

Exploring the Influential Marketing Mix and its Attributes in Tourists Hotel

Choice: Empirical Study in South Part of Ethiopia

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Abstract

The main purpose underlying this study is to explore the most influential attributes of marketing mix on tourist's hotel choice. For the sake of achieving the purposes of this study, the study employed blend of both descriptive and explanatory research involves quantitative approach in a cross sectional design. Convenience sampling was employed for data collection. Furthermore, data were analyzed using descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential (regression) statistical tools. The findings indicate that the quality of products and services, price flexibility, location convenience, ambience of the hotel, courtesy personality of staffs, and process customization as the key attributes that influence the hotel choice of tourists. Further regression results revealed that with the exception of promotion other marketing mix factor does have positive and significant influence in determining tourist's hotels choice although differs in level of influence. Importantly, therefore, various stakeholders in hospitality facility operators, hoteliers, and managers advised to take those identified influential factors into consideration while developing more efficient marketing mix strategies and the study has also suggested hotel managers should comprehend tourist's viewpoint before spending on any form of hotel promotional efforts.

Keywords: Influential Attributes, Tourists, Hotel Choice, Marketing Mix

1. Introduction

In Ethiopia, the travel and tourism sector is increasingly being recognized as an important source of earnings and employment opportunity. According to WTTC (2018), travel & tourism economy grew by 48.6% in 2018, which is the largest in the world. Furthermore, such economic prominence of the industry is demonstrated by its direct contribution to the National (GDP) which in 2018 was 9.4% and supported 2.2 million jobs. Cognizant of this, the hotel industry is one of most essential economic activity that makes important contributions. Ethiopia's hotel industry has been showing growth over the past few years and stands on fourth in hotel development in Africa (Regasa, 2019) Unfortunately, Ethiopia is still a relatively unknown tourist destination to the traveling public and it needs to create a sense of place on travelers' minds, according to a report in the Addis Standard (Desta, 2018). Furthermore, the country's tourism and hospitality sector in general and hotel sector in particular continues to face various challenges including, weak position of tourism marketing, lack of marketing strategy, poor marketing segmentation and market mix (UNECA, 2015).

The country's comparators are considered some of the most mature hospitality markets in Sub-Saharan African countries (WB, 2012). In a competitive hotel industry, hotels have to find ways to make their services better among the others (Al-Debi, 2014). In this regards, marketing mix works as a tool used by many firms to examine tourists buying behavior, and influences them to use hotel service. For this reason, hoteliers must be knowledgeable about the issues and options involved in each element of the mix as proper mix does not just happen (Belch & Belch, 2018; CIM, 2009). Lovelock & Wirtz (2011) has also noted that the mixing of all of the parameters that affect customer's choices as one of the most important aspects of service marketing mix. Therefore, it is central for the hoteliers to understand why tourists tend to choose a certain destination and what sort of attributes influences them (Lee & Wu, 2011). Given the importance of hospitality research in boasting country vision of hospitality sector, paradoxically it continues to receive little attention (UNECA, 2015). This, therefore, researcher became attracted in expanding research with goal to establish better understanding of marketing mix attributes sought by tourists.

Additionally, the service industry remains to attract more research attention due to its prominent role in job creation and contribution to GDP in most countries (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). Therefore, identifying and understanding the factors influencing tourists hotel choice should not be a worry only to hoteliers (Chen *et al.*, 2017), but to other hospitality operators. In this regard, although a number of studies have identified various key attributes and factors that directly influencing tourists in hotel choice, in recent decades several studies has pointed out that there is heterogeneusness in the literature with regard to important attributes considered by tourists in making their hotel choice (Chou *et al.*, 2008; Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2012; McCartney & Ge, 2016; Yang *et al.*, 2017; Bor, Kieti, & Rotich, 2018). Another noteworthy concern is the cultural differences plays huge role in guests' hotel choice (Barsky, 2013). In this scenario, this study could be regarded as one of the significant initiative with a view to providing visitors, investors, hoteliers, managers, and hotels with appropriate information on marketing mix and its influential attributes in hotel choice. On top of all of this, despite the study areas offers a meaningfully climate and is home to various tourists recreational facilities, making it an increasingly popular destination for international tourists and those seeking to escape Ethiopia's capital for some rest and relaxation, yet there are very few empirical studies on the marketing mix attributes of hotels in Ethiopia and lack of studies in the study area. This study therefore objectives to fill this gap by exploring the most influential marketing mix elements and its attributes of on tourist's hotel choice in south part of Ethiopia.

