

THE IMPACT OF LEISURE TRAVELERS' CHARACTERISTICS ON HOTEL WEBSITE

ATTRIBUTES PREFERENCE

Li Zhang, B.A.

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2004

APPROVED:

Lisa R. Kennon, Major Professor

Robert L. Getty, Minor Professor

Juliet M. Getty, Committee Member

Richard Tas, Program Coordinator

Lea Dopson, Chair of the Hospitality Management  
Division

Judith Forney, Dean of the School of  
Merchandising and Hospitality  
Management

Sandra L. Terrell, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse  
School of Graduate Studies

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Zhang, Li, The impact of leisure travelers' characteristics on hotel Website attributes preference. Master of Science (Hospitality Management), December 2004, 52 pages, 12 tables, references, 39 titles.

Travel is now the largest online business-to-consumer product in the United States. Online hotel bookings are the second largest segment of online travel. Leisure travelers online spending will increase dramatically from 2002 to 2007. However, a majority of hospitality companies do not currently take advantage of the Internet as the cheapest and most efficient distribution medium. The purpose of this study examined leisure travelers' demographic and psychographic characteristics, online booking and travel frequency that influence travelers' desired hotel website features and functions. The results found out that demographics (gender, occupation, and ethnicity), and psychographics (travel benefit sought), number of leisure travel trips per year, and number of online hotel bookings per year have impact on hotel website attribute preferences.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The development of the Internet has provided a way to deploy vast, inexpensive, reliable and transformational technologies. It has driven the society into the Knowledge Era in which the most successful organizations will be those that can use the Internet effectively for information capture, knowledge creation and distribution (Cline, 2001). The Internet is viewed as a cost-effective, flexible way of doing business, which allows companies to create value through one-to-one marketing and allows cost-effective integration of electronic trading into a company's core business (Biswas & Krishnan, 2004). Furthermore, the Internet is not simply reducing cost and generating revenue online, it is also a mechanism for increasing value chain efficiency, forging customer relationships, and strengthening brands (Rohm & Sultan, 2004).

The Internet as the universal and interactive means of communication has changed the traditional way tourism and travel products are distributed (Werthner & Klein, 1999). The major shift indicates that consumers prefer to book online when it comes to planning and booking travel. The advantage of planning and booking online is that consumers can control their plans by gathering all the facts they need and comparing prices and options to obtain what they feel are the best deals possible. According to the Travel Industry Association of America, 30% of the US adult population (64 million people) used the Internet in 2003 to get information on destinations or to check prices or

schedules. Of the 64 million, 44.6 million actually booked travel online, up 8% from 2002 (Travel Industry Association, 2004).

The Internet as a reservation medium was already highly accepted (Poel & Leunis, 1999). Online hotel bookings were the second largest segment of online travel. In 2003, 14% of all hospitality revenue was generated through the Internet, and this figure was expected to grow to 16% in 2004, and 24% by 2006 (Starkov & Price, 2004). Some hotels already generate 20%-30% of their bookings from the Internet. Marriott, Inc. generated \$1 billion in online sales in 2003 (Marriott.com, 2004).

#### Rationale

The leisure travel market is growing rapidly. Online leisure travel spending will increase dramatically from 2002 to 2007 according to the Forrester Research Company (Starkov & Price, 2004). An estimated 34.3 million households in the US will book online, bringing the online leisure travel revenues to \$50 billion by 2007. There were more leisure travelers visiting hotel Websites than business travelers: 56.2% of leisure travelers compared to 32.1% of business travelers (Starkov, 2004). Forrester Research also found that 69% of US leisure travelers prefer to buy online directly from a supplier, while just 27% prefer to buy from intermediaries (Starkov & Price, 2004).

Although the proportion of online reservations has increased, only 64% of hospitality companies currently handle such transitions (Cline and Warner, 2001). On the customer side, the top three favorite hotel reservation resources for travelers were travel

agents, toll-free reservation numbers, and calling the hotel directly. The use of online hotel reservation systems was fourth in the list of preferences (Cobanoglu, 2001).

Many hospitality firms are embracing the Internet. However, a large number of hospitality companies do not take advantage of the Internet as the cheapest and most efficient distribution medium. Most hotel Websites are designed like an online brochure instead of a 24/7 sales and marketing tool.

There were several reasons accounting for the failure. First, many sites were created or re-created without stopping to ask the users what they really need and what they really like or dislike. There was often a huge disparity in the site owners' viewpoint between what the site needs to communicate and what its audience is really looking for (Tarasofsky, 2003). Another reason was the lack of communication between hoteliers and Website designers, which led to poor Website design and performance. Hoteliers did not have knowledge in Website design or in building a useful Website. Web designers did not understand the operation of the hospitality industry. Designing hotel Websites without taking into account the fundamental online distribution principle could lead to Websites that were more like a brochure than a profit-generating marketing tool (Price & Starkov, 2003). For example, customers often spent extra time in figuring out whether the displayed price was per room or per person on the hotel Websites while the major third-party Websites such as Hotel.com, Expedia.com, Travelocity.com, and Priceline.com made the information very clear. The Marriott hotel Website stood out within the hotel industry. It generated a record \$1.4 billion in online sales in 2003, a 29% increase from 2002. Significant enhancements have been made to attract the leisure traveler. Features

such as “Last-Minutes Weekends” offer up to 60% savings for hotel, airline and car packages. Marriott’s “Design Your Own Package” enable travelers to custom design their own vacation packages, including hotel rooms, flights and car rental for any time they want to travel. Additional enhancements will make it easier to plan and book group events, such as weddings, by the end of 2004. In addition, Marriott.com will also increase the number of global sites tailored to international markets (Marriott.com, 2004). However, hotels have a long way to go in order to make online booking process user friendly (Cox, 2003).

In order for hotels to benefit from using the Internet, it would behoove them to design their Websites based on the needs and wants of Website users. Such an approach can dramatically increase occupancy rates, boost revenues, attract new markets, and consequently improve the bottom line.

