se identifican los principales temas en la imagen presentada por el hotel y la imagen percibida de los clientes.

Resultados : Se reconocen cinco dimensiones (creación de eventos, comida exquisita, excelentes comodidades y servicios, lugar de funciones especiales y promoción) utilizadas por los hoteles para formar su imagen de lujo boutique. Entre la imagen auto-posicionada de los hoteles y las imágenes percibidas por los clientes, se confirmaron pequeñas similitudes, como el reconocimiento de excelentes comodidades y servicios, pero se identificaron diferencias considerables, lo que indica la comercialización ineficaz del hotel boutique de lujo a pesar de su éxito en términos de clasificación. Se propusieron sugerencias gerenciales sobre cómo abordar la discrepancia de imagen.

Originalidad / valor : Este estudio aporta información sobre la discrepancia de imagen del hotel entre las plataformas de redes sociales en los segmentos de hoteles de lujo al agregar la categoría de hoteles boutique de lujo. También identifica las implicaciones para mejorar el desarrollo de una imagen de hotel que satisfaga las necesidades y expectativas del cliente.

Palabras clave : Imagen auto-posicionada, Imagen percibida, Un hotel boutique de lujo, Un estudio comparativo

Introduction

Given the increased competition in the hotel industry, developing an individualised image has become a critical issue for hotel operators (Lee *et al.*, 2010). As emphasised by Stark (2011), instead of its strict reality, a product's image is a key criterion to generate emotive response among customers. Therefore, a well-expressed image plays a central role in the positioning strategies of a hotel. Undeniably, hotels exert much effort towards accomplishing such image positioning and developing their core competitiveness in the market. Studies on hotel image formation has long recognised the tangible and intangible elements of hotels in determining the fundamental features of their image, namely, their functional and more imperceptible emotional features (Lee and Back, 2010; Zhang and Mao, 2012). However, these studies have examined the hotel image either from the hotel's own perspective (Herstein and Mitki, 2008; Leung *et al.*, 2015) or the customers' (Kandampully and Hu, 2007; Tsao *et al.*, 2015). No extant study has explored whether any difference exists between these two views.

Since the 1990s, luxury hotels have been among the most profitable revenue-generating businesses globally (Chon and Yu, 2012) and have thus rapidly flooded into the world market. However, in many areas, the potential capacity to simultaneously accommodate the arrival of numerous luxury hotels is limited, and a high level of product homogenisation exists in many hotel brands. This development has led to the rapidly decreasing rate of revenue in this hotel segment. In recent years, hotel companies have begun to establish a new type of hotel in the luxury segment, namely, the boutique luxury hotel, to seek a new development point. This type of hotel commonly provides a limited number of rooms but offers excellent services and product design (Mun Lim and Endean, 2009).

Researchers worldwide have conducted corresponding studies examining the image of boutique luxury hotels and dimensions or attributes enabling these hotels to gain popularity in the market (Mun Lim and Endean, 2009; Cetin and Walls, 2016). Currently, rare attention has been directed towards examining whether customers have really perceived what boutique luxury hotels intend to express or whether any perception gap exists between the two images. In reality, previous image research emphasises the necessity to align the projected brand image with customers' perception in harmony so that a sound brand–customer relationship can be maintained (Davies and Chun, 2002; Hatch and Schultz, 2003). Nandan (2005) also advises that an agreement between the projected and perceived images indicates a brand has performed well in its marketing positioning, which may foster great loyalty among customers. Therefore, this kind of research is useful

because if customers' perceived image cannot be in conformity with hotels' self-positioned image, the hotels' marketing campaign will be jeopardised and should be adjusted accordingly.

To fill the perceived knowledge gap, the current study focuses on comparing the hotel's self-positioned image online against the actual image perceived by customers. An exploration of the keywords and the semantic clusters of texts from both hotels and customers, the hotel attributes perceived or overlooked by the latter shall be demonstrated. For theoretical contribution, this research sheds light on how boutique hotels can offer opportunities for additional insights that researchers do not know about luxury hotels and their images. The disparity between the hotels' self-positioned image and customers' perception should be explored by hoteliers for the improvement of the daily operation of boutique luxury hotels to enhance customer satisfaction and ultimately increase revenues. This suggestion constitutes the managerial implication of the present study.