2. Literature review

2.1 Marketing mix elements

In the highly competitive marketing environment of hospitality industry, it is essential that marketing activities would serve as key to enhance companies' performance (Alzbeta & Andrej, 2014). Furthermore, Kotler et al. (2015) argue that numerous attributes can be used as the vital tool basis to differentiate the market offerings. Therefore, particularly in choosing a hotel to stay in is very important decision for tourist's as a hotel is viewed by consumers as a combination of various attributes (Jannach et al., 2012). Noticeably, as the country continues to search for strategies to increase the length of stay (UNECA, 2015), it is worth to mention that various

attributes have certain impact on consumer decision making process and therefore understanding them is very crucial for success in hospitality industry. Accordingly, extensive review of the literature for the hospitality industry shows service marketing mix attributes remains as the base to guide tourist's hotel choice decision making (Barsky, 2012; Baruca & Civre, 2012; Bor et al., 2018; Choorichom, 2011; Chou *et al.*, 2008; Lamb *et al.*, 2012; Lim & Endean, 2009; Lockyer, 2005; McCartney & Ge, 2016; Radder & Wang, 2006; Yang *et al.*, 2017).

A major challenge to management in the modern hospitality sector is delivering qualitative services to customers (Kuo, 2009). In this regards, though the effective marketing mix strategies of a firm: can increase customer retention and competitiveness (Pomering *et al.*, 2011) increase marketing performance (Antoneta *et al.*, 2015) further it support service marketers to achieve superior customer service (Krasnikov et al., 2009), these are, nonetheless, relatively there is a lack of studies in terms of the marketing mix and its attributes in particular towards the hotel industry in Ethiopia or has not received sufficient attention from the academia across the nation. This, therefore, it is important to note that such studies have paramount implications and base for development of effective marketing mix.

2.2 Marketing Mix elements that can Tourists Hotel Choice

Marketing mix is one of the most important concepts in the marketing literature. The marketing mix consists of traditional four P's: price, product, place and promotion, in addition, the service marketing mix which is also known as an extended marketing mix places 3 more P's which include People, Process and Physical evidence (Kotler *et al.*, 2015; McCarthy & Perreault, 2002; Belch & Belch, 2018). The extended marketing mix (7P's) is the mix of seven components of marketing that aimed at solving the insufficiency associated with the classifications in the traditional marketing mix (Bojanic, 2008; Möller, 2006; Popovic, 2006). Each of these elements contains a number of factors.

A product can be defined as combination of goods and services that can be offered by company to a target market to satisfy a want or need (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). In hospitality sector product differs from other products due to the wide ranges, Angelo & Vladimir (2011) as it covers accommodations, transportation, food, recreation and attractions (Reid & Bojanic, 2010). Hence, for the hoteliers it is purposefully commanding that the package of benefits in the service offer must have a customer's perspective (Skowron & Kristensen, 2012). The hotel attributes are those features of products or services that lead tourists to choose one hotel over others (Lewis, 1984). Price is the amount that is being given away by the consumer in order to receive the offering (Solomon et al., 2009) more only marketing mix that generates revenue (Fredy & Valenzuela, 2014) and influences customers buying behavior (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2010). Furthermore, the study conducted by Yang et al. (2017) identified price as one of the most important attributes, and influences in hotel selection decisions. In similar study Baruca & Civre (2012) also underlined how important is price has during selection.

