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**BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY
MANAGEMENT**

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ABSTRACT

How to deliver excellence service has always been one of the main goals to businesses. Hence, the main purpose of this degree thesis is to explore the different factors that affect customer perceptions of excellence within the luxury hotel industry. Therefore, each customer has different expectations about a visit that must be fulfilled by the hotel where they are being accommodated. Thus, this degree thesis is a continuity of the general literature review about customer perceptions and excellence within the luxury hotel industry. Furthermore, there are different definitions and theories throughout this research that have served as pillars to answer the research problem, such as the ones from academics like Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Karatepe or Fick.

Then, there are previous studies about the topics analysed in this paper, but academics did not put them in common to understand them, as this degree thesis has successfully achieved.

This research paper provides disparate factors that ultimately affect the way that customers perceive excellence, which should be used by companies from the luxury hotel industry, in order to create loyal customers. The factors analysed were demographic, behavioural, psychographic, and geographic or the cultural background of the client. Research about those factors was additionally done through online surveys, which were done to visitors to non-luxury and luxury hotels.

Finally, findings have as a final managerial implication to draw general guidelines about how to deliver an excellence service in the hard and soft products of the visit, considering the characteristics analysed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context of research

Scholars have regularly studied the analysis of services and how these are affected by customer satisfaction and how these services are affected by customer satisfaction. As of 2020, customer satisfaction is one of the most important factors that determines the decisions of big companies that consequently affects the global economy (Campos & Marodin, 2012).

All service organizations try to provide the best possible and high-quality services to their customers, but they are still short of the customers' expectations; since the customers have become more demanding with their requirements and expect higher standards of service.

In the competitive hospitality industry, service becomes one of the most important elements for acquiring a sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace (Swaroop Debasish and Dey, 2015). Thus, it is important to define what service means, a service is a deal where there are no tangible products that are sold to the customer (Al-ababneh, 2016).

Service quality could be defined as the result of a comparison between the customer's expectations before the experience and their perception of the actual service they have experienced during their stay (Campos and Marodin, 2012).

This is not an exception inside of the luxury hotel industry, where hotels everyday must deal with a fear of competition, so that they have to reinvent themselves in order to be different and unique in order to be competitive (Campos and Marodin, 2012).

It is essential for companies that want to compete globally to be able to deliver appropriate customer benefits, which may vary depending on the sector where they are found (Day, 1990). So, a customer benefit can be defined as an offer that the company provides to the customer apart from the core product. They make a distinction between core and add-on benefits. However, the perception of benefits differs hugely among different cultures (Sinha and DeSarbo 1998). Hence, in a global context, delivering benefits requires the understanding of different interests and preferences within the context of a globalized world with different cultures (Hofstede 1980; Money, *et al.*, 1998) (Kuester & Beutin, 2005).

Then, it is necessary to ask why it is important to analyse or not the luxury industry; for that it is necessary to understand luxury as a value that varies from person to person and from place to place.

For example, India is an attractive destination for luxury tourists because of its rich heritage, which includes the famous Taj Mahal, Red Fort, and many other famous monuments without excluding the wildlife reserves. Also, in India there are a lot of packages created to attract the luxury tourists (Swaroop Debasish and Dey, 2015).

On the other hand, the Seychelles islands is also considered an attractive destination for luxury tourists because of their nature, the disconnection that tourists can find and the privacy that the destination offers (Serrano Ruiz, 2016).

Both are antagonistic destinations, but both are considered high luxury destinations; this is why understanding the client is crucial to success in the luxury hospitality industry (Goeldner *et al.*, 2000) (Lu *et al.*, 2015).

The way each person perceives luxury is contingent on a “luxury state of mind” (Berstein, 1999, p. 50). Consumers are often focused on “luxury” but sometimes also on abstract concepts such as “space”, “time” or “freedom” to describe their perceptions (Dubois and Laurent, 1994). Hansen and Wänke (2011), found that consumers and companies describe luxury products in more abstract language than they describe non-luxury products.

Truong and McColl (2011), confirmed that the regular buyers of luxury goods tend to look to the quality of the product and its ability to provide self-directed pleasure, suggesting that buying luxury goods may be an effective way to satisfy self-esteem (Lu *et al.*, 2015).

Otherwise, the perceived usefulness and price of a product are not the only characteristics that have been used to define a luxury product. A luxury product is also often defined as a vehicle for self-expression (‘Castelli Brun - 20130729 IJRDM manuscript’, no date).

1.2. Identification of the research problem

In other respects, while academics have regularly undertaken customer perception studies (Mohsin *et al.*, 2011), researchers have observed that there is a lack of analysis regarding the main factors that customers perceive as excellence within the luxury hotel industry (Campos and Marodin, 2012). Investigation of the luxury hotel industry is difficult because of the big number of characteristics, their subjectivity and imperceptibility (Campos and Marodin, 2012). In fact, it was observed that hotels need guidelines in order to understand how there are different behaviours depending on each customer, so that they can make a feasible consumer preservation plan (Min, Min and Emam, 2002). This retention plan is necessary because as they are companies, they must know which the most solvent methods are to create and preserve devoted consumers (Min, Min and Emam, 2002). Thus,

hotel professionals are able to understand that different consumer profiles show dissimilar interpretations about what is excellence in the luxury hotel industry (Swaroop Debasish and Dey, 2015). In addition, it is mandatory to professionals to create a new luxury concept due to the entry of new competitors due to the globalization of our society and new consumers from other countries (Choo *et al.*, 2012).

Otherwise, regarding what excellence means, it has frequently been studied due to the requisite by luxury and non-luxury companies to understand the motivations of luxury consumers (Choo *et al.*, 2012). Hence, it is also necessary to explain what excellence means. Excellence may be defined as the antonym of mediocrity (“‘Excellence,’ Meanings,’ 1984). Thus, this degree thesis is born to help companies to know how to deliver the best “excellence”, taking into account customer preferences and expectations. Thus, hotels will be able to meet their expectations and exceed them, which will create a loyal customer (Mohsin, McIntosh and Cave, 2005).

1.3. Aims and objectives

In addition, to solve the research problem, this degree thesis displays three main objectives in which the research is focused on:

- To identify the different factors that impact on the customer perception of excellence.

Analysing which are the main circumstances that affect how the consumer in a luxury hotel perceives excellence, it is possible to assess what a customer values or not as excellence. They are found in the hard and soft product of the hotel experience.

- To assess how the cultural background of the clients affects the perception of excellence.

Understanding the main aspects of how cultural differences between customer profiles determines their meaning of excellence is crucial for the company. Consequently, the understanding of these elements is necessary to discern how to deliver value to consumers (Kuester and Beutin, 2005).

- To measure consumer satisfaction and how to improve it.

Collecting and analysing customer value is key to understanding how a company is doing and we want to improve the current ways or methods to acquire that information (Phillips, 1999).

1.4. Originality and contribution to knowledge

The originality of this project consists of the research to fulfil the lack of acknowledgement of the factors that affect the client, which ends up causing an intrinsic problem in our industry, which is the lack of guidelines to follow when the hotel is providing an excellent service to the different customer profiles that exist.

1.5. Structure of the study

This paper is organized in five different chapters analysing the factors affecting customer perfection of excellence in the luxury hotel industry:

Firstly, the first chapter begins establishing the context of this problem, determining the aims and objectives, and indicating why this paper is original and significant for the academic knowledge.

Secondly, the degree thesis focuses on the literature review, one of the largest parts of the thesis, where the past and current state of the research of the perceptions of excellence in the hospitality industry are analysed, focusing on the different aspects that affect them, such as the cultural factors, etc. is analysed.

Furthermore, in chapter 3 the methods used to reach the degree thesis' objectives are exhibited, how all the data was collected, the techniques and the research instruments used.

In chapter 4, the findings and discussion of this paper are shown, reinforcing them using the data analysis from the methodology used.

Finally, in chapter 5 conclusions and recommendations are exposed for further research and limitations that have affected the research of this problem.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definitions, theories and authors

Academics have been developing different theories for solving this problem, then during this point, the five key words that define the thesis are analysed and explained.

2.1.1. Service

Service is an intangible product and is the value that is produced and delivered simultaneously from provider to customer (Wolfson *et al.*, 2015), which applied to the hotel industry, it means the act of dealing with customers inside the hotel to provide them what they need.

One of the best instruments to measure the quality of the service is using the SERVQUAL model, this model is based on 5 components proposed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988).

- Tangibles: the tangible components applied to the hotel would be the Physical facilities, how the rooms look like, how many restaurants the hotel has, the equipment that provides to the guest (Spa, pool, etc.).
- Reliability: is the capacity of the hotel to give to the client the expected and promised service accurately.
- Responsiveness: is the willingness to give to the client a prompt service and a prompt solution to any problem or requirements they could have.
- Assurance: The hotel has to transmit security to their guest this is why he needs to train his staff to be capable of giving the client the knowledge that they require to solve the doubts showing confidence and trust.
- Empathy: This component consists in transmitting to the client a sensation of personal attention, making them feel unique and special and showing that their problems are the hotel problems and that the staff will do everything to solve it immediately (Fick and Brent Ritchie, 1991).

2.1.2. Quality

The term “quality” has different meanings depending on the customers; therefore, defining “quality” is usually the primary step in “quality improvement” journeys. A typical understanding and vision of what is meant by “quality” will help the hotel to focus its “quality improvement” efforts. Thus, defining “quality” is not only important from a semantic point of view but, more importantly, it is required to direct employees’ efforts towards a specific common cause (Abby, *et al.*, 1994). For example, in the Japanese philosophy, quality is defined as “zero error – do right first time” (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

In addition, quality is used to define different phenomenon (Vinagre and Neves, 2008):

- Some authors define quality as usage convenience, while others define it as the conformity to several specifications (Kara *et al.*, 2005).
- The definition of quality written by “American National Standards Institute” and “American Society for Quality” is: “The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that impact its ability to satisfy given needs” (Ma *et al.*, 2005, p. 1068) (Taylan Dortyol, *et al.*, 2014).

Therefore, service and quality correlate with its own characteristics, and it is represented as an attitude form which has a worldwide judgment involving the prevalence of service (Jun *et al.*, 2004; Stewart *et al.*, 1998). Service quality it is an attitudinal structure that leads behavioural intentions (Fullerton, 2005) and as an output of the service encounter process, service quality is explicit as meeting the clients’ expectations (Duffy *et al.*, 1997). Among consumer satisfaction theories, some authors together with Parasuraman and his colleagues determine service quality as the gap between service perceptions and consumer expectations (Vinagre and Neves, 2008).

Accordingly, perceived service quality, defined “true quality” by Kordupleski (Redman and Mathews, 1998), is that the discrepancy level that emerges as the results of the comparison created between normative expectations involving what ought to happen and perceptions related to what really happened (Kelley and Turley, 2001; Sureshchandar *et al.*, 2001). In different words, service quality focuses on meeting desires and needs and the degree to which the service provided meets client expectations (Lewis *et al.*, 1994) (Taylan Dortyol, *et al.*, 2014).

2.1.3. Luxury

Luxury in the hotel industry is a concept that can be defined from different points of view; as mentioned in the introduction the luxury has different meanings to each person, due to that the perception of luxury of each one varies widely (Serrano Ruiz, 2016).

The best way to understand the luxury in the hotel industry is reading the definitions of luxury made by the leaders of the biggest brands in the world:

- John Vanderslice, Hilton World wide's Global Head of Luxury and Lifestyle Brands explains in his luxury manifesto some of the things that a real luxury hotel has to have:
 - Employees First: Luxury hotels and Chains need to focus on the fact that the employees go first, not the clients. This technique ensures happy, empowered employees that are the kind of employees who provide the first-class service. Employees who are happy in their jobs create the most memorable experiences for the guests (Kime, 2011).
 - Experiences Over Things: The true luxury means enjoying and sharing unique and unrepeatabe experiences and making the guest feel unique, not the accumulation of physical things and possessions (Kime, 2011).
 - Service Does Not Equal Hospitality: Service is a technical process that usually involves meeting certain company-wide standards. Hospitality is a bi-directional dialogue that goes above and beyond and uses the employee's empathy and the intuition to create a truly luxury experience that the client will not forget (Kime, 2011).
 - Time is the Ultimate Luxury: Excellent luxury service anticipates and satisfies guest needs before they ask for it and even before they know they need it (Kime, 2011).

“Luxury travel today is defined less by thread count and Michelin stars and more by access to the people, places and experiences that represent all that is authentic about a destination. There is no denying that comfort factors still apply, and high standards of accommodation and dining will always feature on the luxury traveller's wish list. However, today's luxury traveller seeks more depth of understanding and immersion into local culture than ever before. People do not just want to see; they want to participate. The sales process is also critical and whilst the online proposition can be an asset in terms of booking more simple arrangements, clients looking for luxury experiential travel require a deep level of sophisticated knowledge and confidence during the sales process.” (George Morgan-Grenville, Chief Executive Officer, Red Savannah) (Serrano Ruiz, 2016 P.12).

However, it is mandatory not to forget about what a luxury hotel is considered nowadays and what basic standards and facilities must have to be considered as luxury.

A Hotel is considered a luxury hotel when it provides a luxurious accommodation experience to the clients. Hence, there are several characteristics that they need to fulfil to become a luxurious hotel (Landman and Landman, 2020), below some of them are exhibited:

- Offer a simple, easy planning and booking process.
- Fast, easy, and discreet Check-in and Check-out.
- The room gives to the client what he wants and needs, luxury features (as aesthetic details, quiet rooms, all the information they should need about the hotel, etc).
- Exceptional service: The client should have the feeling that they are known, valued and unique.
- Outstanding hotel dining: Huge variety in breakfast (quality and quantity), providing outstanding service in all their restaurants and with 24 hours room service.
- Guest activities and amenities: A concierge with an amazing knowledge of the city, High-end spa treatments, pool, 24/7 fitness centre, laundry service, packing and unpacking service, babysitting, pet sitting, dog-walking, personal trainer referrals (Landman and Landman, 2020).