It is time to face the unique challenges involved in building a hospitality property on the information superhighway. Many hotel sites fail to meet the usability needs of their customers despite the readiness of the customers to book online. Every component of a Website, such as the tone and feel of the copy, the usefulness of the content, and the navigation time, will greatly influence users’ perception of the brand. It is imperative to address the needs and wants of Website users and to create a user-friendly Website. Failing to recognize the needs and wants of the users means the hotel running the risk of negatively impacting the traditional brand as well as falling online (Tarasofshy, 2003).

## Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to identify which Web attributes are perceived as important and desired by leisure travelers when booking reservation on hotel Websites. Additionally, this study will examine how demographic and psychographic characteristics of customers respond to hotel Website features when booking reservations online, as well as their online booking frequency. This study will provide critical information for hotels to enhance their Website usability, overall performance and Internet-generated revenues.

## Limitations

The scope of the study is limited by the following factors:

1. The sample is limited to individuals in two major tourist origin and destination states—California and Texas. Users from other geographical areas may have different Web information and design needs.
2. The sample is limited to individuals who own personal computers. Their behavior patterns and information needs regarding products and services may not be generalized to all leisure travelers (including those without personal computers) Those have personal computers will likely have more frequent Web usage, longer Web experience, and possibly higher Web literacy.

## Operational Definitions

Internet: A worldwide system of interconnected networks and computers.

World Wide Web: The World Wide Web. An Internet system to distribute graphical, hyperlinked information, based on the hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP). The

World Wide Web is also known as WWW or W3. The Web is not synonymous with the Internet; rather, it is just one service on the Internet. Other services on the Internet include Internet relay chat and newsgroups. The Web is accessed through use of a browser.

Online travel booking: Increasingly, consumers are turning to the Internet to the Internet to book travel. More travel is sold over the Internet than any other consumer product. The Internet brings together a vast network of suppliers and a widely dispersed customer pool in a centralized marketplace. These sites can be supplier-sponsored, online travel agencies, opaque auction sites, or consortium sites sponsored by several competing hotel companies.

Third-party Websites: non-propriety online travel Websites that offer complete trip searching and purchasing capabilities such as airfares, hotel lodging, and car rentals from a variety of brands.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Characteristics of Internet Travelers

Bonn and Furr (1998) studied sociodemographic and behavioral characteristics of travelers who are Internet users and non-users. The studies revealed that travelers who are college-educated, under 45, and earn more than \$50,000 yearly are more likely to use the Internet for travel purposes. In addition, the study also showed that *Internet* users have different travel behavior than non-users. Internet users spend more money per day, use commercial lodging establishments, and travel by air because they tend to have more disposable income and travel more frequently. Another study by Weber and Roehl (1999) found similar results. Their study found that the respondents who searched for travel information or who purchased travel products online reported higher incomes, higher status occupations, and more years of experience with the Internet than those who did not search or purchase online. The findings of these studies suggest that hotel marketers should understand the sociodemographic and behavioral characteristics of online customers before implementing their promotion strategies.

Internet users represent a specific target group. It is wise for the marketers to use the Internet as a promotional medium to attract those online bookers who are likely to have greater economic impact than non-users.

### Study on Customers' Intention to Purchase Online

Some researches have studied the factors that influence customers' online purchase decision. The findings reported that consumers' intentions to use the Internet for purchasing were influenced by their attitudes towards payment security, privacy, safety, and so forth; perceived behavioral control, and Internet purchase experience (Klein, 1998; Ajzen, 1995). Shim, Eastlich, Lotz & Warrington (2001) argued that the information search was the single most crucial element leading to purchase via the Internet. Yoon (2002) substantiated these previous studies. He found four antecedent dimensions that influenced online customers purchase intentions. They were transaction security (i.e., security warranty phrases and clarity of refund policy), Website properties (i.e., adequacy of product description and width of product selections), navigation functionality (i.e., usefulness of help functions and overall operational efficiency) and personal variables (i.e., familiarity with e-commerce and previous satisfaction with e-commerce).

### Study on General Website Evaluation

Cox and Dale (2001) postulated eight aspects to evaluate Website quality: accessibility, communication, credibility, reliability, appearance, availability, functionality, and integrity. Accessibility, appearance, and functionality are system- or Web-related constructs such as download time, design and color, and ease of navigation. The communication aspect in their study was described as service, feedback, and customer confidence. Credibility and integrity referred to privacy, security, and terms and conditions. Reliability was determined by consistency of performance and dependability

Finally, availability focused on whether customers could obtain information about products and services that they were looking for.

Wan (2002) formed a rating system for evaluating Websites of hotels and tour wholesalers in Taiwan. The evaluation instrument was divided into three categories: user interface, variety of information, and on-line reservations. User interface referred to a) ease of physical access to the Website b) ease of accessing specific information within the Website c) standardized format d) ability to access information in multiple ways and from various points in the system, and e) an interface that provides both help and orientation. Variety of information was determined by a) simplicity, current and reliable information b) comprehensive coverage, and c) hyperlink to relevant Websites. Table A is the summary of previous studies on Website evaluation.

Table 1

*Overview of Website evaluation criterion research.*

<u>Attributes</u>	<u>Bell &amp; Tang</u> (1998)	<u>Cox &amp; Dale</u> (2001)	<u>Ho</u> (1997)	<u>Breitenbach &amp; Dire</u> (1999)	<u>Wan</u> (2002)
Accessibility	Y	Y		Y	Y
Content	Y	Y	Y		Y
Visual attractiveness	Y	Y		Y	
Navigation	Y			Y	Y
Structure	Y				
Ease of use	Y				
usefulness	Y	Y			
Unique features	Y		Y	Y	
Online transaction	Y		Y		
Site usage fees	Y				
Download speed	Y	Y		Y	
Communication		Y			
Credibility		Y			

*( table continues)*

Table 1 (*continued*)

Reliability	Y		
Information quality	Y	Y	Y

### Study on Hotel Website Evaluation

The above studies were for general Website evaluation. Previous researchers have also examined how hospitality and travel Websites' attributes meet customers' needs and what travelers expect from hotel Websites.

Murphy, Forrest, Wotring & Brymer (1996) conducted research to determine how the hotel industry was using the Internet and Websites as potentially revolutionary marketing and management tools. They developed a picture of how specific hotels use their Websites. Thirty-two different features were recorded on 36 sites. The different features were then placed into four broad categories: promotion and marketing, service and information, interactivity and technology, and management.