Place is another marketing mix where you choose to conduct your service business and plays important factor in influencing consumers (Colbu & Scutariu, 2008). There are various attributes that are part of the 'place' (Barsky, 2013; Chan & Wong, 2006; Lockyer, 2005). Moreover, because the choice of place is the first and crucial marketing decision for hospitality companies, it is very vital to highlight their location during their marketing campaigns which add benefits to

tourists choosing their hotel (Chou et al, 2008). Belch & Belch (2018) defined promotion as the direction of all seller initiated efforts to set up channels of information and persuasion. Promotion mix includes specific blend of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016), without proper mixes, companies cannot grab the attention of their customer, if they don't, a competitor surely will (CIM, 2009). The extended service marketing mix such as people, process and physical evidence Wirtz & Lovelock (2016) along with promotion of the hotel industry are the key factors of the service marketing mix.

Physical evidence is related to the internal layout and external appearance of the premises and experience faced by tourists at service delivery sites (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011; Klaus & Maklan, 2012). Zeithaml *et al.* (2006) define physical evidence as the atmosphere in which the service is provided, and where the firm and customer interact. Lin & Mattila (2010) supports the notion that better customer experience with physical environment is not based only on a single element, but rather, on tangible component of the service offering (lighting, landscaping, signage, fitting decor, furniture and furnishings) and intangible factors are intimately linked to physical evidence ambience or atmosphere.

In the hospitality industry, people refer to all of human actors who play role in performing, delivery, and influence the customers in the service environment (Kotler et al., 2015). They must, therefore, be appropriately trained, well-motivated and have the right attitude (CIM, 2009). As the people are essential, understanding needs and providing customized services could impacts quality service delivery (Narteh et al., 2013). Finally, it is crucial to note process within the services marketing mix in hotel business as known by high-contact. This element deals with the delivery of the services to consumers and includes issues such as standardization of service delivery, waiting times, personalized service (Bojanic, 2008; Lim & Endean, 2009, McCartney & Ge, 2016). These are guided by a thorough knowledge with regards to the importance of the services to the customers (Lin, 2011). Moreover, process could be a great source of competitiveness advantage if hotels strike a balance on the key issues of this marketing mix element.

In conclusion, compressive review of the literature it is important to note that in fast growing hospitality industry suggests that numerous attributes have been considered by most tourists in hotel choice. Moreover, it is important to understand hotel choice attributes as a number of previous literature supports that attributes in extended marketing mix play a major role in influencing tourists, especially in the hotel business. This study therefore, looks at extended marketing mix with various attributes in order to extract the most influential attributes through a descriptive and exploratory analysis in the south part of Ethiopia and to support the existing literature review that could be more comprehensive. Therefore, the research question remains: Which are the most influential marketing mix and its attributes on consumer's hotel choice? And Which of the marketing mix dimensions have greater influence on consumers hotel choice?

3. Research methodology

The four cities (Hawassa, Arba Minch, Jinka and Wolaita Sodo)in south part of Ethiopia was purposively selected as the south Ethiopia offers several new hospitality facilities and enhancement of transportation links are bringing cities closer to the rest of Ethiopia, and