2.1.4 Customer Perception

Customer perception refers to the customer's opinion of the business or merchandise. It summarizes how the guests feel regarding the whole brand including direct or indirect experience they have had along with the company.

In addition, as referred by Stec (2020), by monitoring guest perception the businesses can spot the weaknesses and improve the client journey.

2.1.5. Why Client Perception Matters

According to a report by Walker (2020), client experience will overtake price and products as the key brand differentiator by 2020. In different words, companies are shortly from a world where the client's perception of the brands and the quality of service may take precedence over traditional competitive benefits like valuation, features, or usability (Stec, 2020).

Carly Stec (2020) in her article: "Customer Perception: What It Is, Why It's Important, and How to Improve It" gives us the following steps to know how to improve the Customer Perception.

Carly Stec proposes:

1. Look inward: Put people before process, client's perception before the company.
2. Strike an emotional chord with your customers: Tell them something they care about, connect with the client at an emotional level (Zorfas and Leemon, 2016).
3. Lean on positive language: Transmit positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2011).
4. Commit to consistency: Establish core operating values as of integrity, respect, customer focus.
5. Fill skill gaps before they become evident: improve the skills and service areas that need to.
6. Break down data silos: a data silo is when some information is only available by one department.
7. Collect customer feedback: Knowing what the guest thinks about your company is essential to know what to improve in it.
8. Follow up with customers after every interaction: Following up with the requirements of the clients increases their loyalty (Oldroyd, *et al.*, 2011).

2.1.6. Excellence

Excellence refers to the provision of an unexpected service through a management system, exceeding the client's previous expectations, to receive not only guest satisfaction but also guest delight and therefore more guest loyalty (Dobni, 2002; Edvardsson and Enquist, 2011; Khan and Matlay, 2009) (Gouthier, *et al.*, 2012).

Kanav Mata gives the following steps to achieve it (Mata, n.d.):

1. Instil your value system: The excellence must flow from the top, to make the frontline staff able to deliver excellence you have to train your staff to be hospitable but the most important is to make them be imbued within the culture of the organization (Hsieh, 2017).
2. Listen to your customer: It is very important to know what is saying about your brand. A good example to follow is Bill Marriott: he personally used to read the 2% of the 750,000 client's comments and the 10% of the eight thousand letters that the customers send each year.

3. Hire the right person: Is always a plus to hire people with a hospitality background but it is important to focus on some softer elements like communication, grooming and people's skills.
4. Define and document standards: It will give the opportunity to the client to know more about your company.
5. Equip your employees to deliver on excellence: Give to the staff the right Knowledge and skills to be able to deliver excellence following your standards.
6. Empower: Give more control to the employees, for example giving more money to employees to spend it in solving guest issues (Token, 2019).
7. Reinforce: Show to the staff the importance of excellence in the hotel and in all the luxury industry.

2.2. Germinal theories

To further investigate the analysis of this paper, this section takes a trip through time to the past, so that the research problem can have a context.

The concept of luxury is as ancient as humanity and it remains until today from the ancient civilizations (Gurzki, 2020). Even though luxury has a very long history, it has been completely changing over the years therefore, we can observe how every society and culture has given a different definition to it. For example, watches have always been used for knowing what time it is, however, people started adding jewels to it, which made them more expensive and finally luxurious (Dewey, 2009).

In the Roman and Greek Empires, they used to think that luxury was a matter of great concern, they would start gathering money so that they would be able to "carpe diem" or enjoy the moment. Since the Middle Ages until nowadays, collectors feel that the antique is luxurious. Then, courts would start gathering luxurious objects, so that they could compete between them, such as, jewellery and splendid palaces (Faiers, 2016). After that, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some products from what was known as the East Indies, nowadays they integrate some countries as India or China, started to be considered as luxurious (Berg, 2004). Subsequently, in the nineteenth century all what people used to consider as luxury, should be custom made. Finally, in the twentieth and nowadays, all these concepts have evolved to what people now understand as different definitions of luxury, which has provoked that each brand tries to provide a different way of luxury (Dewey, 2009).

Furthermore, in the case of the luxury hotel industry, it starts with the beginnings of the railway as a mode of transport in the First Industrial Revolution. Then, investors started spending big amounts of money in accommodations and the right of having holidays provoked the generalization of tourism and a bigger number of people with high incomes who would be able to expend more money on their trips (Korstanje, 2017).

Some of the main hotel brands that have historically designed the perception of how customers see luxury in the hotel industry are Ritz-Carlton, Kempinski and Hyatt (Liu *et al.*, 2017). Thus, each hotel brand has its own definition a luxurious service:

- Firstly, Ritz-Carlton, which started in the 1900s in the United States and it is based on their motto, credo and gold standards that are the values and philosophy of the company (Michelli *et al.*, 2014).
- Secondly, Kempinski was founded in 1897 and it is considered the oldest hotel chain in Europe. Kempinski's proposal of what luxury must be is: It must be original, crafted, rare, lived in the now, felt physically and emotionally and reflect status (Neck, Houghton and Murray, 2017).
- Thirdly, Hyatt corporation, it was founded in 1957 in Los Angeles (United States of America), which has different brands, and each brand provides a different type of service, so that they can target different customers differentiating their product offer, such as Park Hyatt and Grand Hyatt. So, every customer will choose a different brand depending on their expectations about what they need (Teare, 1993).

Hence, each hotel chain, which was born in different places and years, offers different luxurious experiences and services that will change the expectations and perceptions of the customer (Liu *et al.*, 2017).

In addition, it is necessary to know about how the customer's perceptions of service have evolved until our days. The United States of America has nowadays more than three quarters of its Gross Domestic Product represented by the service sector. However, the situation was not the same a few years ago, as it only represented less than half of the GDP fifty years ago (Jack E. Triplett and Barry P. Bosworth, 2004). This is not only the case of this country, but the same trend of servitization happens in the rest of the world (Peillon, Pellegrin and Burlat, 2015).

Thus, perceptions of customers have been changing fast in a few years if you compare with the humankind's history and analysis of these perceptions has recently started to be taken (Schneider and

Bowen, 1985). Regarding this analysis, numerous academics have created different ways to understand customers' perceptions, but the most followed by companies is the SERVQUAL Model (Fick and Brent Ritchie, 1991). This instrument serves to analyse five different dimensions of the service perceived by the consumer, which are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985).

Another way to identify the customers' perceptions was introduced a few years ago, thanks to the integration of the internet and e-commerce, with the online reviews of their experiences (Mauri and Minazzi, 2011). Thus, some customer review sites, and Online Travel Agencies allow consumers to review by themselves how the experience has been, for example using TripAdvisor or Expedia (Krestel and Dokoohaki, 2015). The use of these websites has created a big impact on the previous expectations of the consumers and their process to purchase these services (Mauri and Minazzi, 2011). Wherefore, hotels have started analysing the reviews on these sites and how to improve those negative perceptions, using business intelligence managers that will use the information to drive the company to effectiveness (Davenport, 2010).

Additionally, it is essential to consider how the service provided by businesses has evolved until the personalization that clients can nowadays find. According to Surprenant and Solomon (1987), the personalized service is any conduct happening in the encounter which wants to contribute to the individuation of the consumer. Moreover, that service encounter is the interactivity between two main elements, the consumer, and the service provider, such as a hotel. In that individualisation of the service, the consumer is engaged in the interaction, thanks to the recognition of the unique necessities of the customer. Therefore, the essence of this encounter is a critical factor of satisfaction, as the service provider must meet the personal necessities of each customer (Czepiel *et al.*, 1985).

As this paper has already analysed, World economy has recently started to focus on services, so the personalization of this service has also recently started to be a trend as a marketing manner to sell these services. Thus, the oldest literature started four decades ago with the identification of the "personalizing shopper", which meant that this was the first time that the social interaction in the encounter was considered as a shopping motive (Stone, 1954) (Webster, 1968).

Regarding the current situation of personalization on service encounters, it is essential to analyse how e-commerce and personalization have merged. The new journeys that customers take to interact with businesses are completely different than a few years ago, thanks to the integration of the new technologies and the use of e-commerce. Therefore, customer experiences are essentially personal

and different; then, it is necessary to design unique customer journeys for everyone (Halvorsrud, Kvale and Følstad, 2016).

Furthermore, in the modern customer journey, touchpoints are those interactions between the customer and businesses (Parker and Heapy, 2006) (Blomkvist, Holmlid and Segelström, 2011) (Clatworthy, 2011). In these touchpoints, it is observable that the development that e-commerce has given to businesses to provide an individualized personal service, as they are able to gather data and use business intelligence to know what the special requirements of everyone are and try to satisfy them (Norton and Pine, 2013). Thus, service providers, as hotels, must understand how customers create expectations depending on the dynamism and subjectivism of each touchpoint, so that they are able to improve customer satisfaction (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

To sum up, analysing and understanding the origins of luxury, the luxury hotel industry, customers perceptions and personalized service gives a context about the research problem, so that this degree thesis is able to design solutions taking into account what it is already known.

2.3. Typologies of factors

Understanding what academics have already said about the factors that affect the customer's perceptions is mandatory for business to understand which are the expectations that need to be satisfied and fulfilled. The main factors analysed are: Demographic, geographic (cultural background), behavioural, and psychographic.

2.3.1. Demographic

These factors are those that are based on the idea that people with the same gender, age... will have similar needs and wants (Martin, 2011). Hence, it is necessary to analyse the role of genders affecting the perception of consumers, so that managers can considerate them and make the right decisions (Karatepe, 2011).

According to Lee *et al.* (2011) males and females demonstrate different ways of perception of the service quality. Otherwise, they identified that males focus more on the tangible part of the service, such as facilities and infrastructure, while females are more interested in empathy. Moreover, Lin, Chiu and Hsieh (2001) also found out that male consumers feel that the main agent affecting them is openness, as when a service provider is open, they feel safe. Moreover, they also observed that for female consumers the main factor is conscientiousness, as they feel that a conscientious service provider will be reliable and empathetic.

In addition, it is essential to observe the previous studies about how age of the customers affects the way that they perceive the service provided. The study made by Ganesan-Lim, Russell-Bennett and Dagger (2008) revealed that there is a solid proof of how age has a big effect on how customers perceive service quality. They detected that mature individuals have higher perceptions of the service quality compared with younger consumers.

Therefore, regarding millennials, who are those people born between 1980 and 2000 (Migacz and Petrick, 2018), they have a special point of view about how they perceive the service. Thus, they have been born in a moment when brands started to compete in a fierce market, so they now see the brand as an important element of the service, some examples about what they perceive from brands are the brand identity and brand image of a business (Dash, Kiefer and Paul, 2020).

2.3.2. Geographic

These are the factors that are based on the belief that a consumer who lives in a special location has the same needs that another person in that same location (Martin, 2011). Determining how geographic factors interfere in the way customers perceive a service is important as this information can be used by managers in the future.

According to Phillips *et al.* (2020) the geographic factor has a big importance on customer satisfaction. Then, differences between travellers located in different places in their preferences regarding hotel features are noticeable. Furthermore, regions where visitors and hotels are located, interfere in the way that the consumer perceives the service provided (Banerjee and Chua, 2016).

As referred by Tajfel, H. (1982), there are different social identities, where everybody is in, such as nationalities. Thus, hoteliers must determine which are the social communities where their consumers are in, in order to be able to understand those motivations and needs that drive the customers and have to be fulfilled (Phillips *et al.*, 2020).

Regarding how customer's cultural backgrounds may affect the perception of the services provided by hotels, every culture has their own values, which finally determines the way that consumers perceive those service attributes (Mariani, Di Fatta and Di Felice, 2019).

Furthermore, according to Peterson and Hofstede (2003) there are four different dimensions of culture, which are: Power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. All these dimensions will finally affect our way of understanding how a service must be provided. Therefore, managers have to understand and analyse them to delete the gap between the expectations and the

final perception (Mariani, Di Fatta and Di Felice, 2019), because as Riddle, D. (1992) states, those businesses that can take advantage of cultural factors, are able to create competitive advantages.

In addition, it is necessary to focus on how a cultural identity will affect the customer perception considering the service of luxury hotels. Academics have observed that culture is important in designing people's needs and wants, which is completely noticeable in those service processes where there is a high degree of contact between the consumer and employees or facilities (Lovelock and Yip, 1996). Additionally, even though there are trends to the Western values and modern changes in the Asian customer behaviours, the Asian context has endured robustly. Therefore, Western customers have dissimilar cultural values than their Asian equivalents (Kugler, Ralph, 1998).

Furthermore, perceptions of personalized service are also affected by the customer's cultural background (Mattila, 1999). As Pucik and Katz (1986) express, any interplay between people is forecasted by social information, which is therefore connected with the values and cultural background. Wherefore, the behavioural norms and dispositions that represent the optimal service quality are absolutely conditioned on cultural orientation (Zeithaml, 1988; Valarie, 1988).

2.3.3. Psychographic

These are the factors that correspond to personality with brands and it is defined as the investigation of attitudes, lifestyles, personality, values, and interests (Martin, 2011). Thus, businesses must understand their customer's habits to really correlate with them and for the customer to recognize the company's goods and services (Martin, 2011). Accordingly, the research has to also focus on the level of income as a factor that interferes in the way that consumers perceive a service.

Results on Shieff (1993)'s paper state that the level of income of a customer will roundly affect the way that the consumer perceives a service. The fact that customers with higher income usually have a higher education (Farley, 1964) makes them get more information about the service, before deciding, which creates more expectations (Schaninger and Sciglimpaglia, 1981). Then, customers with higher remunerations will perceive a service disparately from those customers with lower remunerations (Ganesan-Lim, Russell-Bennett and Dagger, 2008). Therefore, Ganesan-Lim, Russell-Bennett and Dagger (2008) also stated that consumers with higher incomes seek more quality in the interactions, a higher personalization and greater service outcomes than low-income earners. Additionally, those with higher income will probably spend more money in order to receive a better service.