Literature review

Hotel image

A critical indicator of customers' behavioural intention is their perception towards a product, service or brand (Lee *et al.*, 2010). Such a formed image is strongly associated with customers' purchase and recommendation intention (Chen and Tsai, 2007). Therefore, improving their image of a product, service or brand may directly or indirectly increase the intention of customers to be loyal (Lai *et al.*, 2009). Extant studies have long emphasised image formation for marketing endeavours (Finn and Louviere, 1996; Leisen, 2001; Kim and Hyun, 2011). However, realising a straightforward definition of image is difficult because of its complex nature (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). In the hotel industry, image is generally referred to as the sum of the beliefs, ideas and impressions of customers towards a hotel (Han and Hyun, 2013). Considering the intangible nature of hotel products and services, customers' image formation becomes highly emotional and is sometimes difficult to replicate (Hu *et al.*, 2009).

Boutique luxury hotels are a newly emerged segment within the luxury hospitality context. According to Rogerson (2010) and Herstein *et al.* (2018), this type of hotel is usually small or medium-sized and offers personalised services with upper-band prices. This type supplements conventional luxury hotels by incorporating customised features into the hotel. In previous literature, extremely few articles explored the image of this type. For example, a study published in the *Journal of Hotel Modernization* depicted the sales and marketing strategies of boutique luxury hotels and features such as the uniqueness, a friendly online image and active interaction with customers are closely related to the image of such hotels.

Currently, boutique luxury hotels are active players in using social media as an image formation strategy. According to Nassar (2012), 41% of boutique luxury hotels have already adopted one kind of social media to brand their hotel image. The investment luxury hotels spend on social media is continuously growing as well (Lanz *et al.*, 2010). However, many such hotels do not have a clear idea of how to brand their image effectively in social media, especially about what kind of message content is useful in strengthening the hotel image among customers (Cervellon and Galipienzo, 2015). Hence, how luxury hotels can increase their revenue and attract business through their image in social media merits scholarly attention worldwide.

User-generated content for hotel reviews

Nowadays, hotels can no longer retain their unparalleled roles as experts in disseminating information on the features of hotel products and services and in shaping the hotel's specific image because of the existence of multiple online channels. Although a hotel has

its own internet presence, user-generated content (UGC) reviews from various online travel agents (OTAs) are likely to appear earlier from search engine results (Liu and Zhang, 2014). Such finding indicates that potential customers tend to access UGC websites first before browsing the hotel's site. However, hotels can gain specific benefits from UGC websites if a positive image can be formed on OTA sites because, among customers, the UGC image is regarded as more trustworthy and reliable than that from a site managed by the hotel itself (Leung, *et al.*, 2013).

UGC in the hotel context has been addressed widely, including the nature of UGC and its influence on booking intention (Liu and Zhang, 2014), the decision-making process (Ye *et al.*, 2011) and product acceptance (Jalilvand *et al.*, 2017). Other related studies have explored the credibility of online reviews and the differentiation between real and fake reviews (Ayeh *et al.*, 2013; Filieri *et al.*, 2015) and reviewed studies conducted in the hotel context (Cantallops and Salvi, 2014). The impact of UGC is likewise discussed specifically for hotels of various sizes, such as small-sized establishments (Hills and Cairncross, 2011), small and medium-sized hotels (Chaves *et al.*, 2012) and large hotel groups (Liu and Zhang, 2014).

Image congruence

Image congruence can significantly influence the operation of a business (Dolich, 1969). In general, a matched image can benefit the business because what the business offers can meet the expectation of customers and, accordingly, increase their motivation to purchase. If great incongruence exists, then the business will gradually lose more customers, which may lead to a dilemma in maintaining their business. Various studies have been conducted to examine image congruence, such as its effects on product evaluations (Graeff, 1996), on consumer choice (Birdwell, 1968) and customer satisfaction (Huang *et al.*, 2015).