undeniably to the international visitors. This study used both descriptive and explanatory research in a single cross-sectional design. For the purpose of exploring the most influential marketing mix and its attributes on tourist’s hotel choice, this study draws on empirical evidence from the survey covering 361 respondents of nine hotels in the study area were selected. Thus, respondents were selected using convenience sampling in which questionnaire were personally distributed to the tourists on the basis of their willingness to participate on the study. Seven-point Likert type response options from 1 = not at all influential to 7 = extremely influential were utilized. In conducting the data collection, the study was established clear intentions and procedures to assure the privacy of respondents and the confidentiality of the information they provide. As a result, verbal informed consent was first obtained from each participant. The instruments were designed based on existing literature review with slight modifications to match the service marketing mix attributes and hotel industry in Ethiopia. To facilitate the data processing and analysis of collected quantitative data from questionnaires Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 20) was used. For analysis purpose, the simple statistical tools like, mean and standard deviation and inferential statistics (regression) were used to analyze the data obtained from primary sources.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This section dealt with the analysis and discussions of the empirical data on hand. Thus, the results of descriptive analyses of mean values and standard deviations of the attributes in each marketing mix are presented first, followed by the regression analysis in order to examine the influence of marketing mix dimensions (product, price, place, promotion, physical evidence, people and processes) on customer’s hotel choice. Out of the 400 questionnaires, total 361 were completed and retrieved successfully, representing 90.25% response rate considered for analysis of the study. “Cronbach’s Alpha” test was computed in order to check internal consistency and reliability of the instrument. Accordingly, overall internal consistency reliability the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the instrument was found as 0.75 which indicate the data that were collected for this research is reliable.

4.2 Results of Measures of Central Tendency and Dispersion

There are a number of attributes for the tourists in their hotel choice which associated with various dimensions of marketing mixes. This part explains the descriptive statistics calculated on the basis of the marketing mix attributes that influence tourists were elicited below.

Table 1. Level of marketing mix attributes influencing customer’s hotel choice

SN	Dimension	Attributes	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Product	Quality of products/services	5.79	.550	1
		Variety of products/services	4.85	.880	2
		Reputation of the hotel	3.33	.597	5
		Regularity of products/services	3.73	.660	4
		Availability of supplementary of products/services	3.89	.553	3
2	Price	Fairness of price to the budget	3.25	.616	3

		Discounts allowed	4.16	.622	2
		Competitiveness of price in the area	3.14	.708	4
		Price flexibility	5.73	.747	1
3	Place	Convenience of hotel location	5.96	0.775	1
		Accessibility of the hotel	5.52	0.649	2
		Affiliation with other hospitality companies	4.32	0.510	4
		Availability of public infrastructure	4.44	0.686	3
4	Promotion	Sales promotion	2.25	.739	4
		Personal selling	2.40	.864	2
		Public relations	1.85	1.107	5
		Advertising	2.37	1.131	3
		Direct marketing	3.02	.828	1
5	Physical Evidence	External appearance of the hotel	2.62	.646	4
		Ambience of the hotel	5.10	.582	1
		Hygiene of the hotel	4.42	.604	2
		Interior design and décor of the rooms	4.26	.636	3
6	People	Courtesy personality of the staffs	4.32	.677	1
		Neat appearance of the staffs	3.03	.755	4
		Communication skill of the staffs	3.08	.623	3
		Competency of the staffs	3.83	.618	2
7	Process	Detailed Menu information	2.32	.575	4
		Anytime hotel check in/check out	2.40	.715	3
		Hotel ordering and waiting time	3.08	.675	2
		Customization of service procedure	3.13	.680	1

Source: Survey data.

4.2.1 Discussion on marketing mix attributes

Quality of products and services rendered is the very influential factor for the choice in a market environment where the level of competition is intense and price-competitive (Shaharudin et al., 2010). Consistently, among the product attributes, quality of products/services has rated as significantly influence tourists when choosing a hotel with a mean score of 5.79. The mean score of variety of products/services is 4.85; this means most of respondents believe that “they are moderately influenced by the variety of products/services”. The third slightly influencer in selecting hotel is availability of supplementary products/services to tourists, followed by regularity of products and services and reputation of the hotel. This study suggests that quality and variety of products and services are identified as the most influential in defining tourist’s hotels selection. Price attribute influence with the highest mean value of 5.73 is flexibility of price. Thus, unvarying pricing has been also found as idealistic since results in significantly higher expected profits than fixed price strategies (Williams, 2018). The second moderate price attribute influencing hotel choice is discounts allowed, with a mean value of 4.16. In the same vein, Devashish (2011) has also noted that the finest price strategy not only included the real price but also includes discounted price in order to influences hotel choice decision. Yet, the study found that fairness of price and its competitiveness in the area as the slight influential attributes with a mean of 3.25 and 3.14 respectively. To conclude, even if all these price

attributes have considerable influence on tourists hotel choices; price flexibility and discounts allowed are considered to be relatively more influential than other attributes of price.