2.3.4. Behavioural

The behaviour of the customer changes if he is searching a luxury hotel focused on business or leisure. Thus, the luxury hotels have to focus on several different aspects depending on the type of public they want to attract:

The business client searches the following aspects in a hotel:

<p><u>Location</u>: This aspect is the key, they need to be close to the place they are going to work (Lavanchy, 2018).</p>	<p><u>Be connected</u>: Internet; the hotel needs to have high speed WIFI, that nowadays is a must in the hotel industry independently of the type of hotel but in business is even more important. Also is a plus if the hotel is connected physically with the city centre and the public transport (Lavanchy, 2018).</p>
<p><u>Loyalty Program</u>: the companies that have employees that travel frequently usually negotiate with the hotel loyalty in exchange for lower rates, some level of comfort standards, it is a Win-Win (Hoang, 2014).</p>	<p><u>Amenities</u>: The business travellers prefer to have close packs that usually are negotiated with the company that includes breakfast, coffee machine & essential amenities for morning preparation (Hoang, 2014).</p>

Figure 1. Behavioural aspects of the business clients searching luxury hotels. Own creation.

The leisure client searches the following aspects in a hotel:

<p><u>Reviews</u>: Nowadays when a tourist needs to choose one hotel usually asks family or friends that have been there before or check the online recommendations made by previous guests (Hoang, 2014).</p>	<p><u>Facilities</u>: The facilities of a luxury hotel are one of the Keys for the success, needs to have all the facilities the guest could desire during his stay as pool, SPA, entertainment, and the top ones have their own private beach (Lavanchy, 2018).</p>
<p><u>Packages</u>: usually the client that travels for leisure to luxury hotels does not want to be worried about anything and he likes a package which has all included that he does not have to do anything (Lavanchy, 2018).</p>	<p><u>Price sensitive</u>: In the luxury hotels this aspect is not usually applied but sometimes if the hotel does some offers can attract more people that are willing to pay extra money for receiving good value (Hoang, 2014).</p>

Figure 2. Behavioural aspects of the leisure clients searching luxury hotels. Own creation.

Another concept to analyse in the behavioural segmentation is the brand loyalty. The concept of brand loyalty has won interest by the professionals and the academics in the last year due to the number of benefits that gives a loyal customer base (Kim, 2011; Kucukusta *et al.*, 2013; Wilkins *et al.*, 2009) (Rather and Sharma, 2016).

Brand loyalty is a varied construct and has been perceived as a three-dimensional conception that includes behavioural, attitudinal, and composite (Backman and Crompton, 1991; Bowen and Chen, 2001) (Rather and Sharma, 2016).

Empirical research also states that the effect of the client identification with the brand helps to create loyalty (Heand Li, 2011; He *et al.*, 2012; Homburg *et al.*, 2009; Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010). Therefore, clients identified with a company will not only buy products randomly, but they will also establish a closer relationship with the hotel (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) creating a sense of loyalty (Rather and Sharma, 2016).

Commitment between Hotel and client is one of the most important concepts in relationship marketing research (Fullerton, 2003) and is defined as “an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship” (Moorman *et al.*, 1992). Many academics have concluded that commitment is the key

component for establishing and maintaining a long-term relationship with business partners (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Geyskens, Steenkamp *et al.*, 1996; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) (Rather and Sharma, 2016).

The factors that influenced positively in the clients are brand identification, client satisfaction, commitment, and brand loyalty (Rather and Sharma, 2016). Hence, loyal clients make that the profitability of service providers such as luxury hotels increase (Reichheld, 1996). With the knowledge of how one marketing perspective influences another, hotel luxury operators have to take the necessary action to reach the goals (profit, loyalty etc.) by improving the client brand identification, the level of satisfaction, the desire based in the commitment which ultimately leads to brand loyalty (Rather and Sharma, 2016).

2.4. Literature map

The aim of the Literature map is to visually summarize the literature review with the main factors and the main authors.



Figure 3. Literature map of the research “The perception of excellence within the luxury hotel industry”. Own creation.

2.5. Conceptual map

The principal aim of the conceptual map is to determine the literature review's main theories, concepts, and topics that this research paper has used to develop the research of this investigation.

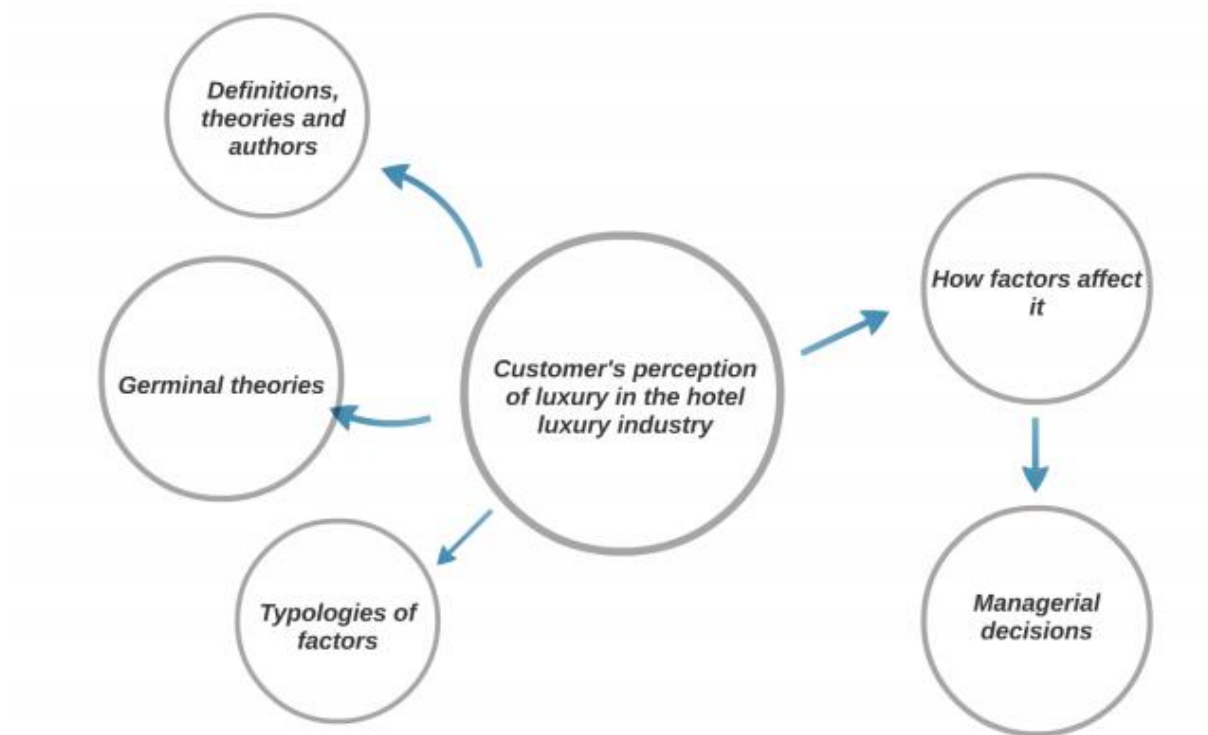


Figure 4. Conceptual map of the research "The perception of excellence within the luxury hotel industry" Own creation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Overall research design

The HTSI University normative of degree thesis on regulations and norms (2020) gives the chance of undertaking different approaches to the research, so researchers have focused on the conceptual and empirical research approaches. This paper has characteristics from both orientations of research, as from an empirical approach, it provides more information on the factors affecting the perception of luxurious service and from a conceptual approach, it analyses what other authors have said about these factors.

As Ruiz Olabuénaga (2012) stated, there are five different techniques that are used in research for obtaining information can be found: survey, observation, experiment, content analysis and deep interview.

Thus, in terms of the technique undertaken in this paper, surveys were used as according to Kumar (2012), a survey is a systematic method of obtaining data from (a sample) of entities, to construct quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members. Thus, researchers were able to analyse how larger populations will be affected by the different factors discussed during this thesis. Furthermore, internet surveys were used in order to arrive at a larger sample.

Regarding the use of quantitative or qualitative approaches, during this section researchers have used a mix.

The method of gathering and analysing numerical data is quantitative research. The data resulted from this method is used to create graphs and tables that display trends and statistics (McLeod, 2019). The objective of quantitative researchers is to develop general behavioural and phenomenal principles across various environments/scenarios (McLeod, 2019). This study is used to evaluate and potentially accept or refute a hypothesis. Thus, the closed answers from this survey were the quantitative results of this research.

In addition, the method of gathering and evaluating data which is non-numerical, such as language, is qualitative analysis (McLeod, 2019). Qualitative research analyses the subjective meaning of an individual's experience and it is used from the data to create hypotheses and theories (McLeod, 2019). Hence, the results from those open-ended answers from this survey were the qualitative results of this research.

Thus, mixed-method research is a dynamic choice to extend the scope and strengthen the analytical capacity of research (Sandelowski, 2000).

Furthermore, the data resulted from this survey was primary, as surveys are considered as one of the main sources of primary data. Primary data is the data gathered for the analysed problem, undertaking methods that fit the specific problem best (Hox and Boeije, 2004). Then, as this thesis has a specific research question to answer, results from this survey were used to analyse and understand it.

3.2. Data collection techniques and research instruments & 3.3. Research context and participants

As explained above in “Overall research design” the technique used for the data collection is an online survey. Hence, the aim of this survey is to find an answer to this research question and to accomplish the aims and objectives.

Research Question:

“Which are the main factors that customers perceive as excellence within the luxury hotel industry?”

Aim and objectives:

- To identify the different factors that impact on the customer perception of excellence.

Analysing which are the main circumstances that affect how the consumer in a luxury hotel perceives excellence, researchers are able to assess what a customer values or not as excellence. They are found in the hard and soft product of the hotel experience.

- To assess how the cultural background of the clients affects the perception of excellence.

Understanding the main aspects of how cultural differences between customer profiles determines their meaning of excellence is crucial for the company. Consequently, the understanding of these elements is necessary to discern how to deliver value to consumers (Kuester and Beutin, 2005).

- To measure consumer satisfaction and how to improve it.

Collecting and analysing customer value is key to understanding how a company is doing and it is essential to improve the current ways or methods to acquire that information (Phillips, 1999).

The online survey made changes depending on what you answer so that it is possible to fulfil all the information above.

The first question is: - Do you stay in luxury hotels? YES or NO. Depending on your answer it creates 2 models of survey. On the one hand, the model of survey of the "YES" is the one used to answer the research question and objectives. On the other hand, the survey of the "NO" is only the two last questions of the survey. Both are used to make a comparison about what type of information the client searches about the hotel before he goes to a luxury hotel or to a non-luxury hotel (read appendix 1 for the survey).

No research method is perfect, and the online survey method is not an exception, even though there are more advantages than disadvantages there are also some of them.

Rice *et al.* (2017) showed some of them in their investigation about Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Internet-Based Survey Methods.

Advantages:

- Easy Access to (New) Populations: An immediate benefit of internet-based research methods is the access to populations that it would be impossible to access without the internet.
- Greater Generalization: It is important that the results can be applied to the broader population from which you study while performing scientific research.
- Age of Participants: It is also necessary for researchers to sample from a wide age range, in addition to easily expanding the accessible population from which one would like to sample (Field, 2013). As if college-age students are included in the only sample obtained, therefore the age range may be skewed and distorted.
- Larger Sample Sizes: In statistical studies, larger samples provide better generalization of analysis, reduce variance, and increase control. Importantly, larger samples provide more detailed data on the size of the effect. It is preferable to perform research with broad sample sizes because of these factors.
- Time: Internet-based study enables a researcher to gather data in a relatively short period of time from hundreds, and even thousands, of participants.
- Cost: It is often more economical to do it online. In the case of the degree thesis the cost has been 0.
- Anonymity: usually, online surveys do not allow researchers to access the participants identity, thereby maintaining their anonymity and protecting the participants.

Disadvantages:

- Untrue data: as the surveys are anonymous and it is impossible to check the truth of the information, could be that some participants send untrue information.

The reason why researchers decided to choose this method is because as mentioned above, it has a lot of advantages as of the time spent to collect all the information, the economic cost is 0, anonymity of the respondents is preserved, and the most important, researchers were able to reach people from outside of the country and the continent, collecting all this information it would have been very difficult by using another method.

After analysing the available resources, investigators concluded that the minimum number responses needed to reach was 200 for each of the models they did. Model of survey for the “YES” and Model of survey for the “No”. This was the chosen number because 200 people that visit luxury hotels is a wide range to take findings and conclusions about the aims and objectives of this thesis.

One of the most important objectives is about “how the cultural background of the clients affects the perception of excellence”, therefore the objective researchers had was to reach around 30 different nationalities of all the world, considering Europe, Asia, America, and Africa.

The resources took into account to conclude that it was possible to reach these figures were: The personal contacts investigators had, their contacts in social media as LinkedIn, the grateful help of their supervisor Miquel Alimbau, but specially the contacts they made during their work experience where they contacted people from around the world.

The data collection of the survey has been taken between the 8 of November of 2020 and the 15 of November of 2020.

The data collection has not been taken in any specific geographic point, and has been taken from the internet, using the tool that google provides (google forms).

3.4. Data analysis

Five separate steps must be followed for studying all results, according to the theory published by Ishtiaq (2019). Data is arranged and structured for the review in the first phase, which includes transcribing answers, typing field notes, and dividing data into categories. Secondly, data must be read for obtaining a general idea about participant’s opinions and observing the validity of the information gathered. Thirdly, data must be coded so that it is possible to put it together in different groups of the

same subject. Fourthly, categories from this information are generated that form part of the findings of the research paper. In conclusion, these findings have to be interpreted to answer the research question.