Joeng & Lambert (2001) used 38 information-need attributes to examine the extent to which attributes were important when making lodging-purchase decisions via the Web. The top five most desired attributes were "security of personal information," "immediate reservation confirmation numbers," "timely information," "room rate," and "easy to read information." Five factors were identified as underlying the 38 attributes; they were general Web information quality, hotel facility and service information, locality, Website design and format, and room information.

## Study on Traveler Psychographics Impact on Travel Preferences

Lehto, O'leary & Morrison (2001) studied travelers' psychographics influence on vacation destination choices. The findings indicated that psychographic factors such as traits, attitudes, and preferences could play a significant role in travel decision making. Psychographic segmentation may serve as an effective tool for understanding why certain travelers tend to favor a specific type of vacation destination. Tourism marketers would be better equipped to develop more persuasive promotional messages by understanding their target market better. Hotel marketers can also serve the target market better by determining characteristics of the travelers coming to the destination where the hotel located. The related question is whether psychographics can also influence travelers' preference of hotel Website attributes.

In summary, the review of the literature revealed that a body of knowledge exists in the area of online customers' characteristics and purchase decision making and what constitutes an effective Website. However, no study was found linking customers' characteristics and purchase decision making to Website attributes. This purpose of the study was to determine the relationships between travelers' characteristics as well as online booking frequency and effective hotel Website attributes.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to identify what features and functions are perceived as important and desired by leisure travelers when booking reservations on hotel Websites. Additionally, this study examines how demographic and psychographic characteristics of customers respond to hotel Website features when booking reservations online, as well as their online booking frequency. This study provides critical information for hotels to enhance their Website usability, overall performance and Internet-generated revenues.

#### Research Questions and Hypotheses

##### *Research Questions*

There are five research questions that the study address throughout the investigation. They are:

1. What features and functions are perceived as important and were desired by leisure travelers as an effective hotel Website?
2. What demographic characteristics of travelers have a response impact on desired hotel Website features and functions?
3. What psychographic characteristics of travelers have a response impact on desired hotel Website features and functions?
4. How does travel frequency impact travelers' preferences for hotel Website attributes?

5. How does online hotel booking frequency impact travelers' preferences hotel Website attributes?

*Research Hypotheses*

The study was divided into two parts. In Part I of the study, travelers' demographic and psychographic information was tested to see if correlations exist between travelers' demographic and psychographic information and hotel Website attributes. Then, in Part II, hotel Website attributes were tested to find out if they were related to online hotel booking and leisure travel frequency. Therefore, the following hypotheses were established to test the relationships.

H1: Travelers' demographic characteristics have no effect on their desired hotel Website features.

H2: Travelers' psychographic characteristics have no effect on their desired hotel Website features.

H3: Travelers' travel frequency has no effect on desired hotel Website features and functions

H4: Travelers' online booking frequency has no effect on desired hotel Website features and functions

The four hypotheses were phrased as null hypotheses. Null hypotheses were used because previous studies did not provide sufficient alternatives for this study to develop alternative hypotheses.

## Research Design

### *Variables Studied*

Travelers' demographic and psychographic information were independent variables. Their information was tested to determine their relationship with hotel Website attributes. Then, the independent variable of travelers' hotel online booking and leisure travel frequency were correlated to the dependent variable of hotel Website features and functions.

### Instrument Development

A questionnaire was developed to measure travelers' perceptions about hotel Website features and functions. Additionally, the questionnaire was designed to access Internet travelers' demographic and psychographic information. Travelers' demographic and psychographic information was related to hotel Website features and functions; then, travelers' perceptions of hotel Website attributes were related to online booking and travel frequency.

Travelers' perceptions of an effective hotel Website were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The instrument included 45 items to measure 45 factors.

### *Hotel Online Booking Frequency*

Travelers' online hotel booking frequency was measured by the number of bookings per year, coded from 1 to 5. They are 0 times, 1-10 times, 11-20 times, 21-30 times, and more than 30 times.

### *Demographic Characteristics*

The following demographic characteristics were obtained: a) age b) income c) education d) gender e) children f) occupation, and g) travel frequency.

### *Psychographic Characteristics*

Traveler's psychographics were measured by adapting The Travel Destination Choice Model developed by Lehto, et al. (2001). Two psychographic variables were examined: travel benefits and destination attributes preferences.

In Lehto's study, the travel benefit set was composed of 16 statements, and they were reduced to four factors: a) seeking escape, relaxation and entertainment; b) experiencing different lifestyles and people; c) seeking novelty and status; and d) strengthen family or kinship ties.

In Lehto's destination attribute preference set, the 23 preference statements were reduced to six factors: a) history, heritage, and knowledge; b) culture and people; c) environment quality and infrastructure; d) value for money and convenience; e) outdoors and family activities; and f) scenery and atmosphere.

### *Pretest*

For an examination of content validity, a copy of the instrument (see appendix) was evaluated by faculty members from the Division of Hospitality Management. The validation test was conducted in the Research Methods course with 25 graduate students from the University of North Texas. The survey was approved by the University of North Texas committee for the Protection of Human Subjects before sending it out to the research subjects.

## Population and Sample

### *Population*

The population of this study was composed of travelers from California and Texas who own personal computers. The population was chosen because California and Texas rank first and third, respectively, as tourist destinations.

### *Sample*

Random sampling was used. The mailing list was purchased from usadata.com®. The Website's database can reach more than 170 million individuals in over 100 million US households nationwide. The end result was one of the largest multi-source databases in the world containing current demographic and lifestyle information on over 95% of U.S. households. Travelers from Texas and California who own personal computers were randomly selected by computer. The sample size was proposed to be a minimum of 50 usable surveys, and 250 surveys were distributed.

### Data Collection

Data was compiled from responses of questionnaires mailed to 250 randomly selected California and Texas travelers who own computers. As stated in the instrument cover letter, participation was voluntary and respondents were encouraged to return the questionnaires by July 15, 2004. Postcards were followed to encourage responses.