Some studies in tourism have attempted to address the image congruence issue existing in the field and have mainly used traveller surveys to compare projected and perceived destination images (Marine-Roig and Ferrer-Rosell, 2018). Currently, with the popularisation of online sources, more destination marketing organisations stress the importance of such information and frequently collect online UGC data to examine their images to enhance their competitiveness in the global market (Banyai and Glover, 2012). However, few studies have examined image congruence based on online data. Among the few, the study by Marine-Roig and Ferrer-Rosell (2018) adopts compositional analysis to investigate the perceived and projected images of Catalonia in which three apparent discrepancies are identified. Recent studies have continued to rely heavily on induced surveys to compare between two image types, such as Komppula and Laukkanen (2016) and Önder and Marchiori (2017). These studies have focused on the comparison of destination images. However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, this kind of research is highly needed in the hospitality field.

This study endeavours to take boutique luxury hotels, a newly popular hotel category worldwide, as its research subject to enrich the view on the self-positioned image of luxury hotels and simultaneously compare this image with the one perceived by customers. In addition, it investigates whether a gap exists between the two images. The theoretical contribution generated from this type of comparative study is more extensive than that from the examination of the image solely from the perspective of the hotel or customers.

Methodology

Content analysis

Content analysis is particularly useful in the analysis of large volume of texts, including newspaper articles, open-ended comments and documents of various kinds (Krippendorff, 2004). With the assistance of modern technology, content analysis through computer

software can accomplish large-scale text data analysis. The present study deployed the KH Coder (Higuchi, 2012) to generate high-frequency wordlists and semantic co-occurrence network charts for evaluation. The most important part, the semantic co-occurrence network, offers an in-depth analysis of the semantic connection of high-frequency words by measuring the probability for two or more words to co-occur. It is an experimental data analysis method without a pre-requisite concept of the clusters that may arise from the analysed texts. Therefore, co-occurrence analysis is a useful means to complement the findings from word frequency analysis because it can uncover information not readily manifested in the wordlist (Bullinaria and Levy, 2007). Overall, the application of both methods can enhance the comprehensiveness of data analysis and facilitate the interpretation of findings.

For the high-frequency wordlist, the researchers extracted the top 50 words for further analysis because such words are recognised as the major themes of texts across various studies (Ryan and Bernard, 2003; Brysbaert and New, 2009; Turney and Pantel, 2010). In the semantic co-occurrence network, the larger the circle size is, the more times the word in the circle occurred in the text. Purple circles indicate words with high centrality, meaning that such terms are closely related to other words. The darker the purple hue is, the stronger the centrality of the word is. To demonstrate major themes, only word clusters with strong associations were selected for inclusion in the network.

Case hotel and data source

The Upper House is a boutique luxury hotel in Admiralty, Hong Kong Island, Hong Kong, which is ranked among the most popular destinations in the world (Euromonitor International, 2011). According to TripAdvisor, the hotel was opened in 2009. In 2011, the hotel was included in the *Top 10 hotels in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan* by TripAdvisor. In the following year, it entered the list of top 25 hotels in China. From the size of the hotel, the service it can offer, its design and the market orientation, the case meets all the requirements of a boutique luxury hotel. Moreover, the hotel's Facebook posts are clearly organised to target potential and loyal customers and cover a lengthy timeline for data collection. Because of this hotel's excellence in the boutique luxury hotel market, a study on it can generate some implications for the luxury hotel segment to certain extent.