The source of analytical research information has been the surveys, from which researchers analysed the information generated (Sandelowski, 2000).

3.5. Ethical considerations

Academics have to expect the ethical issues that can occur during their research (Punch, 2005). Ethical considerations are a vital part of research in this context, because without them, there would be no validation of the thesis. Validity is focused on assessing whether the outcomes from the point of view of the study, participants, or the readers are correct (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

The ethical considerations are given by this degree thesis as they help sustain the results of the surveys and provide constructive and practical conclusions to validate the research paper. Ethical considerations are very critical since the participants should be thoroughly informed about the research paper and the purpose of the analysis. The participants have all the right to give us their honest opinion and be anonymous.

Previous literature has shown that a researcher has to choose the right approach to use appropriate data collection techniques, present the research results and interpret them appropriately, leading to the presentation of knowledge in a logical order (Akaranga & Macau, 2016). According to them, when undertaking research, it is always important for a researcher to uphold acceptable values. It could result in wrongdoing if it is not noticed. A thesis may only be published if it is professionally conducted, written and complies with the ethical standards required.

Then, it is important to accurately and with practical conclusions endorse and validate observations, obey professional standards, and use data in an ethical manner. In contemplation of the fulfilment of the moral and responsible ethics in compliance with the principles and regulations laid down by the Rectorate of the University (2020), documentation proving the approval and permission of the supervisor to use data for this degree thesis have been completed and added to the appendix section.

Hence, ethics have always been employed in the gathering of information during the undertaking of this research paper.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

This chapter provides an insight from field research, understanding which are the main factors that customers perceive as excellence in the luxury hotel industry. The results in the subsequent sections have emerged after having thoroughly examined the details gathered through the surveys. Researchers have evaluated the outcomes categorized by the research objectives so that findings were adequately organized and to guarantee that all study goals are covered.

4.1. Findings for objective 1: To identify the different factors that impact on the customer perception of excellence.

In order to have a clear understanding of those factors, they are divided in demographic, psychographic and behavioural.

4.1.1. Demographic

These are the factors that according to Martin (2011) are such as age and gender, which are useful to divide consumers and understand their expectations of excellence.

Regarding age, it could be observed that there are different trends depending on the age of the respondents. Then, researchers have analysed the data considering the results of what is the percentage of respondents of each age group:

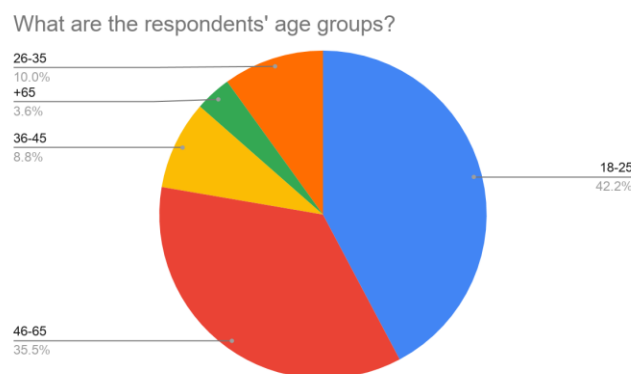


Figure 5. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Demographic aspects. Own creation.

As figure 5 shows the majority of respondents are from Generation Z, who are between 18 and 25 years old and represent 42,2% of the total. Furthermore, there are those between 46 and 65 years old and represent 35.5% of the respondents, those who are between 26 and 35 years old and represent 10% of the total, those who are between 36 and 45 years old and constitute 8.8% of the respondents.

Finally, it can be observed that those who are more than 65 years old only are 3.6% of the total, due to the difficulties for this age group to answer survey questions. Otherwise, every generation has specific needs and wants which companies must know how to be satisfied (Dimock, 2019).

With respect to the aspects that they consider as more important depending on the age group:

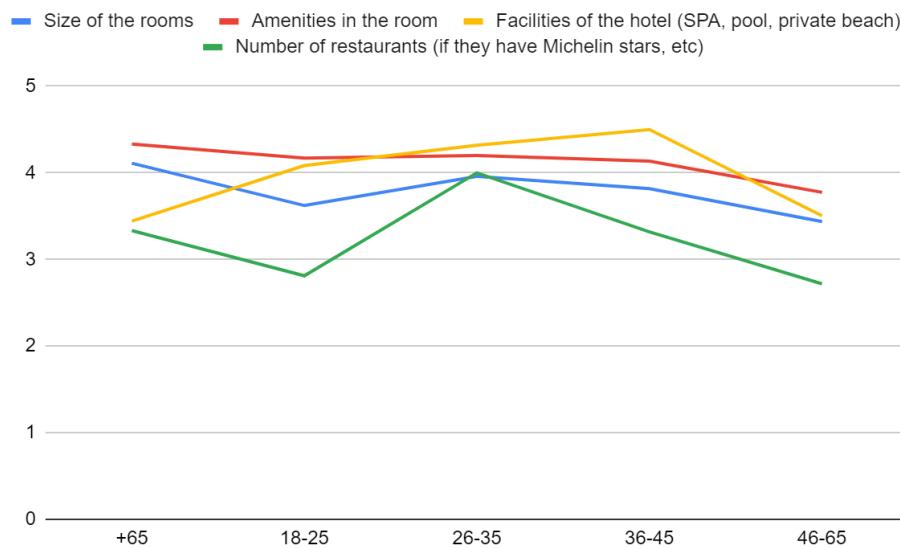


Figure 6. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Demographic aspects. Own creation.

Regarding the hard and soft products or tangible and intangible aspects, this figure demonstrates that each age group gives different importance to each aspect. For people who are between 18 and 25 years old the amenities are the most important tangible aspect. However, for those between 36 and 45 years old the most important tangible feature is the facilities of the hotel. Furthermore, for people who are between 18 and 25 years old the housekeeping service is the most important intangible aspect. However, for those between 26 and 35 years old the most important intangible feature is privacy. This graph corroborates that depending on the age of customers, they will have different perceptions of excellence.

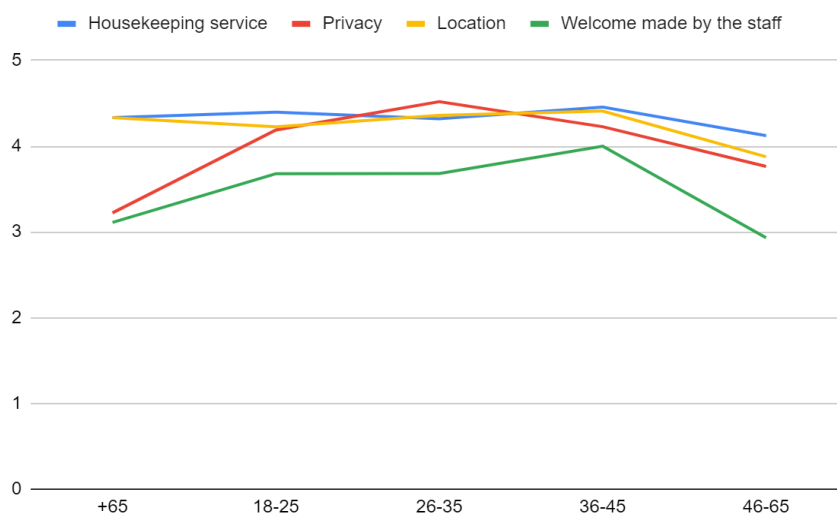


Figure 7. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Demographic aspects. Own creation.

In addition, figure 7 demonstrates that each age group has a different loyalty to brands, for example people between 18 and 25 years old are 72.6% more likely to be disloyal to brands, while 27.4% more loyal to brands. However, people between 26 and 35 years old are 84% more likely to be loyal to brands, while 16% more disloyal to hotel brands.

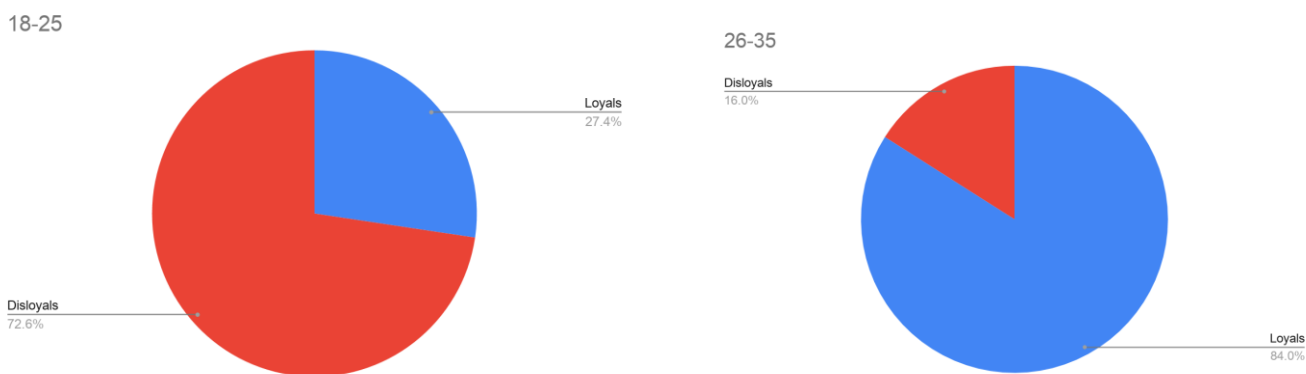


Figure 8 & 9. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Demographic aspects Own creation.

Additionally, figures 10 and 11 show a trend about how brand loyalties change based on the age group.

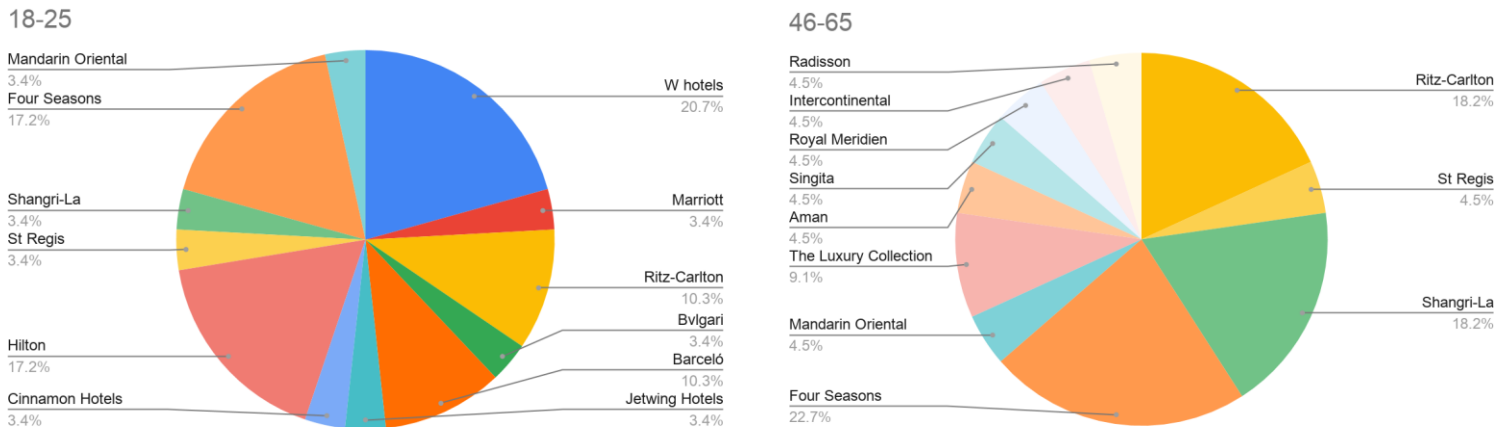


Figure 10 & 11. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Demographic aspects Own creation.

On the one hand, figures 10 and 11 show that respondents who are between 18 and 25 years old are more likely to be loyal to W hotels. This may be because as W Hotels from wonderland to worldwide (2020) states, W hotels have a strong identity based on the “Whatever/Whenever” culture, so that it is a more carefree concept of hotel, which may relate more with people from younger generations. On the other hand, most brands chosen by people who are between 46 and 65 years old have a less carefree lifestyle and are more focused on older target markets, such as Four Seasons or Ritz Carlton. Additionally, younger respondents added other more juvenile hotel brands as Jetwing and Cinnamon Hotels, and older respondents added less juvenile and more traditional hotel brands, for example Intercontinental, Royal Méridien, Aman, Singita or The Luxury Collection.

Results also demonstrate that from clients’ opinion about why they are loyal to these brands, they differ depending on their age group, as for example, older age groups focus more on the tradition of the service or the benefits from being part of the loyalty programs. However, younger age groups trust more on their needs being fulfilled.

Furthermore, with respect to the research before choosing a hotel, researchers found out that those who are older are more likely not to read online reviews than younger generations.

Regarding the gender, data has been analysed considering the percentage of each gender group, so that researchers have found different trends too.

What are the respondents' genders?

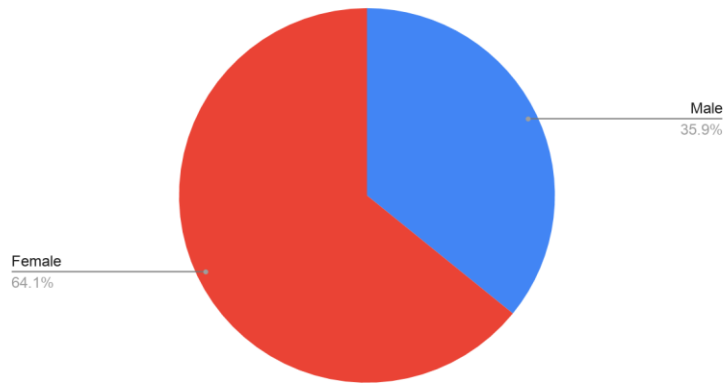


Figure 12. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Demographic aspects. Own creation.