With respect to the specific attributes of place, convenience of hotel location revealed greater influence in tourist's hotel choice having a mean score of 5.96. This can be explained by the other ways of presenting convenient location as not only increases profitability to hotel owners but at same time it strongly influences a tourist's hotel choice decision (Chou et al, 2008). Similarly, accessibility of the hotel is found as one of the essential place attributes in hotel choice with a mean score of 5.52. Besides, 'availability of public infrastructure was ranked as third influential factor of place attributes with a mean score of 4.44. Lastly, the study found that the affiliation of hotel with other hospitality companies achieved the moderate rating in influencing their hotel choice. Generally, the study showed that though there are many place factors which have substantial influence with the choice of the hotels, important determinants of the choice are the convenience of hotel location and accessibility of the hotel. Having established the relevance attributes the highest tourists ratings of hotel promotional efforts were observed for direct marketing efforts with a mean score of 3.02 and the lowest for public relations efforts of hotel with a mean score of 1.85. The remaining three dimensions of promotional activity were observed to be maintaining low influences in tourist's hotel choice. specifically, the personal selling effort of hotel was reported to be with the second mean score of 2.40, followed by advertising activity (Mean=2.37), and sales promotion with a mean score of 2.25 as fourth factor that influences tourist's hotel choice. The results of the study are indicative of the factor that associated to promotional efforts did not make a big difference in tourist's choice of hotel. This implies that the analysis of the usefulness of various promotional tools is very essential for a hotel operators before implementing promotional program due to the expenditures involved.

The study established that the influential physical evidence attributes at hotel choosing decision making have been identified the ambience of the hotel with the highest mean score of 5.10. Hygiene of the hotel and interior design and décor of the rooms indicated as second and third most important influential driver of hotel choice with a mean score of 4.42 and 4.26 respectively. This finding is supported by Lockyer (2005) who stated that a cleanliness factor is essential on hotel decision-making process and selection of accommodation to stay in. However, 'external appearance of the hotel' the dimension of physical evidence received a relatively low influence with the mean score of 2.62. It can, therefore, be concluded that ambience and hygiene of the hotel had major influence on tourist's choice of hotel as rated highest in the results. Concerning attributes of people, the study indicated that priority for the tourist is courtesy personality of staffs, as the average of the score is 4.32. Choi & Chu (2001) also found politeness have a considerable effect on repeat patronage of hotel services. The second most influential aspect of factors related to people for tourists when choosing a hotel is the competency of the staff with mean value of 3.83. Findings of this study also support earlier studies of Radder & Wang (2006) who found professionalism of staff as the most key determinant when selecting accommodation. On the other hand, the study was found both neat appearance and communication skill of the staff as the slightest attributes that influences tourist's hotel choice. It is evident from the study that most of the customers have given highest importance to the factors like courtesy personality of staffs and competency of the staff.

Finally, the findings revealed that customization of service procedure graded as the slightly influential in their hotel choice decision with mean score of 3.13. In a similar manner, a study

conducted by Lim & Endean (2009) also confirms the important effect of personalized service on tourist’s criteria in overall hotel selection. The second influential factor that influences the hotel choice of customers is hotel ordering and waiting time with a mean score of 3.08. In similar study Amofah et al. (2016) further recognized speedy delivery of services as important attributes which guarantee customer’s repeat purchase. The third was the hotel check in/check out with a mean of 2.40, followed by detailed menu information with a mean of 2.32.