Texts generated by the hotel were downloaded from Facebook, the top social media network recommended by the hotel itself. Many hotels resort to Facebook to spread their image because of its affordability and effectiveness (Su *et al.*, 2015). All posts generated by the hotel since it was established in 2011 in its official Facebook page were collected to form the first database. The second database comprises reviews collected from TripAdvisor (www.tripadvisor.com), and the authenticity of its reviews is considered the distinctive feature of the site (Xie *et al.*, 2016). For these reasons, it was chosen as the data source of this study. To guarantee the comparability of the two data sets, 1,731 customer reviews were collected for the database from the time the first post was posted on its Facebook page to the end of 2017. Reviews in other languages were excluded in this study to ensure the comparability of the databases as the hotel exclusively constructs posts in English on its Facebook page. Before analysing the two databases, the researchers pre-processed the data to ensure the quality of analytical results.

Findings and analysis

Word frequency

Table 1 lists the high-frequency words from the hotel's Facebook account in descending order. In general, one type of words (the noun) was preferred. A total of 19 different nouns and 11 separate proper nouns found accounted for 60% of the top 50 words. Nine of the words are verbs, another nine are adjectives and two are adverbials.

Table 1 Top 50 high-frequency words used in the hotel's Facebook posts

<i>Word</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Word</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
HongKong	334	event	50
TheUpperHouse	227	today	50
CaféGray	220	Christmas	49
Deluxe	148	come	49
thank (v.)	141	view (n.)	49
enjoy	109	SkyLounge	45
weekend	105	try (v.)	44
special	91	Asia	43
join	88	AfternoonTea	42
guest	85	stay (n.)	42
stay (v.)	83	morning	41
look (v.)	82	designer	40
new	73	happy	40
week	73	AndreFu	39
TheLawn	70	good	39
day	69	just	39
fabulous	69	team	39
UpCloseWith	69	chef	38
Hotel	68	favorite (adj.)	38
Lovely	68	make	37
Night	68	soon	37
year	59	great	36
best	54	drink (n.)	35
start	54	evening	35
time	52	experience (n.)	35

In addition to the noun “hotel”, other nouns were grouped into three categories: time, activity and people. The hotel conducts year-round marketing from morning to night, and its marketing focus involves creating an experience through the customers' stay, which consists of event attendance, view appreciation and savouring drinks. The experience is co-created by the hotel's excellent team, including a world famous chef and a designer who tends to offer a unique experience for guests. Among the proper nouns, seven words described the place where the hotel service is provided.

As for verbs, one word (“thank”) was used to express the hotels' gratitude to the support from customers. The rest of the eight words are laden with a persuasive tone through which the hotel intends to convert potential customers who are perusing Facebook posts into actual purchasers. The terms “try” and “join” are two typical words performing such function. For the use of adjectives, the hotel prioritises setting its distinctive image apart from competitors. Moreover, the hotel's use of certain adjectives (fabulous and lovely) was likewise meant to emphasise its high-end nature, which also lays a foundation for the hotel to claim its position as the best hotel or the favourite hotel among customers. The last adjective, “happy”, was used to send wishes to readers on festivals or special events. This greeting and the expression of gratitude to customers manifest the intention of the hotel to establish a good relationship with its customer base.

[Table 2](#) provides the top high-frequency words often generated in customer reviews. A total of 25 words are nouns, with 3 being proper nouns. Adjectives, verbs and adverbials accounted for 12, 8 and 2 terms, respectively.

Unsurprisingly, “hotel” topped the list as it describes the subject of the review. The same reason accounts for the high frequency of the term “The Upper House” and “Hong Kong”. “Room” ranks second, signifying the important and central position that rooms represent for a hotel. Two other nouns related to rooms (bathroom and suite) reflect the customers' preference for amenities and room types. The words “service”, “staff” and “team” (service

Table 2 Top 50 high-frequency words used in customer reviews

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
hotel	3910	really	456
room	2835	excellent	455
HongKong	2024	guest	449
TheUpperHouse	1664	location	434
stay (v.)	1645	food	422
service	1595	day	417
view (n.)	1502	wonderful	416
staff	1306	bar	406
great	1124	floor	402
make	984	perfect	373
best	911	recommend	369
experience (n.)	861	harbor	361
stay (n.)	847	beautiful	353
time	742	come	353
amazing	709	special	346
restaurant	647	world	346
bathroom	607	suite	341
just	597	city	340
night	552	team	338
feel	547	fantastic	333
home	527	want	333
place	500	love (v.)	331
breakfast	486	friendly	327
CaféGray	486	nice	324
good	462	say	320

provider) represent the second distinctive feature of the hotel. The third highly mentioned noun group indicates the sights that customers can perceive, including “city”, “harbor” and “view”. The food and beverage group follows, consisting of the terms “restaurant”, “breakfast”, “food” and “bar” along with the proper noun “Café Gray”.