### Data Analysis

Data collected for this study was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science® 11.0 for Windows® (SPSS®). Data received from the questionnaire was interval, nominal and ordinal. Descriptive statistics were run to describe sample

characteristics and demographic profile. Two methods of analysis were utilized. a) path analysis with a t-test for assessing the significance of the standardized coefficient; b) cross tabulation with Chi-square test for assessing the significance of the relationships between the two variables under study.

Path analysis was used to evaluate the impact of demographic and psychographic characteristics on hotel Website features, which was correlated with travelers' online traveling and booking frequency. Path analysis provided a plausible explanation of observed correlation between variables (John & Wichern, 1988). By bringing together postulated relationships gained from knowledge of subject matter, such as review of literature and common sense with statistical significance standardized coefficient, path analysis is a very convincing argument for clear relationships.

Cross tabulation is ideally suited for investigating the independence of variables that are considered in a cross classification (Churchill, 1987). Categorical variables, such as gender and ethnicity, were cross tabulated with attributes of Web pages to determine if there were significant relationships present. This then allowed an assessment of the effect of one variable on another.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This is a descriptive study, which identifies vacation travelers' preference in terms of hotel Website information needs. The research study examines vacation travelers' demographic and psychographic characteristics, on-line booking, and travel frequency that influences travelers' desired hotel Website features and functions. This provides insights for destination marketers to understand travelers' decision-making processes better and to develop more effective promotional programs.

#### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The population for this study was travelers from Texas and California who own personal computers. The sample of 250 was randomly selected from a comprehensive database. Of all the 250 questionnaires distributed, a total of 50 usable ones were returned, resulting in a response rate of 20%. The sample was composed of 33 (66%) females and 17 (34%) males. More than half (56%) of them were Caucasian/white, 20% were Asian/pacific islander, 10% were African American, and 5% were Hispanic. The average age was 33 years old. More than half (60%) of the respondents had no children. The majority (76%) of them had an Associate degree or above: 20% had an Associate degree, 40% had a Bachelor's degree, and 16% had a post-graduate degree. Less than one-third (28%) reported an annual household income of less than \$25,000; 42% had annual income of \$25,000-50,000; 22% had \$50,000-75,000; and 4% had more than \$100,000 (see table 2).

Table 2

*Demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 50).*

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>% of total</u>
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	17	34
Female	33	66
<u>Occupation</u>		
Business/finance	32	64
IT	3	6
Medical field	2	4
Education	11	22
Government	1	2
Not-for-profit organization	0	0
Retired/Unemployed	0	0
Other	1	2
<u>Education</u>		
High school or less	12	24
Associate degree	10	20
Bachelor's degree	20	40
Graduate	8	16

*(table continues)*

Table 2 (continued)

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<u>Children</u>		
Yes	19	38
No	30	60
<u>Income*</u>		
\$25,000-50,000	21	42
\$50,000-75,000	11	22
\$75,000-100,000	1	2
\$More than 100,000	2	4
<u>Ethnicity*</u>		
Caucasian	28	56
African American	5	10
Asian American	10	20
Hispanic	5	10
Multi-racial	1	2

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\* One respondent did not answer

### Respondents' Online Hotel Booking Frequency

The majority of vacation travelers (78%) from this sample book hotel rooms online 1 to 10 times a year. There were 20% of the respondents book online. Only 2% book online 11 to 20 times a year, as noted in Table 3.

Table 3

*Respondents' hotel online booking frequency per year (n =50).*

<u>Hotel Online booking frequency</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>% of total</u>
1-10 times/year	39	78
0 times/year	10	20
11-20 times/year	1	2

#### Respondents' Leisure Travel Frequency

Half of the sample takes vacations 2 to 3 times a year. Twenty-eight percent of them only take a vacation one time or less a year. Fourteen percent of them travel 4 to 5 times a year. Eight percent of them travel six times or more for leisure, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4

*Respondents' leisure travel frequency per year (n =50).*

<u>Leisure travel frequency</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>% of total</u>
2-3 times	25	50
0-1 times	14	28
4-5 times	7	14
More than 6 times	4	8

#### Traveler Psychographics

Two psychographic variables were examined: travel benefits and destination attributes preference. The travel benefit set was composed of four factors: a) seeking

escape, relaxation and entertainment; b) experiencing different lifestyles and people; c) seeking novelty and status; d) strengthen family or kinship ties. The attribute preference had six factors: a) history, heritage, and knowledge; b) culture and people; c) environment quality and infrastructure; d) value for money and convenience; e) outdoors and family activities; and f) scenery and atmosphere.

*Travel Benefit Sought*

As shown in Table 5, among the travel benefit sought factors, travelers rated “seeking escape, relaxation, and entertainment” as the most important vacation benefit (M=4.56), followed by “strengthening family or kinship ties” (M=3.9). “Seeking novelty and status” was considered less important for vacation decision making with a mean score of 2.37.

Table 5

*Mean value of respondents’ preferences by travel benefits sought.*

<u>Travel benefit sought</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Seeking escape/entertainment	4.56	.675
Seeking family/kinship	3.90	1.189
Seeking different lifestyle/people	3.52	1.203
Seeking novelty/status	2.37	1.104

*Desired Vacation Destination Attributes*

As shown in Table 6, travelers in this study rated “value for money and convenience” highest (M=.412), and rated “scenery and atmosphere” second (M=4.08). Outdoor and family activity was also considered to be important destination attribute with

mean score of 4.06. The least desirable vacation attribute was history, heritage, and knowledge (M=3.48).

Table 6

*Mean value of respondents' destination attributes preferences.*

<u>Destination attributes</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Value/convenience	4.12	.918
Scenery/atmosphere	4.08	.922
Outdoor/family activity	4.06	.956
Culture/people	3.86	1.107
Environment/infrastructure	3.80	1.107
History/knowledge	3.48	1.182

#### Respondents' Demographic Characteristics vs. Travel Psychographics

Cross tabulations were used to test for differences in different ethnic, gender, education, income, children, and occupation groups when they are making vacation destination decisions. The results in Table 7 show that ethnicity and gender have an impact on vacation destination choices. Caucasians placed higher importance on environmental quality and infrastructure than other ethnic groups did, with significance level of .05. African Americans and Asian Americans rated history, heritage and knowledge type of vacation higher than other groups, with significance levels of .01 and .02, respectively. Asian Americans and Hispanics preferred to travel in order to see different cultures and people; the significance levels of were .053 and .052 respectively.