As figure 12 shows, the majority of the respondents were female, who represent 64.1% of the total and the rest were males, who represent 35.9% of the respondents.

With respect to the aspects that they consider as more important depending on the gender:

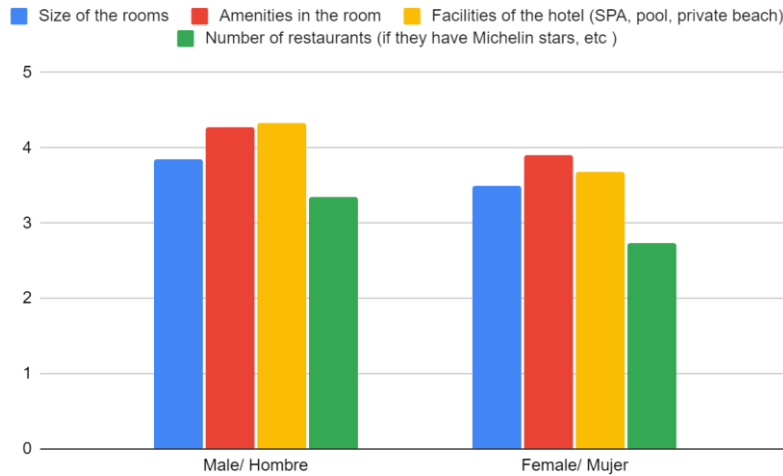


Figure 13. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Demographic aspects. Own creation.

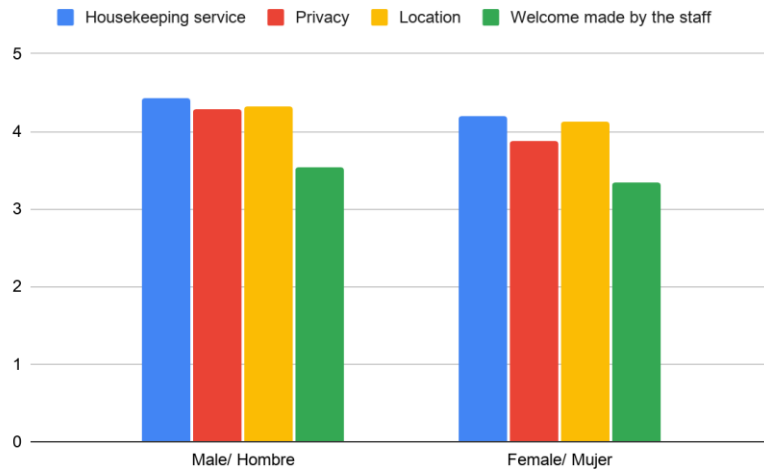


Figure 14. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Demographic aspects. Own creation.

Figures 13 and 14 exhibit that there is the same trend in the hard and soft products, as males usually tend to give a bigger importance to all the aspects than females do.

On the one hand, concerning the hard product or tangible aspects of a hotel, males are more likely to give more attention to the facilities while women to the amenities of the room. Moreover, the least important aspect for both genders is the number of restaurants of a hotel.

On the other hand, with regards to the soft product or intangible aspects of a hotel, males and females tend to give more importance to the housekeeping service. However, privacy is more important for males than females. Additionally, the welcome made by the staff is the least important of these aspects for both genders.

Furthermore, from the gender perspective there is a difference of loyalty or disloyalty to brands:

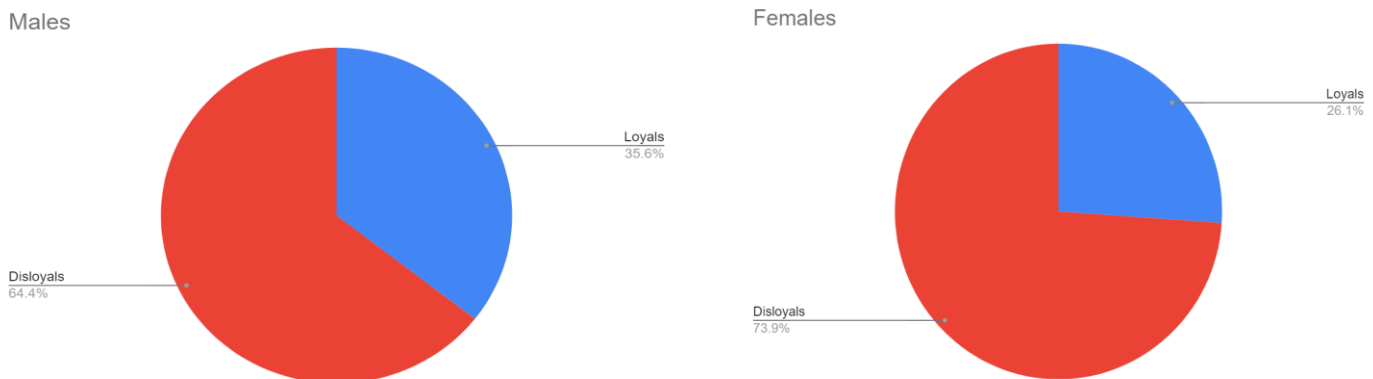


Figure 15 & 16. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Demographic aspects. Own creation.

These graphs show that males tend to be more loyal to hotel brands than females, as 35.6% of males are loyal, opposed to 26.1% of females who consider themselves loyal to hotel brands.

Figures 17, 18 and 19 exhibit a trend about how brand loyalties change based on the age group.

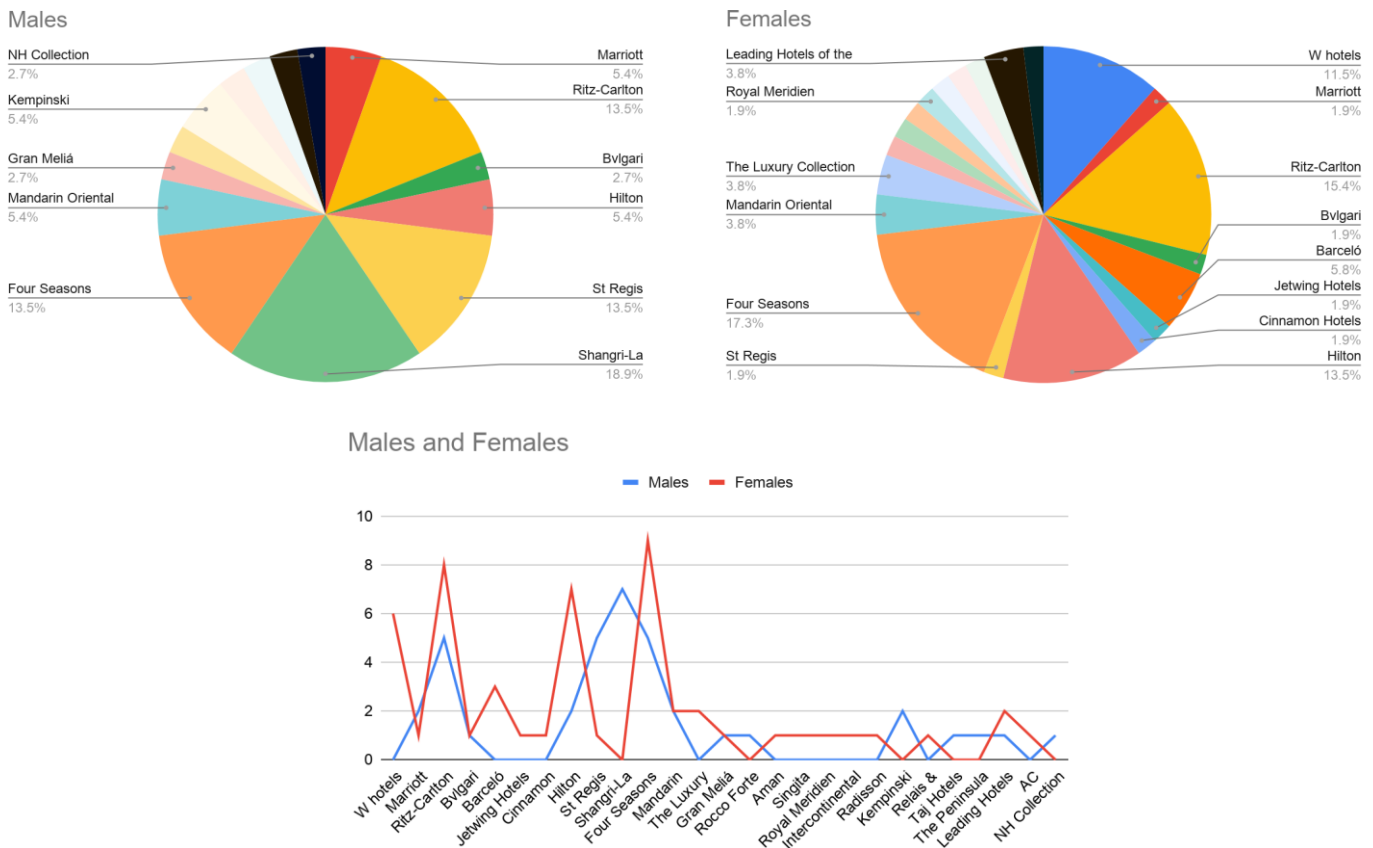


Figure 17,18 &19. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Demographic aspects. Own creation.

There are hotel brands that are more preferred by one gender than the other, such as, W hotels that as already mentioned it has a specific brand identity, which according to the results attracts more the female profile. Moreover, in the male’s case, the biggest share of brand loyalty is represented by Shangri-La, St. Regis and Four Seasons hotels. In the female’s case, the biggest share is represented by Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton, Hilton and W hotels. In addition, males and females both tend to prefer Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton hotels too and each gender also tends to have other different hotel brands, as males have NH Collection or Kempinski and females have Royal Meridien, Intercontinental, Aman, Singita, The Luxury Collection, Jetwing, Cinnamon, Barceló and AC hotels.

Investigators also found out that from clients' opinion about why they are loyal to these brands, they do not differ depending on their gender, as they have the same opinions, about why they have such loyalty to each brand.

4.1.2. Psychographic

As it has been already mentioned, these are the factors that correspond to personality with brands and it is defined as the investigation of attitudes, lifestyles, personality, values, and interests (Martin, 2011).

Findings are based on clients who regularly go to luxurious hotels, however some of them always visit them and others only visit them sometimes.



Figure 20. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Psychographic aspects. Own creation.

According to figure 20, most of the respondents travel sometimes, being 68.1% of the total and the 31.9% represents the respondents who visit luxury hotels every time that they travel.

Regarding the aspects that they consider as more important, based on their frequency to luxury hotels:

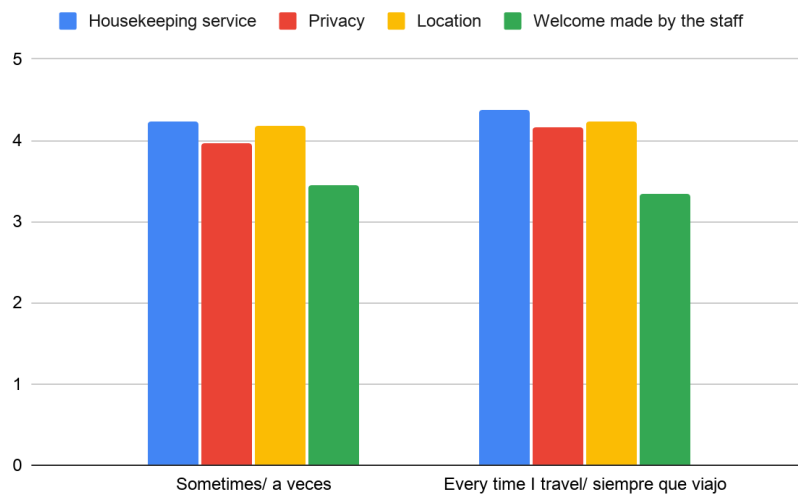
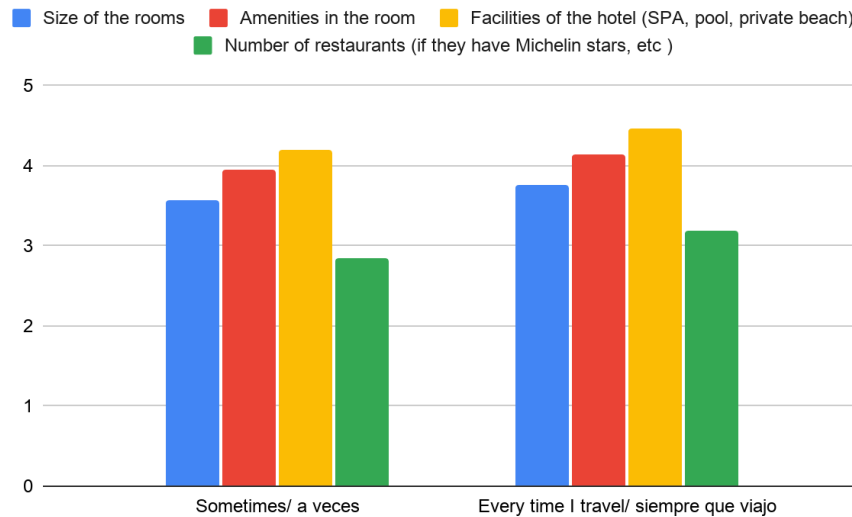


Figure 21 & 22. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Psychographic aspects. Own creation.

It is remarkable that in figure 21 and 22, both groups care about the same aspects of the visit. In the hard product, they firstly focus on the facilities, secondly the amenities, thirdly the size of the rooms and finally the number of restaurants. Wherefore, with respect to the soft product, both give firstly attention to the housekeeping service, secondly location, thirdly privacy and finally the welcome made by the staff.