Among the 12 adjectives, 8 words directly addressed the excellent image of the hotel with the supreme compliment of “best” and “perfect”. Two words are primarily used to praise the staff (nice and friendly). One word “beautiful” is used for the appreciation of the physical setting of the hotel and the view it offers. The hotel’s specialty is also perceived by the customer through the use of “special”. In addition, the use of verbs can be classified into two groups. The first is composed of words associated with hotel living activities (stay, make, feel, come and say). The second group tends to reveal their satisfaction with the hotel (want, love and recommend).

Semantic co-occurrence network analysis from the hotel’s perspective

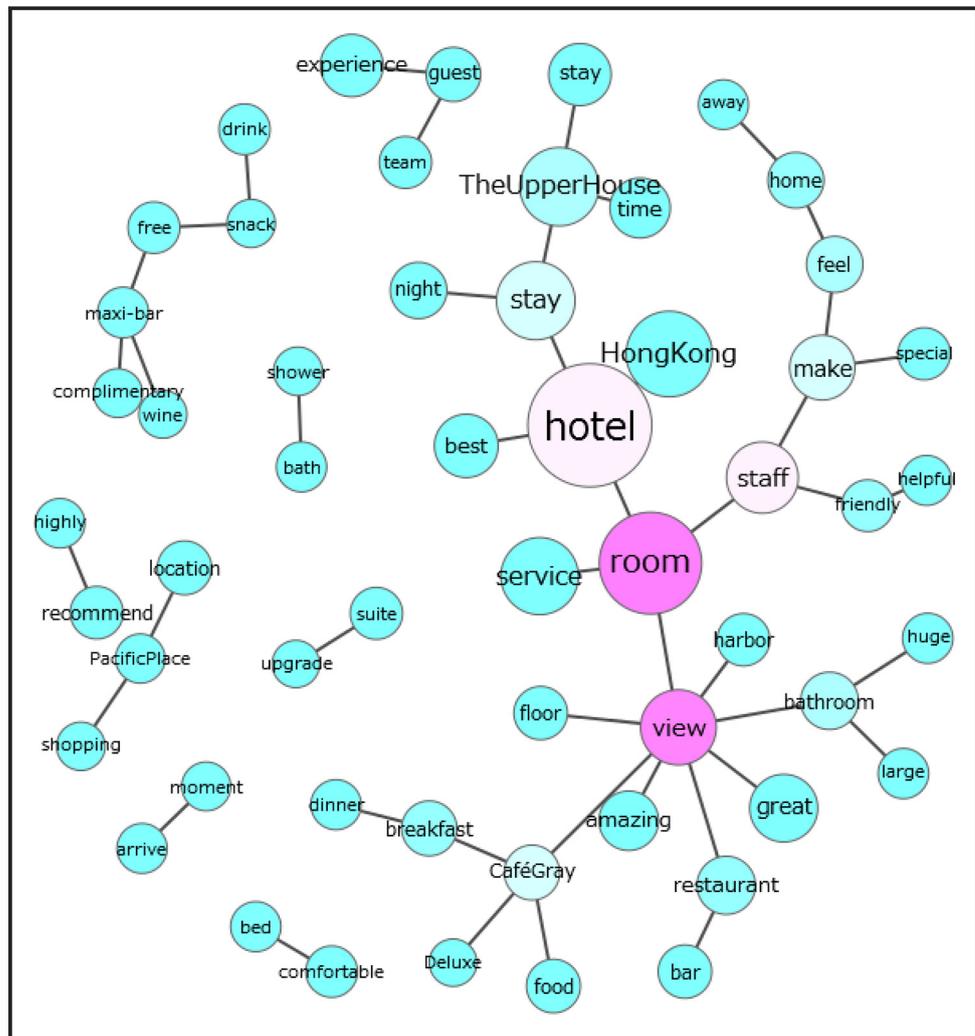
As shown in the semantic co-occurrence network (Figure 1), one of the two largest clusters centres on Café Gray and the other on Up Close With. Café Gray ranks third in the high-frequency wordlist after Hong Kong and the hotel name, but it ranks first in centrality, indicating its importance for the hotel. The term is actually composed of Café Gray Deluxe (the restaurant) and Café Gray Bar. However, the restaurant is considerably more frequently mentioned given that Café Gray and Deluxe are almost affixed to each other. In terms of marketing, the hotel always launches its new menu or dishes on important days such as New Year’s Day, whereas special offers are recommended for customers to enjoy their hotel stay. Additionally, the dark purple colour for the circles of “enjoy”, “special” and “offer” signifies that these three words are closely linked with many other topics. These outcomes further demonstrate the popularity of the use of special offers in the hotel.