Also, Hispanics gave higher rating for “scenery and atmosphere”, with the significance level of .048.

Female travelers put significantly greater importance in environmental quality and travel infrastructure than male travelers (Sig. =0.001). Also income was correlated to vacation choices. People with a higher income had higher scores for “different culture and people” attributes (Sig. =.042).

Table 7

*Significant relationships between travelers’ demographics and psychographics.*

	Environment/ infrastructure	People/ culture	History/ knowledge	Scenery/ atmosphere
<u>Demographics</u>	<u>P value</u>	<u>P value</u>	<u>P value</u>	<u>P value</u>
Caucasian	0.05			
African American			0.01	
Asian American		0.053	0.02	
Hispanic		0.052		0.048
Female	0.001			
Income		0.042		

### Research Questions

1. What features and functions are perceived as important and are desired by leisure travelers as an effective hotel Website?

The proposed 45 hotel Website features and functions were analyzed based on descriptive statistics. The analysis showed that travelers' perceptions toward specific Web attributes were largely different with a mean score ranging from 2.61 to 4.70, as illustrated in Table 8. The top five most important Web information needs were all related to general information quality. The number one most important Website attribute was "information accuracy" (M=4.70), closely followed by "personal information security" (M=4.68), and then "information timeliness" (M=4.60). Fourth was "room rate" information, followed by "easy-to-read information" (M=4.54). The least desired hotel Website attributes were format and design-related. Those with mean scores less than 3.0 were "no frame" (M=2.96), "text-only site" (M=2.90), "audio" (M=2.8), "forum" (M=2.66), and "newsletter" (M=2.61).

Table 8

*Mean value of importance of hotel Website attributes by respondents.*

<u>Hotel Website attributes</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Information accuracy	4.70	.580
Personal information security	4.68	.794
Information timeliness	4.60	.535
Room rate	4.60	.670
Easy-to-read information	4.54	.706
Email confirmation	4.52	.677
Quick download	4.46	.788

*(table continues)*

Table 8 (*continued*)

Overview before reservation	4.46	.813
Quick response to questions	4.44	.760
Direction to hotel	4.40	.904
24/7 Booking engine	4.40	.756
Special promotions	4.40	.700
Hotel phone#	4.22	.815
Map	4.22	.737
Description of hotel	4.20	.728
Few clicks	4.18	1.063
Retrievability	4.18	.691
Helpful guidelines	4.14	.913
Amenity information	4.04	.865
Family promotion	3.98	1.078
Email to hotel	3.78	.954
Local mass transportation	3.74	.876
FAQ	3.64	.921
Restaurant information	3.62	1.048
Search engine	3.60	1.143
Humanlike interactivity ability	3.58	.906

*(table continues)*

Table 8 (continued)

Business promotion	3.58	1.090
Programs	3.56	1.296
No advertisement banners	3.54	1.216
Local weather information	3.52	.909
Multilingual sites	3.50	1.129
Video	3.44	1.033
Group promotion	3.42	1.197
Related links	3.40	1.069
Room service menu	3.38	1.105
Color contrast	3.29	1.099
Web excitement	3.28	1.161
Personal history	3.18	.941
Meeting planning	3.16	1.095
No frames	2.96	1.110
Text-only site	2.90	1.085
Audio	2.80	1.195
Forum	2.66	1.006
Newsletter	2.61	1.096

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2. What demographic characteristics have impact on desired hotel Website features and functions?

Demographic characteristics were cross-tabulated to find out the difference between each category. The Web features and functions of significance level of .1 were retained. The percentages of each category to the respective Website feature were reported with the Chi Square significance. As shown in Table 8, demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and occupation had significant relationships with Website attribute preferences.

More females (36.4%) considered few clicks to get to wanted information important compared to 5.1% of male. Male travelers (35.3%) put more importance on the Web information accuracy than female travelers (9.1%). Male travelers thought hotel phone number availability on the Website was essential: More than half (58.8%) of the male respondents rated it important, while only 24.2% of females rated it as important. Also, male Web users were more likely to be critical about the frames on the Website. About twenty-nine percent of males considered it important, of which 17.6% thought it very important, compared to only 3.2 % females who rated it as very important and 12.9% who rated it as important.

Caucasians had highest expectation of personal information security, and the majority of them (92.9%) rated it at very important level. African Americans seemed less concern about security issues: 40% of them rated it at the somewhat important level. Most Caucasians (75%) considered information timeliness as very important compared to only 20% of Hispanics and 40% of African Americans.

People working in the IT industry had higher requirements for information simplicity: 100% of them considered easy-to-read information very important, compared

to 100% of people working in the government who rated it as somewhat important. More than one-third of IT professionals rated human-like online interactivity as very important, a much higher percentage than the people working in medicine (0%), education (9.1%), and the government (0%). Although people across all fields thought information accuracy was important, IT professionals had a significantly higher rate for the information accuracy importance: 100% of them considered it as very important Website attribute. People working in the government seemed less concerned about information timeliness: 100% of them thought it was somewhat important, while respondents in education (81.8%) and IT (67.1%) rated it very important. Almost half of the people (45.5%) working in the education field considered hotel amenity information very important.

Table 9

*Significant chi-square values of hotel Website attributes by respondents' demographics.*

<u>Hotel Website attributes</u>	<u>Chi-square</u>	<u>p-Value</u>
<u>Gender</u>		
Few clicks	9.636	0.047
Information accuracy	6.258	0.044
Hotel phone #	6.787	0.079
No frames	8.470	0.076
<u>Ethnicity</u>		
Timely information	28.753	0.004

*(table continues)*

Table 9 (continued)

Personal information security	16.769	0.033
<u>Occupation</u>		
Information accuracy	22.935	0.011
Information timeliness	53.802	0.000
Easy-to-read information	22.675	0.091
Humanlike interactivity	37.017	0.012

3. What psychographic characteristics have impact on desired hotel Website features and functions?

First, four factors of travel benefit and six factors of travelers' destination attributes preferences were regressed upon hotel Website attributes individually. They were labeled as type 1 to type 10: 1. seeking escape, relaxation and entertainment; 2. experiencing different lifestyles and people; 3. seeking novelty and status; 4. strengthen family or kinship ties; 5. history, heritage, and knowledge; 6. culture and people. 7. environment quality and infrastructure; 8. value for money and convenience; 9. outdoors and family activities; 10. scenery and atmosphere.