Furthermore, concerning the brand loyalty that each group of respondents have:

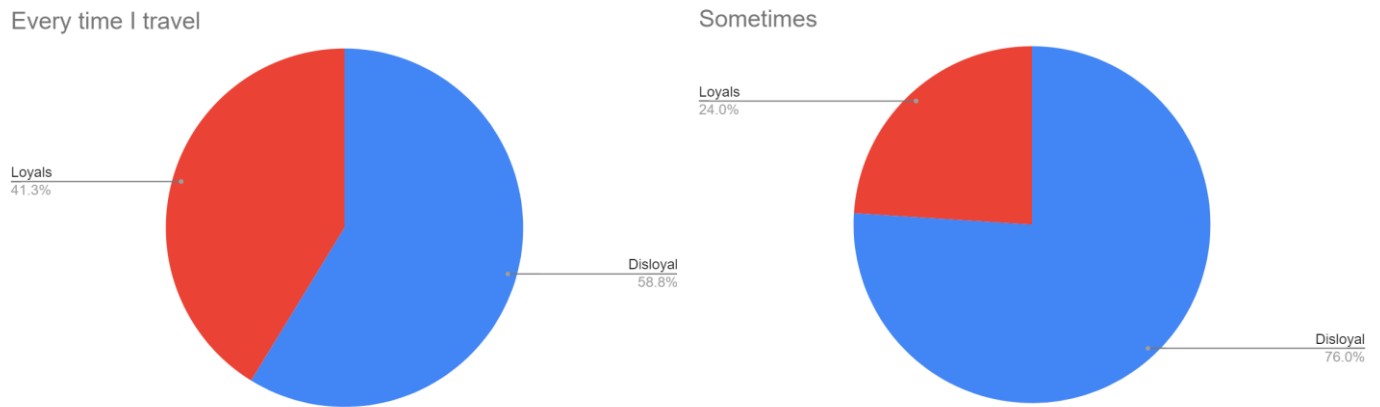


Figure 23 & 24. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Psychographic aspects. Own creation.

While in figure 23 those who always visit luxurious hotels tend to be more loyal to hotel brands, being 41.3% loyal and 58.8% disloyal. Respondents in figure 24 who sometimes go to luxury hotels are less likely to be loyal to a hotel brand, a 24% consider themselves loyal to a brand and 76% of the respondents do not consider themselves loyal to any hotel brand.

4.1.3. Behavioural

As explained before, these are the aspects which analyse the behaviours of clients (Martin, 2011). From the behavioural perspective, findings exhibit the different conducts that visitors to luxury hotels have, from the business/leisure and brand loyalty points of view.

Regarding the motivation of the trip, most of the respondents answered that they visit them for leisure purposes.

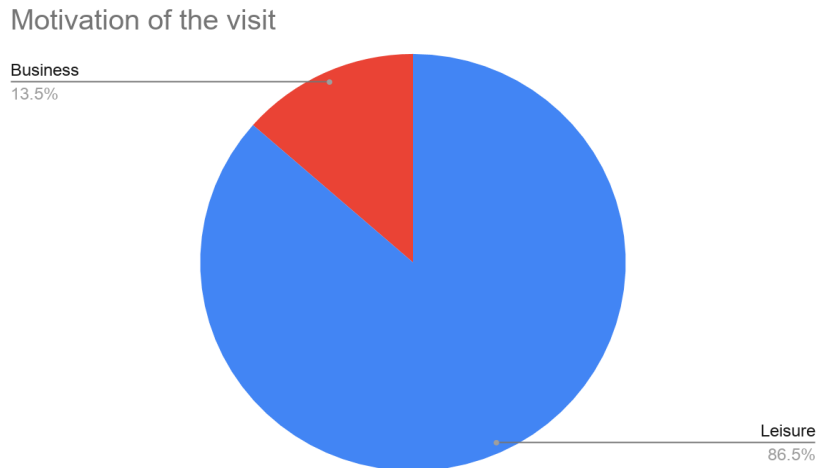


Figure 25. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Behavioural aspects. Own creation.

With respect to the hard product of the hotel visit:

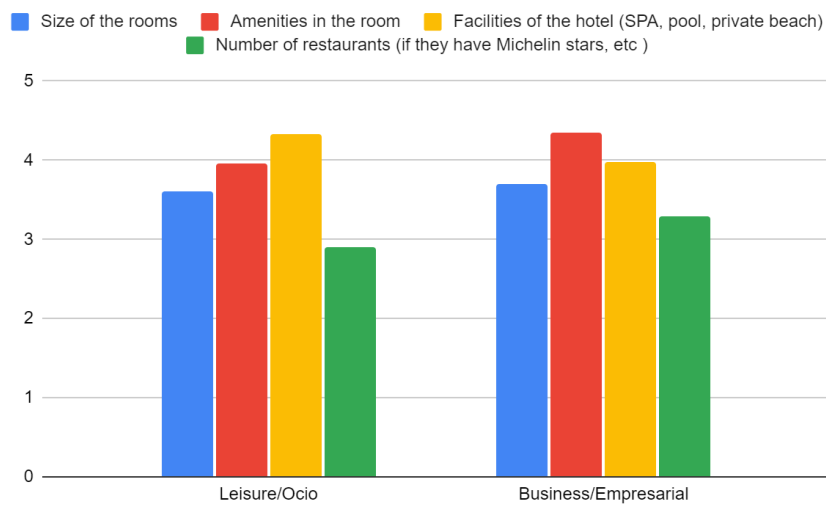


Figure 26. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Behavioural aspects. Own creation.

Figure 26 shows that there are two big trends, which are that firstly, profiles who visit with a leisure motivation tend to give more importance to the facilities of the hotel, such as a private beach, pool, spa... Secondly, business profiles also tend to give more importance to the amenities of the room.

In addition, leisure profiles also care about the amenities and business profiles about the facilities. The least important of these aspects according to these findings is the number of restaurants in the hotel.

From the soft product point of view:

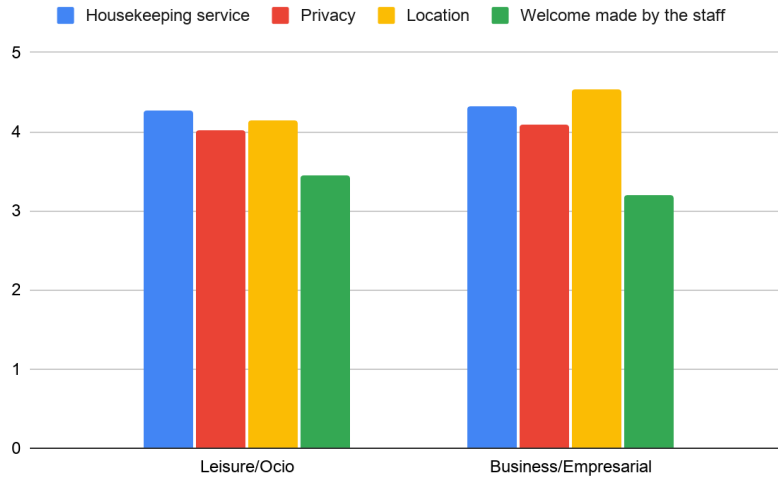


Figure 27. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Behavioural aspects. Own creation.

Figure 27 exhibits that there are two remarkable trends, which are that business profiles usually tend to care more about the location of the hotel and that both profiles give attention to the housekeeping service. Furthermore, the welcome made by the staff is the least important of all the aspects analysed.

Wherefore, results from the information that each profile searches before their visit to the hotel are:

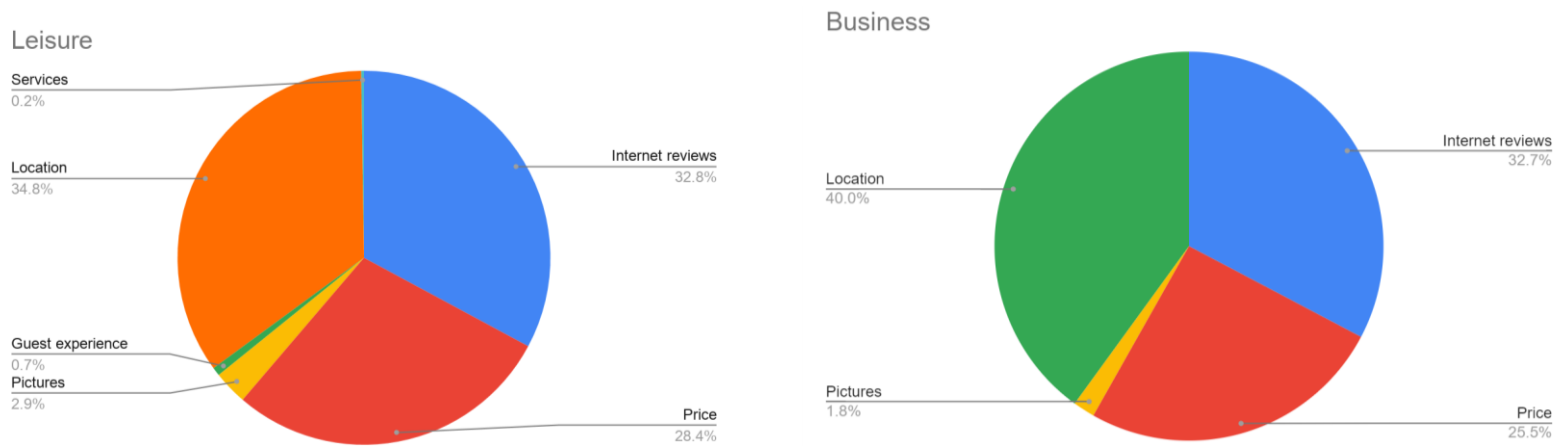


Figure 28 & 29. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Behavioural aspects. Own creation.

Then, it is noticed that the business profiles are more likely to search about the location of the hotel, being 40% of these respondents. Moreover, in both cases location, internet reviews and price are key aspects that they search before visiting a luxury hotel.

Besides the type of visit, an important aspect to comment is the loyalty to brands:

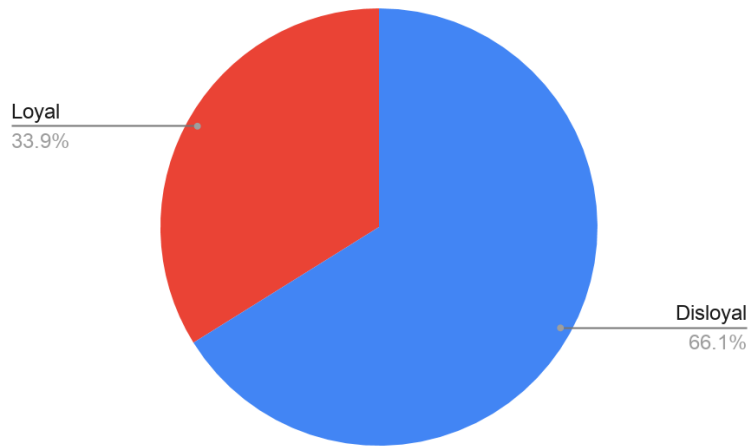
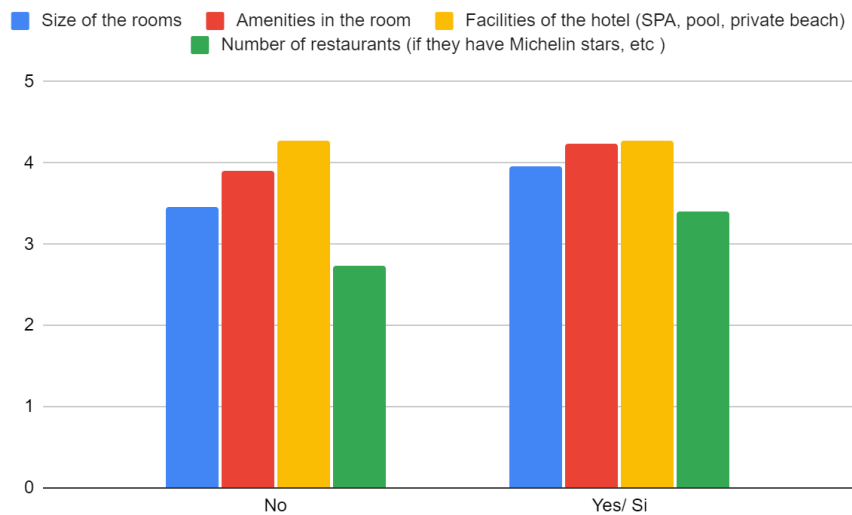


Figure 30. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Behavioural aspects. Own creation.

Results from figure 30 exhibit that most of the respondents who visit luxury hotels are disloyal to hotel brands, being 66.1% of the total and loyal represented by 33.9% of the respondents.

In addition, regarding the aspects that loyal to hotel brands care about, from the tangible and intangible aspects:



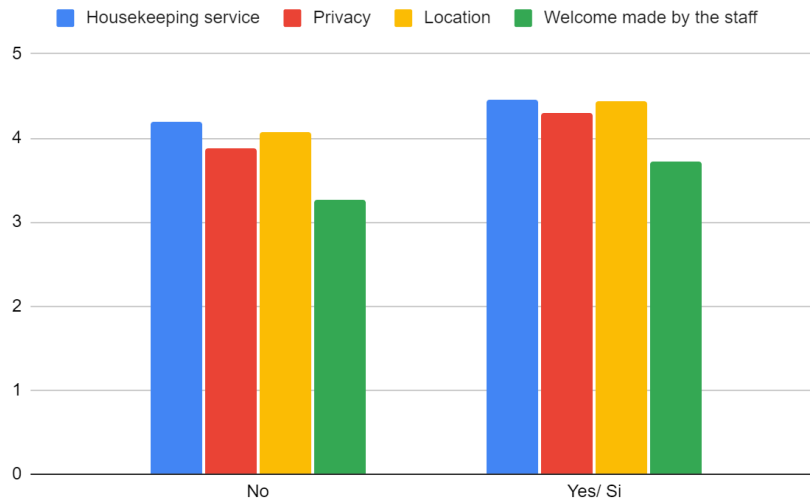


Figure 31 & 32. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Behavioural aspects. Own creation.