Semantic co-occurrence network analysis from customers' perspective

From the semantic co-occurrence network of customer reviews (Figure 2), a big cluster (33 words) is formed with “room” and “view” at the centre. The first distinctive feature is the amazing and great harbour view which customers can enjoy from their room and from the Café Gray. Moreover, the large size of the bathroom is frequently mentioned because such a huge bathroom is a luxury in Hong Kong. In addition to the view, Café Gray’s food, including its breakfast and dinner, also caught the customers’ attention.

To provide enhanced experience, the hotel should have excellent room amenities, food and exceptional service. Friendly and helpful staff can assume the role of offering such a service. The hotel staff not only fulfil their basic duties which correspond to those in other hotels, but they also make their customers feel that their service is special, even making them regard the hotel as a home away from home. Given its physical setting and service, the hotel is viewed as the best one in Hong Kong by its customers. Consequently, “highly recommended” also becomes an apparent cluster signifying the customers’ satisfaction from another perspective.

Figure 2 Semantic co-occurrence network for customer reviews in TripAdvisor



The second-largest cluster focuses on the hotel's featured mini-bar, the "Maxi-bar". This bar offers free or complimentary snacks and drinks with the daily refreshment, but customers must pay if they drink the wine from the bar. Young and old customers speak highly of the mini-bar. Two three-word clusters are present. The first indicates the hotel's exact location which is close to the shopping mall, Pacific Place. This location enables customers to conveniently participate in the so-called shopping paradise of Hong Kong. The other cluster centres on the teamwork of the hotel. Many customers wanted to thank the hotel management team for the well-organised service they received which upgraded their experience during their accommodation.

All the remaining three two-word clusters are related to the room product. Such outcome reveals that customers strongly felt that they must be offered a comfortable bed and an enjoyable shower or bath. Moreover, suite upgrades occur frequently. By examining the text data, the researcher can identify several reasons for service promotion, including visiting on special days for the customer, becoming a regular client and even for no reason at all.

Discussion

Hotel posts and customer reviews recognised the excellence of the hotel with similar adjectives to indicate its high quality. The hotel also preferred to directly state its brilliance by constantly using the superlative adjective "best" on various occasions. Simultaneously, the hotel group used the opportunity to promote its newly established hotels under the same series. The actual effect remains limited from the current review discourse. As for customers, they were largely satisfied with the hotel, clearly showing their intention to revisit. The hotel accordingly extended its gratitude to the customers' satisfactory reviews, helping the hotel to be the best in Hong Kong, thereby promoting the establishment of a good relationship between the customers and the hotel.