The results showed that type 1, type 2, type 3, type 4 and type 8 had significant impact on hotel Website attributes preferences (see Table 10). Coefficient was marked by  $\beta$ , and Sig. was represented by p-Value.

Table 10

*Hotel Website attributes preferences by travel psychographic factors.*

	$\beta$	Sig.								
<u>Hotel Website attributes</u>	<u>Type 1</u>		<u>Type 2</u>		<u>Type 3</u>		<u>Type 4</u>		<u>Type 8</u>	
Email confirmation	0.394	.003	--	--	--	--	--	--	.372	.009
Multilingual sites	.316	.017	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
No frames	--	--	.364	.035	--	--	--	--	--	--
Mass transportation	--	--	--	--	.341	.049	.390	.027	--	--
Family promotion	--	--	--	--	.287	.043	--	--	--	--

4. Whether travel frequency has an impact on travelers' hotel Website attributes preference?

Cross-tabulation analysis was used to find out the different Web information needs for people with different travel frequencies per year. Respondents' travel frequencies per year were categorized as 0-1 time, 2-3 times, 4-5 times, and more than 6 times. The Chi-square value and the significance level represented by p-Value were showed in Table 10. The results of the tests suggested that five hotel Website attributes, "map," "FAQ," "currency exchange," "group promotion," and "direction to hotel," were associated with respondents' travel frequency.

The group who takes vacations more than 6 times per year considered the Website map important (75%) or very important (25%), a higher percentage than other groups. In

addition, they put significant importance on FAQ features: 100% of them rated it important, compared to the 35.7% who travel less than one time a year who rated FAQ as somewhat important (35.7%). However, the group who travels least rated currency exchange as important (42.9%) or very important (35.7%), a higher percentage than those who travel more. The two groups that take vacations 0-1 times per year and 2-3 times per year thought group promotions were important (35.7% and 36%, respectively) or very important (14.3% and 24%, respectively), while people who travel more had less preference for it. Almost half (42.9%) of people who traveled 4-5 times per year thought group promotion feature was not important, and people who traveled more than 6 times a year thought this feature was somewhat not important (25%) or somewhat important (25%). With regard to hotel directions and travel frequency, people who travel 2-3 times a year preferred to the feature “direction to hotel”. The majority (84%) of them rated it very important; the rest of them (14%) rated it as important, compared to 35.7% who travel least who rated this feature as somewhat important, and 7.1% who rated it as not important.

Table 11

*Significant chi-square values of hotel Website attributes by respondents' travel frequency per year.*

<u>Hotel Website attributes</u>	<u>Chi-square</u>	<u>p-Value</u>
Map	14.858	0.095
Group promotion	24.174	0.019
FAQ	16.855	0.051
Currency exchange	19.23	0.083
Direction to hotel	15.406	0.08

5. Whether online hotel booking frequency has an impact on travelers' hotel Website attributes preference?

The respondents' annual online hotel booking frequency was classified into a) less than 1 time; b) 1-10 times; c) 11-20 times; d) 21-30 times; and e) more than 30 times. The results of the Chi-square and Significance level represented by p value are shown in Table 11.

Regarding the feature "map," leisure travelers (100%) who book hotel rooms 11-20 times per year considered a map on the hotel Website was somewhat important, while 70% of those who book 0-1 time per year thought a map was important or very important.

Regarding the feature "text-only" site, the group who books hotel rooms only one time or less per year indicated less preference for this feature, and they rated it lower than the groups who book more. About 89% percent of them thought text-only Websites were

somewhat important, and 11.1% considered it somewhat not important.

Table 12

*Significant chi-square values of hotel Website attributes by respondents' online booking frequency per year.*

<u>Hotel Website attributes</u>	<u>Chi-square</u>	<u>p-Value</u>
Map	12.313	0.055
Test-only sites	14.548	0.069

### Hypothesis Testing

H 1: Travelers' demographic characteristics have no effect on their desired hotel Website features. Based on cross tabulations of demographics vs. hotel Website features, the hypothesis was rejected. Leisure travelers' gender, occupation and ethnicity affected the Website attribute preferences.

H2: Travelers' psychographic characteristics have no effect on their desired hotel Website features. Based on regression of psychographics vs. hotel Website features, the hypothesis was rejected. Leisure travelers' travel benefit, such as seeking escape, relaxation and entertainment, seeking novelty or status, and strengthening family and kinship ties, affected the Website attribute preferences. Also, travel destination attributes such as value for money affected the preference of the Website features.

H3: Travelers' online booking frequency has no effect on hotel Website features and functions. Based on cross tabulation of online booking frequency vs. hotel Website features, the hypothesis was rejected. Frequent online bookers and less frequent bookers

put different importance on Web features such as map and text-only sites.

H4: Travelers' traveling frequency has no effect on hotel Website features and functions. Based on cross tabulation of travel frequency vs. hotel Website features, the hypothesis was rejected. Frequent travelers and less frequent travelers had different information needs on Web features such as map, hotel direction, group promotions, FAQ, and currency exchange.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The study was designed to determine what features and functions were perceived as important and desirable by leisure travelers when booking reservations on hotel Websites. Additionally, the study was to determine correlations between hotel Website features and travelers' demographic and psychographic information, as well as their online hotel booking and travel frequency.

When the data analysis was completed, it was concluded that this study investigated leisure travelers' perceptions about hotel Website attributes. This study also explored how demographic, psychographic, travel frequency, and online booking frequency impacted their perceptions. In this chapter, the findings are summarized. Limitations of this study are covered, and additionally, recommendations are made for further studies related to this topic.