4.3 Regression Analysis

In addition to descriptive statistical tools, a multiple regression model was employed for the purposes of determining the extent to which the explanatory variables explain the variance in the explained variable. The basic assumptions of multiple regression were checked before going to analysis and all assumptions meet successfully. Normality of distribution, and Heteroskedasticity were tested using plot diagrams and Collinearity tested using VIF and tolerance values. Kolmogrov-smirnov test also used to test normality of distribution of responses.

Moreover, as shown in the model summary table 2 the model is significant at 99% confidence level. The R Square value of 0.855 and adjusted R square value of 0.851, thus it could be comprehended that 85.5% of the variation in tourists hotel choice can be explained by the marketing mix dimensions as independent variables.

Table 2. Coefficients table of multiple regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of the Estimate		Sig.
	.941 ^a	.855	.851	.255		.000
Coefficients	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta		
	Constant	-.351	.116		-3.033	.003**
	Product average	.162	.039	.171	5.172	.000**
	Place average	.304	.041	.308	7.532	.000**
	Price average	.227	.043	.233	4.848	.016**
	Promotion average	.040	.037	.048	3.731	.183
	Physical evidence average	.152	.034	.160	4.293	.002**
	People average	.118	.037	.129	3.716	.005**
	Process average	.094	.035	.102	3.629	.003**

Source: Survey data.

a. Dependent Variable: Days of stay

It is apparent from the beta values of standardized coefficients that place and price dimensions are found as the most influential and significant factor in tourist’s hotel choice with standardized coefficient of 0.308 and 0.233 respectively. This finding is consistent with previous an observation which shows elements that are closely related to place and price is considered as

very influential marketing mix attributes in the tourist's hotel choice decision (Barsky, 2013; Chou et al., 2008; Lewis, 1984; Lim & Endean, 2009; Lockyer, 2005; Yang et al., 2017).

Furthermore, product attributes with the beta value of .171 and physical evidence with the beta value of .160 were found as third and fourth influential attributes in tourist's hotel choice after place and price. Hence, the four largest influential attributes in the customer's hotel choice are 'Place', 'Price', 'Product' and 'Physical evidence'. On the other hand, promotion was tested to assess the influence of promotion attributes on hotel choice. The results show that promotion has a positive influence and yet not significant. This reveals that in general promotion attributes are not significant determinants of tourist's hotels choice decision in study areas. Therefore, for the hoteliers it is vital to understand and prioritize hotel choice attributes that tourist's use when choosing hotel to visit.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was conducted using seven major groups of variables, namely product, price, place, promotion, physical evidence, people and process dimensions. The main accompanying research question posed in the study was to investigate the most influential marketing mix and its attributes on tourist's when choosing a hotel. In comparing the mean score of the marketing-mix attributes, the study found that the quality and variety of products/services, price flexibility, discounts allowed, accessibility and convenience of hotel location are the most influential attributes that influences tourist's choice of hotel. Moreover, the ambience and hygiene of the hotel, courtesy personality and competency of the staffs, customization of service procedure and hotel ordering and waiting time have identified as considerably influence on the hotel choice decision of tourist's. On contrary, promotional efforts did not make a big difference in determining tourist's choice of hotel. Finally, it is important to consider the results of inferential statistics, the result of multiple regression analysis clearly illustrates from the seven independent variables one is found insignificant while the other six are significant predictors of the dependent variable. Accordingly, place, price, and product marketing mix elements plays a vital role in the tourist's hotel choice as compared to other attributes in the study area.

Based on the empirical results of this study the researcher provides the following recommendations:

- It is strategically worthwhile to hotel operators and other stakeholders to take influential attributes of marketing mix into consideration while developing more efficient marketing policies and strategies.
- It is advisable to hotel management to give more attention to marketing mix attributes that is related to place, price and product.
- Hotel managers should comprehend customer viewpoint with respect to hotel promotional before spending on any form of hotel promotional efforts as it is useful in building distinctive competencies.

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