Those respondents who are not loyal to hotel brands are more likely to give more importance to the facilities and the housekeeping services. Additionally, those that are loyal to hotel brands tend to care more about the facilities and amenities in the room and the housekeeping service and location of the hotel. The least important aspect for both groups is the number of restaurants and the welcome made by the staff.

To sum up, there are different trends about which are the aspects that affect what clients in the luxury hotel industry care more about. This point is significant, as it reflects which are the aspects that they have expectations about, and it is possible to measure how hotels must create the best experience to fulfil those expectations and achieve excellence.

4.2. Findings objective 2: To assess how the cultural background of the clients affects the perception of excellence.

4.2.1. Cultural background affects the preferences of tangible and intangible aspects inside the hotel?

After analysing the 250 different responses from people of 30 different nationalities from all the continents the research arrives at the following findings about different tangible aspects of the hotel (hard product) and about the intangible aspects (soft product).

- Starting with the tangible aspects (hard product):

Results exhibit that from the size of the rooms the Asian people give a high importance to it with an average of 4.05 over 5. On the other hand, it is noticeable that the occidental people (European and American) are the ones that give less importance to this aspect with a punctuation of 3.59 over 5 and 2.85 over 5, respectively. And finally, the Middle East population gives to the size of the room a punctuation of 3.75 over 5, what situates them between Asian and the occidentals (European and American).

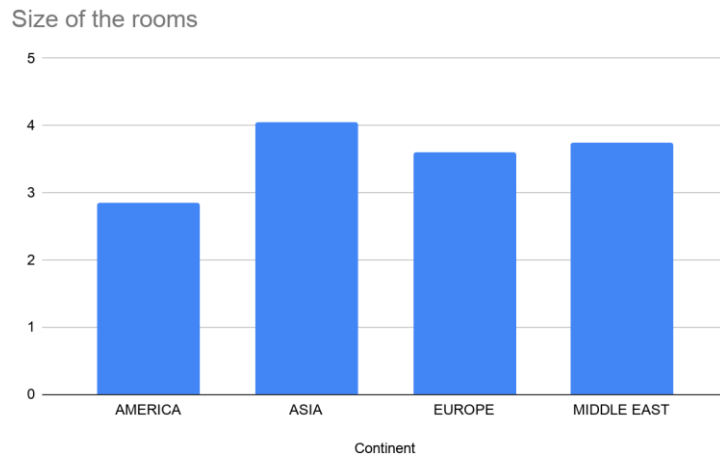


Figure 33. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background tangible aspects. Own creation.

It is necessary to also make a distinction between Spain and the rest of Europe to see if they have different preferences. In figure 34 the size of the rooms, the importance they gave to it is very similar, the rest of Europe gives a little bit of more importance to this aspect with a punctuation of 3.82 over 5 instead of Spain that gives a 3.57 over 5.

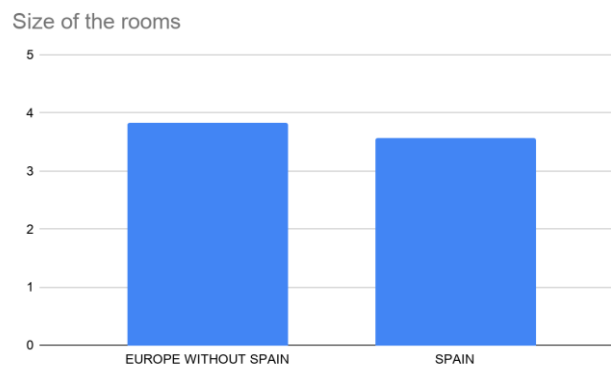


Figure 34. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background tangible aspects. Own creation.

The second tangible aspect analysed are the amenities in the room.

In figure 35, the Asian and the Middle East customers are the ones that give the highest importance to the amenities of the room with a punctuation of 4.55 over 5 and 4.5 over 5, respectively.

On the other hand, as happens in the figure above (the size of the rooms) the Europeans and the Americans are the ones that give less importance to the amenities in the room, with a punctuation of 3.96 over 5 and 3.57 over 5, respectively.

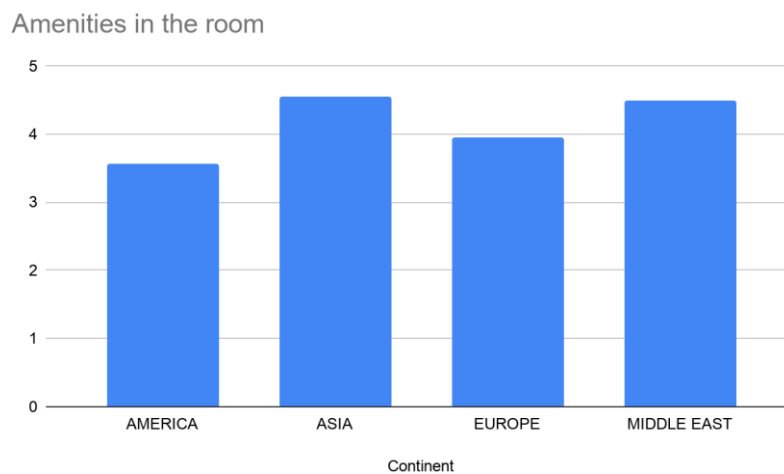


Figure 35. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background tangible aspects. Own creation.

The preferences of the Spanish people are almost the same as the rest of the European citizens, as it is showed in figure 36. They give a considerable importance to the amenities in the room with a punctuation of 3.95 over 5 when the rest of the Europe give a 4 over 5.

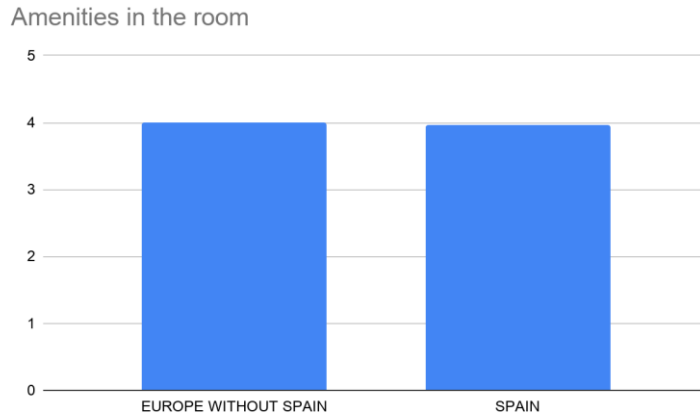


Figure 36. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background tangible aspects. Own creation.

Another important aspect important to analyse are the facilities of the hotel, in this aspect there are more discrepancies between the different cultural backgrounds than in the others, figure 37 exhibits that that the people from the Middle East give a high importance to this aspect with a punctuation of 4.81 over 5. But on the other hand, there are American citizens that gave only a punctuation of 3 over 5. Between them there are the European and the Asian citizens that give by contrast a punctuation of 3.84 over 5 and 4.3 over 5.



Figure 37. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background tangible aspects. Own creation.

In this aspect, it is remarkable that the Spanish citizens give significantly less importance to the facilities of the hotel with a punctuation of 3.79 over 5 than the rest of Europe that gives a punctuation of 4.35 over 5, as it is shown in figure 38.

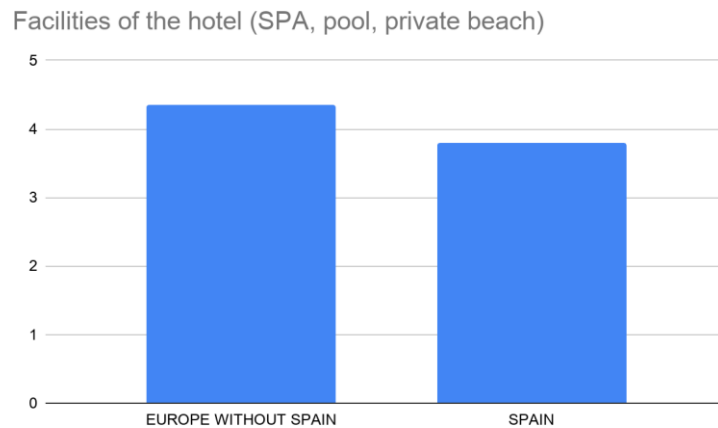


Figure 38. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background tangible aspects. Own creation.

The last but no least tangible aspect analysed is the importance that the customers give to the fact the hotel has good restaurants (Michelin stars, etc). In this case figure 39 exhibit that the Middle East customer tends to give to this aspect a higher importance than the other cultures with a punctuation of 4.12 over 5. Later it comes the Asian customers that also are more likely to give some importance to this tangible aspect with a punctuation of 3.45 over 5. Finally, the European and the American customers that usually give a low importance to this aspect with a punctuation of 2.83 over 5 and 2.71 over 5, respectively.

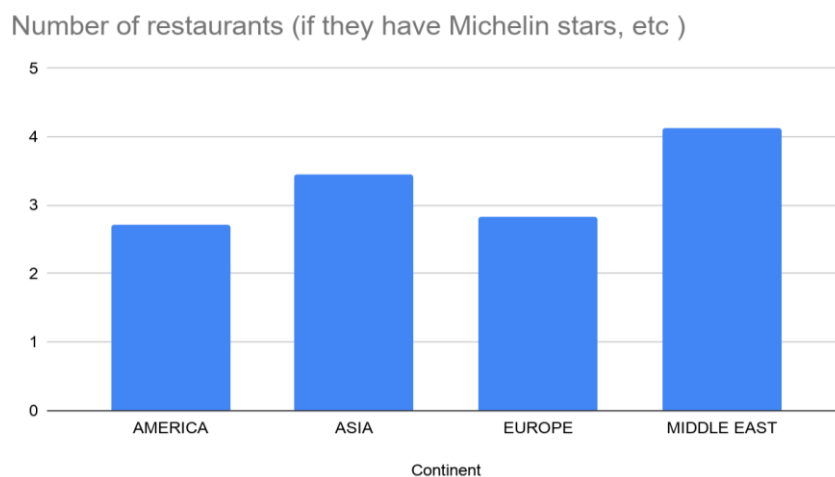


Figure 39. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background tangible aspects. Own creation.

In this last tangible aspect showed in figure 40, researchers found a significant difference between the importance that the rest of Europe gives to this aspect in comparison to Spain. The rest of Europe gives a punctuation of 3.35 over 5 which means they give importance to this aspect inside the hotel, but Spanish customers give a punctuation of 2.78 over 5 which makes that for them this aspect is not as important as the others.



Figure 40. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background tangible aspects. Own creation.

- After analysing in deep the tangible aspects (hard product) the next step is the intangible ones (soft product).

First, it is necessary to start with the importance that different cultures give to the housekeeping service. In figure 41, it can be observed that all of them give a big importance to the housekeeping service, but the ones that give it higher are the Middle East population with a punctuation of 4.68 over 5, followed by the Asian population that gives a punctuation of 4.5 over 5. Finally, the European and the American population that have given a punctuation of 4.25 over 5 and 4 over 5, respectively.

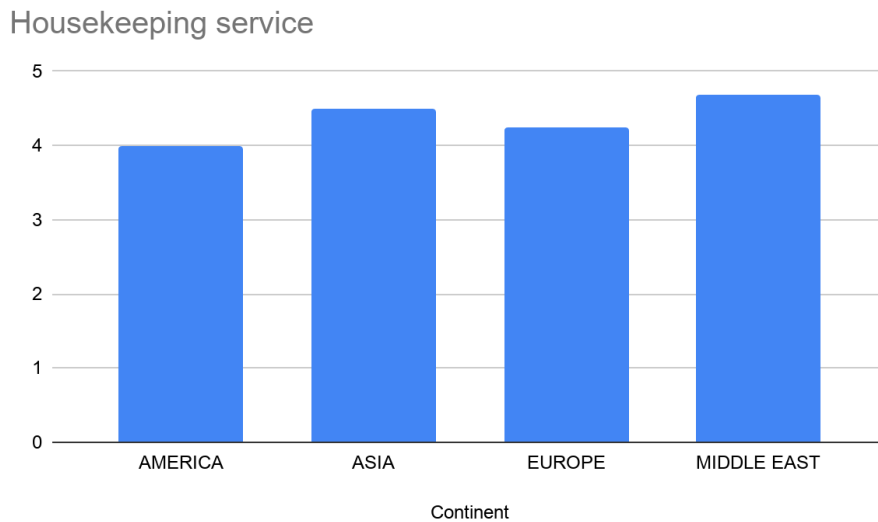


Figure 41. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background intangible aspects Own creation.

In the intangible aspects (soft product) showed in figure 42, there is also a comparison between the preferences of the Spaniards and the preferences of the rest of Europeans. In this case it is exhibited that the importance they give to the Housekeeping service is almost the same, with a little difference that shows that the Spaniards give a little more importance with a punctuation of 4.25 over 5, and the rest of Europe give a punctuation of 4.17 over 5.