Evidently, both parties share the same views on the hotel's overall predominance in the market, but their emphases differ greatly. The hotel purposely organises numerous activities, and it built a quiet garden to form its brand personality. However, such efforts are not perceived by customers. Customers still rely heavily on the room product of the hotel because the majority of their hotel stay is within their rooms. What they desire is the quality assurance of the room from the physical setting to the service. Anything that can improve the room tends to perfect the customers' perception and elicit good reviews. The hotel posts pictures to present its room image, but an integrative multimodal presentation is proven more useful than the mere use of pictures (O'Halloran, 2004). The hotel must also strengthen the presentation of its merits, such as its mini-bar. Customers enjoyed it so much, and they repeatedly appreciated the high-quality supply and its being free, but the hotel fails to consider this seriously. The mini-bar was mentioned only twice in the entirety of the hotel texts, implying the hotel's severe ignorance of a selling point.

The hotel may consider the importance of establishing its unique hotel personality by offering activities. Activities can exert an unconscious effect on the atmospheric formation of the hotel, but hotel customers can often be influenced by those they directly experience (Han and Ryu, 2009). Thus, their room and the service may affect customers more than the activities offered, and the hotel must consider a better means of presenting these core products to their customers before formulating decisions. The hotel should concentrate on fully exhibiting its merits through social media, but it should not allow the image discrepancy to increase in the future.

Conclusion

The study applied content analysis to identify the major topics involved in a boutique luxury hotel's self-presented image and the image perceived by its customers. This method enabled the researchers to conduct their investigation without any prerequisite hypotheses.

Although similarities exist in the two images, considerable difference was identified between them, which may effectively influence the operation of the case hotel. This outcome indicates that the hotel may receive an excellent overall review and that what it offers can match the customers' needs, but its improperly communicated image online may not correspond with the customers' perception. This disparity does not help the hotel in marketing itself, and even some negative effects can be witnessed. On the one hand, such a marketing investment may become ineffectual because it fails to generate sufficient impact to engage more customers. On the other hand, it may even damage the hotel's image because what it offers online frequently diverges from the customers' needs. Hotels in this category must carefully contemplate the aforementioned disparity to fully use social media to guarantee its marketing effect. This study contributes to the hotel literature by examining an ignored area and identifies the issue of image incongruence in the boutique luxury hotel sector. Thus, it can elucidate hotel marketing theories that indicate additional attention should be paid to the congruent image to better stimulate customers' needs, and this kind of marketing should be done frequently.

In addition to the aforementioned managerial implication to the hotel industry, the identification of the five major dimensions (event making, exquisite food, excellent amenities and services, special function venue and promotion) used by the boutique luxury hotel is the first theoretical contribution of the study. Meanwhile, the study brings a new dimension for the academia in hospitality to assess brand image theoretically. Prior studies (O'Connor, 2010; Kandampully *et al.*, 2011) have mainly concentrated on examining either the perceived hotel image or the image projected from different media. A dearth of academic attention has been laid to effectually appraise and comprehend the gap existing between the two images, which is an ignored area in hotel image studies from a theoretical perspective. However, this study demonstrates that an apparent discrepancy is existent without sufficient academic and managerial consideration. Therefore, this study can initiate both academic and practitioners' attention to recognise the importance of hotel image congruence. The methodological contribution is the introduction and the application of the qualitative and quantitative combined approach to do content analysis. It can offer hands-on guidance for future researchers to use the tool and the established framework to identify and reduce potential incongruence in hotel image. Hence, developing such a methodological framework can be a valuable undertaking.

Limitations are inherent in this study. As an exploratory study, it only focuses on the analysis of one hotel in Hong Kong, which may limit its findings from being widely applied in other contexts. However, as is stated by Xiao and Smith (2006), a case study in tourism and hospitality can ignite researchers' attention towards a specific phenomenon and lay a foundation for further exploration and theory building in the future. Therefore, a case study has its special merits in this context. Moreover, the present study does not explore the hidden reason the hotel tends to convey such an image although customers may value other hotel attributes more importantly because it may involve operational practices the hotel does not want to expose to outsiders. Furthermore, in this study, only the marketing perspective of the hotel image is considered, but hotel images may involve more facets. Future studies are encouraged to form a more comprehensive angle to examine the issue and an improved interpretation may be achieved.

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