#### Summary

Currently, hotel Websites are primarily used to check for accommodation and travel information and not for reservations. The results are consistent with the previous, related research. The most important Website attributes are those related to general Web information quality such as information accuracy, timeliness, and simplicity. Real-time online booking engines and other marketing promotions were rated after those attributes. Travelers still do not completely trust online transactions, and as a result, personal information security is their big concern. They also need email confirmation after they

make a reservation online. In contrast, Website format and design such as no-frame sites, text-only sites, show less importance to travelers. Also, they are not interested in participating in the online communication either. Features such as online forums and newsletters were rated lowest.

The study showed that some demographic characteristics did have impact on the Web attribute preference, such as gender, ethnicity, and occupation. Male travelers had higher requirements for information accuracy, and they preferred to have hotel phone numbers on the Website, which could be a way to check information accuracy and make them feel more in control. Also, males were more concerned about the design of the Website. They concerned themselves with “no frames” more than females did. Females had less interest and patience surfing online; they preferred to get to the wanted information as fast as possible, so “few clicks” was an important feature to them. As for ethnicity, Caucasians had higher standard for information timeliness, and security than other ethnicity groups did. As for the occupation, people working in IT industry were obviously more information-quality orientated and more technical. They were critical about Web information quality, such as accuracy, timeliness and simplicity, which may be explained by their expertise and experience in this field. Technical features such as human-like interactivity would appeal to them.

Travelers with different travel psychographics had different Web information needs. Those who seek escape, relaxation, and entertainment preferred to email reservation confirmation. It makes sense that they want to be free of worries and uncertainties so that they can enjoy themselves when get to the destination. Those

who take vacation mainly to seek novelty and status were more concerned about the Web format and design, such as no-frame Websites. Web appearance, rather than content, was more important to them. Those who travel primarily to strengthen family and kinship ties rated family and child promotions and local mass transportation information highly. Those who travel to experience different cultures and people also took interest in mass transportation information, which can provide them with the sense of orientation at the local area and facilitate the connection with local people. Those who are attracted by value and convenience liked to be assured by email reservation confirmation.

As for the relationship between online booking frequency and Website attributes, the study showed that map and text-only site attributes correlated with the booking frequency. Less frequent online bookers thought maps on the Websites were important, which means that a map could be an important Web feature to target those people and make them feel that the Website is useful and helpful. Also, less frequent online bookers did not rate text-only sites as important. Because they were less traveled, they needed more help to conceptualize and get a better understanding of the destination. To stimulate their imagination and form the picture of the hotel, non-text Web features, such as hotel picture tours, audio/visual features, slideshows, and so forth may help to attract those people to the Website.

Travel frequency showed relationship with some of the Website features. Those people who did not travel so frequently preferred group promotions, which could provide a sense of familiarity and security when they travel. More frequent and experience

travelers were less concerned about group travel and more about how to explore the local areas with the helpful features such as map, hotel directions, and FAQ.

#### Limitations

The interpretations of the results of this study were limited. First, there may be a difficulty generalizing the results to all the leisure travelers across the country, because the subjects of this study were selected from only two states. However, the results of this study provided similar insights to those of previous studies. “Security of personal information, immediate reservation confirmation numbers, timely information, room rates, and easy-to-read information were the top five most desired attributes” (Joeng & Lambert ,2001). In this study, we also found out that the Web information quality-related attributes were significantly important.

Second, the results may not be generalized to different groups of people. The respondents in this study all own personal computers, which may indicate that they have more Web experience and computer knowledge. Therefore this sample may not represent all vacation travelers.

Third, as an initial attempt to find out the relationships between vacation travelers’ characteristics and their Web information needs, this study did not further explore the possible trends of the Web features and what might cater to the travelers in the near future. The proposed 45 features of hotel Websites were currently existing and some may have been outdated. More aspects of Web content should be added. Features such as recreation and sports of the hotel and local area should be included in further search, including golfing, jogging trails, spa, museums and attractions, health and fitness,

and so on. Some attributes listed should be explored more. For instance, “amenity information” should give more details, such as complimentary in-room coffee, childcare availability, 24-hour room service, in-room movies, and so forth, because further details may help travelers get useful information to make purchase decisions, and as a result, more significant relationships could be identified between Website features and traveler characteristics.

Finally, due to the low response rate (20%), the respondent population size was so small that some analysis methods were limited, such as data reduction analysis. Some categories had too few people or none at all to conduct meaningful analyses. For instance, in the online booking frequency category, there were no respondents booked hotel rooms more than 20 times per year. If the response rate were higher, more significant correlations between desired hotel Website attributes and psychographics as well as demographics may be determined.

### Recommendations

Based on the limitations and referenced literature, the following recommendations are made. The recommendations have two aspects. One is for further research, and the other is for the hospitality industry.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

In order to validate the results of this study, a nationally representative group of Web users should be included in future research. Travelers’ behavior patterns and their products and services information needs might be different according to their levels of

Web literacy and experience. Inclusion of subjects with or without personal computers may increase the generalization of the results.

This study will be strengthened by more intensive research studies. More creative, comprehensive, and trendy Web features should be explored based on travelers' demographics and psychographics. This study provided a good stimulant for further refinements and more creative development of the hotel Website attributes.

#### *Recommendations for Hospitality Industry*

First of all, hotel Websites should be updated consistently and should keep the information current and accurate. Information reliability and security are travelers' top concerns. Furthermore, in order to serve the target market better and provide more effective marketing promotion programs on their Websites, hoteliers should further investigate the target market's Web information needs and wants based on their demographic and psychographic characteristics. For instance, detailed local sightseeing, dining, shopping, and entertainment and nightlife information on the Website will cater to those vacationers who seek to escape and find entertainment. Also, advice on how to plan and travel will help them to enjoy more relaxation and feel free of worries. For those seeking value, Web features, such as discount promotions on rooms, air tickets and complimentary transportation, breakfast, coffee, will appeal to them. Information on the city, local amusements or hotel catering would help those who travel to visit family or friends.

Hotels should determine the leisure travelers' motivation for choosing that destination. Specifically, hoteliers should further study the destination attributes of the

area where the hotel is located. For instance, hotels located in historical areas may want to incorporate historical facts of the area or information on local museums. Hotels located in areas with rich culture and unique identity can feature local cultural events and information. For instance, hotels located near state fairs, annual festivals and special events should utilize the events' popularity to attract a target market.

In summary, hotels need first to analyze their primary market to find out the particular characteristics and motivations of guests staying in the hotel and then create suitable services to cater to their needs and wants. Although there is a long way to go for the hospitality industry to achieve success on their Websites, the potential of the Website as an effective marketing and promotion tool is great.

APPENDIX  
QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Travelers,

You have been selected to participate in a research study because of your frequent travel experience and knowledge. This study is conducted by Li Zhang, graduate student and Dr. Lisa Kennon, Associate Professor, at the University of North Texas. The survey is designed to identify travelers' desired hotel Website features and functions. The results of this study will contribute to enhancing travelers' online experiences and help to better meet travelers' information needs and wants.

Confidentiality and privacy of responses will be maintained. Access to information will be restricted to researchers who have signed the nondisclosure, confidentiality form. Data files will be strictly controlled and individual identity will not be pinpointed. Your participation is voluntary. Please take 5-10 minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it by July 30<sup>th</sup>. No postage is necessary.

The survey was approved by the University of North Texas committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (940) 565-3940.

Respondents will be given the opportunity to receive a summary of results by providing an email address.

We thank you in advance for your participation in this study. Should you have any questions or desire further information, please contact Li or Dr. Lisa Kennon. You may keep this letter as your record.

Sincerely,

Li Zhang  
Graduate Student  
School of Merchandising and  
Hospitality Management  
University of North Texas

Lisa Kennon  
Associate Professor  
School of Merchandising and  
Hospitality Management  
University of North Texas

### Perceived Importance of Hotel Website Attributes

Please circle a number from the scale below to indicate how important you think each hotel website feature is for a successful hotel Website.

	Not Important			Very Important	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Room rate	1	2	3	4	5
2. Frequent-visitor reward programs	1	2	3	4	5
3. Special promotions	1	2	3	4	5
4. Group promotions	1	2	3	4	5
5. Business-travel promotions	1	2	3	4	5
6. Family or kids promotions	1	2	3	4	5
7. Meeting planning function	1	2	3	4	5
8. Quick response to questions	1	2	3	4	5
9. Quick download	1	2	3	4	5
10. Help guidelines	1	2	3	4	5
11. Ease-to-read information	1	2	3	4	5
12. Few clicks for needed information	1	2	3	4	5
13. Overview of all information before final decision	1	2	3	4	5
14. On-line enjoyment and excitement	1	2	3	4	5
15. Search engine	1	2	3	4	5
16. Humanlike interactive ability	1	2	3	4	5
17. Quick retrievability for information	1	2	3	4	5
18. Currency exchange	1	2	3	4	5
19. Information accuracy	1	2	3	4	5
20. Information timeliness	1	2	3	4	5
21. 24/7 real-time booking engine	1	2	3	4	5
22. Email confirmation of reservation	1	2	3	4	5
23. Security of personal information	1	2	3	4	5
24. No frames	1	2	3	4	5
25. No advertising banners	1	2	3	4	5
26. On-screen phone number	1	2	3	4	5
27. Room service menu	1	2	3	4	5
28. Information of hotel amenities	1	2	3	4	5
29. On-site restaurant information	1	2	3	4	5
30. Description of hotel	1	2	3	4	5
31. Video: virtual tours, photo shows, floor plans, etc	1	2	3	4	5
32. Audio	1	2	3	4	5
33. FAQ	1	2	3	4	5
34. Good color contrast	1	2	3	4	5
35. Hotel newsletter	1	2	3	4	5
36. Personal reservation history	1	2	3	4	5
37. Local weather information	1	2	3	4	5
38. Local mass transportation	1	2	3	4	5
39. Map of surrounding area	1	2	3	4	5
40. Direction to the hotel	1	2	3	4	5
41. Related links	1	2	3	4	5
42. E-mail to hotel	1	2	3	4	5
43. Text-only Web site	1	2	3	4	5
44. Multilingual sites	1	2	3	4	5
45. On-line forum	1	2	3	4	5
Other _____					

**Hotel Online Booking Frequency**

46. How often do you book hotel rooms online per year?

- 0 times
- 1-10 times
- 11-20 times
- 21-30 times
- More than 30 times

**Demographic Characteristics**

Please check the answer that best describes yourself.

47. What is your age?

- A. 25-30    B. 31-35    C. 36-40    D. 40-45

48. Please indicate your current household income:

- Under \$25,000
- \$25,000-\$50,000
- \$50,000-\$75,000
- \$75,000-\$100,000
- \$100,000-\$150,000
- Over \$150,000

49. What is your education level?

- High school
- Associate degree
- College degree
- Graduate degree (Master's, Doctoral).

50. What is your gender?

- Female     Male

51. Do you have children?

- Yes     No.

52. How would you classify yourself:

- Caucasian/White
- African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- Multi-racial

53. How often do you travel for leisure each year (including combined business/pleasure trips)

- 0-1 times     2-3 times     4-5 times     more than 6 times

54. The organization you work for is in which of the following:

- Business, finance
- IT
- Medical field
- Education
- Government
- Not-for-profit organizations
- Retired/unemployed
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Leisure Travel Characteristics

Please circle a number from the scale below to indicate your agreement.

<b>Your main purpose of taking a vacation is to</b>	Not Agree		Strongly Agree		
55. Seeking escape, relaxation and entertainment	1	2	3	4	5
56. Experiencing different lifestyles and people	1	2	3	4	5
57. Seeking novelty and status	1	2	3	4	5
58. Strengthen family or kinship ties.	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>The most important destination attributes for me are:</b>					
59. History, heritage, and knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
60. Culture and people	1	2	3	4	5
61. Environment quality and infrastructure	1	2	3	4	5
62. Value for money and convenience	1	2	3	4	5
63. Outdoors and family activities	1	2	3	4	5
64. Scenery and atmosphere.	1	2	3	4	5

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