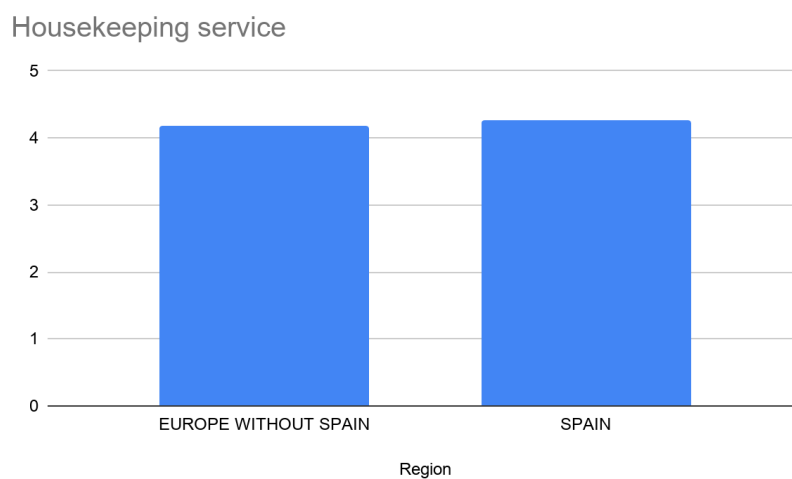


Figure 42. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background intangible aspects Own creation.

The second aspect analysed in figure 43, is the importance of privacy inside the hotels. In this aspect it is observed a little more discrepancy that in the first aspect studied. In terms of privacy, the ones that give to it more importance are also the Middle East population with a punctuation of 4.75 over 5. Followed by the Asians that give a punctuation of 4.55 over 5. The populations that give less importance are the Americans and the Europeans with a punctuation of 4 over 5 and 3.93 over 5, respectively.

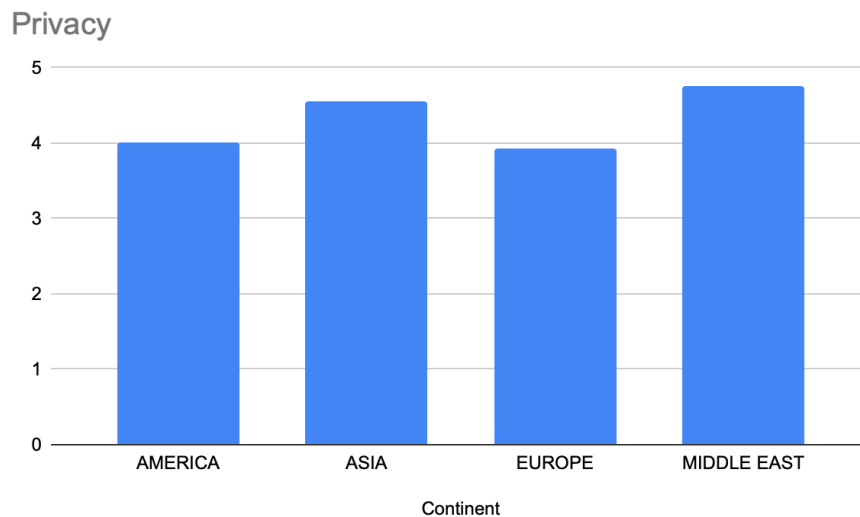


Figure 43. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background intangible aspects. Own creation.

In this aspect exhibited in figure 44, there is also more discrepancy between the Spaniards and the rest of Europe. The rest of Europe gives a notable importance to privacy with a punctuation of 4.35 over 5, while the Spaniards gives a punctuation of 3.9 over 5.

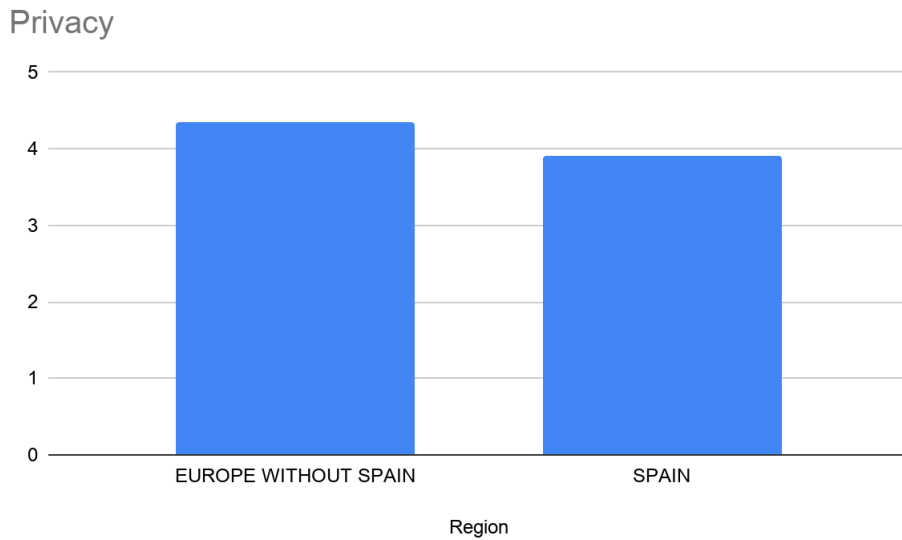


Figure 44. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background intangible aspects. Own creation.

Another important intangible aspect researched is the importance of location of the hotel, in figure 45 this aspect is important to all the populations except the Americans. The Middle East population, the Asians and the Europeans give a punctuation of 4.5 over 5, 4.4 over 5, and 4.11 over 5 respectively, while the Americans just give a punctuation of 3.57 over 5.

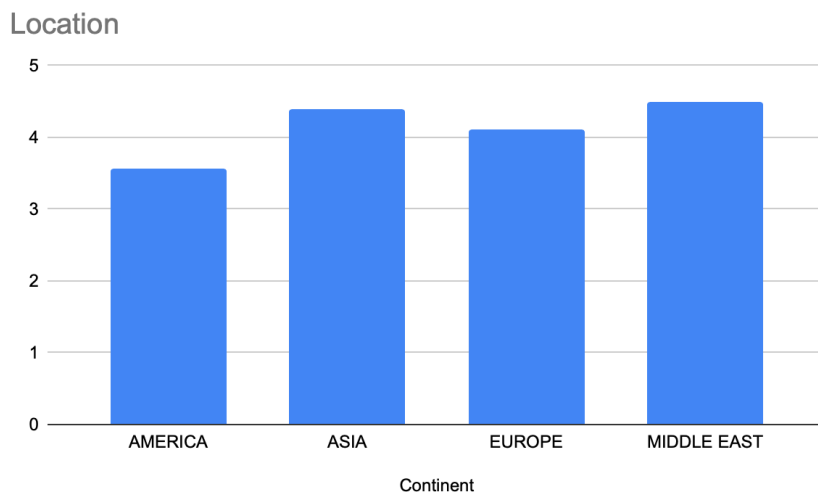


Figure 45. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background intangible aspects Own creation.

In terms of location, the discrepancy showed in figure 46 between the Spaniards and the rest of Europe is again small. The rest of Europe gives more importance with a punctuation of 4.41 over 5, while the Spaniards give a punctuation of 4.08 over 5.

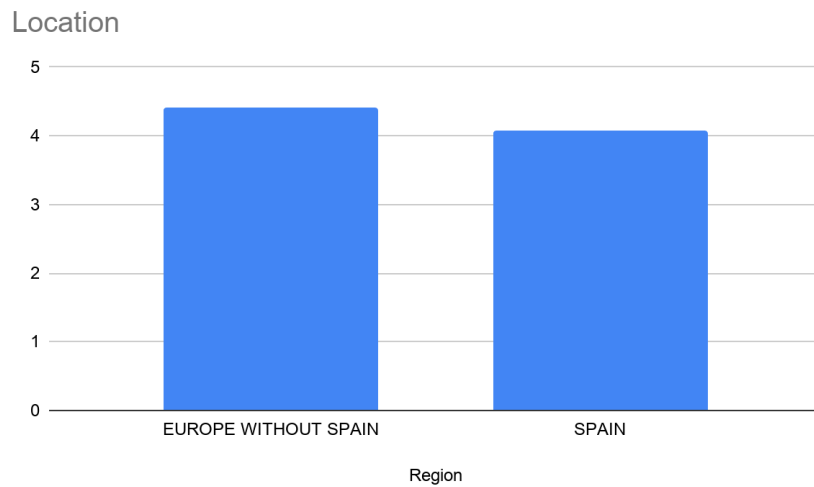


Figure 46. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background intangible aspects Own creation.

The last but no least intangible aspect researched is the importance that the customers give to the fact that they are welcomed by the staff, in this aspect the Asian population is the one that gives more importance in figure 47, with a punctuation of 4.05 over 5, followed by the Middle East citizens that give a punctuation of 3.68 over 5. The third ones that give more importance to this aspect are the Europeans that give a punctuation of 3.35 over 5, and the last ones are the Americans that give to this aspect a punctuation of 3 over 5.

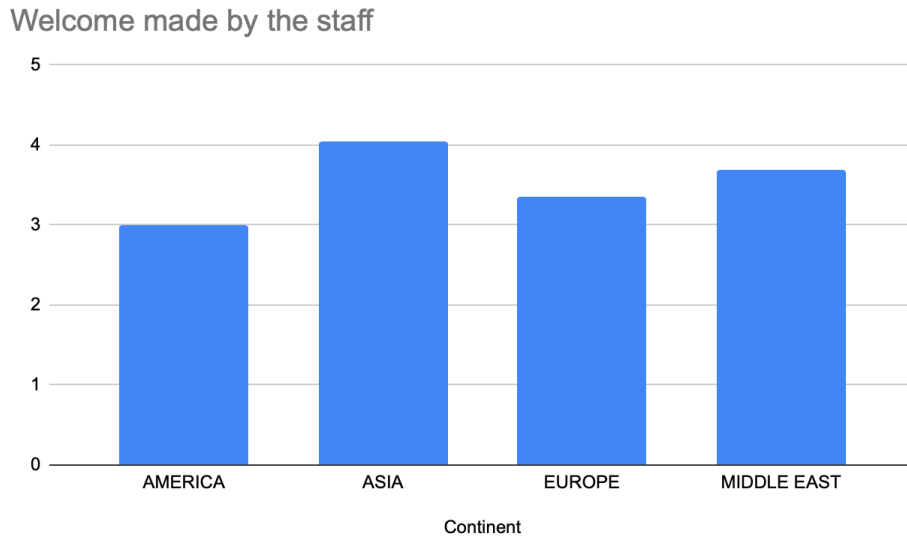


Figure 47. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background intangible aspects Own creation.

In this last tangible aspect exhibited in figure 48, the difference between the Spaniards and the rest of Europe is notorious, the Spaniards give to this aspect a punctuation of 3.28 over 5 while the rest of Europe give a punctuation of 4.11 over 5.

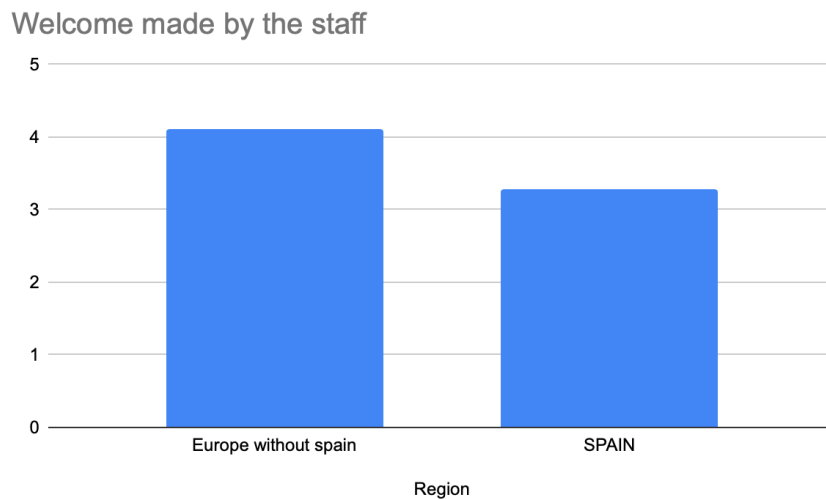


Figure 48. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Cultural Background intangible aspects Own creation.

After analysing all the data above, it can be concluded that:

The Americans prefer the intangible aspects (soft product) over tangible aspects (hard product), since they give to the intangible aspects a punctuation of 3.64 over 5 while they give a 3.03 over 5 to the tangible aspects.

The Asians prefer the intangible aspects (soft product) over tangible aspects (hard product), since they give to the intangible aspects a punctuation of 4.37 over 5 while they give a 4.08 over 5 to the tangible aspects.

The Europeans prefer the intangible aspects (soft product) over tangible aspects (hard product) because they give to the intangible aspects a punctuation of 3.91 over 5 while they give a 3.55 over 5 to the tangible aspects.

The population from the Middle East prefer the intangible aspects (soft product) over tangible aspects (hard product), because they give to the intangible aspects' punctuation of 4.40 over 5 while they give a 4.29 over 5 to the tangible aspects.

4.2.2. Does loyalty change depend on the cultural background?

Another aspect required to analyse in this degree thesis is how it affects the cultural background of the customers with all related to loyalty: if they are loyal or not, why they are loyal and to which brands are they loyal.

The first ones displayed in figure 49 are the Middle East population and it is shown that the 81.3% of the customers that answer the survey affirm that they are loyal to some brand.

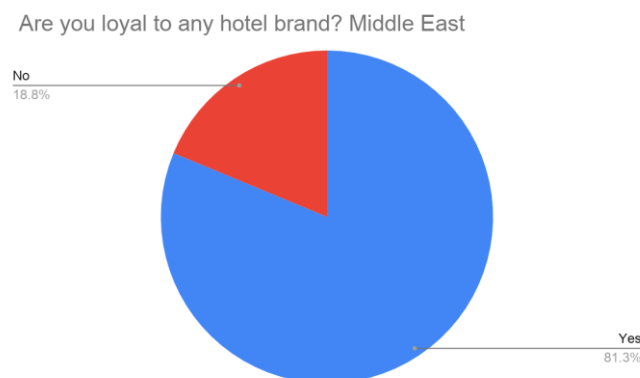


Figure 49. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background. Own creation.

The main reasons for their loyalty were the service, tradition, and exclusivity, as it can be observed in figure 50. The service was the most frequent reason with the 83.3% of the answers and then the tradition and the exclusivity with an 8.3%.

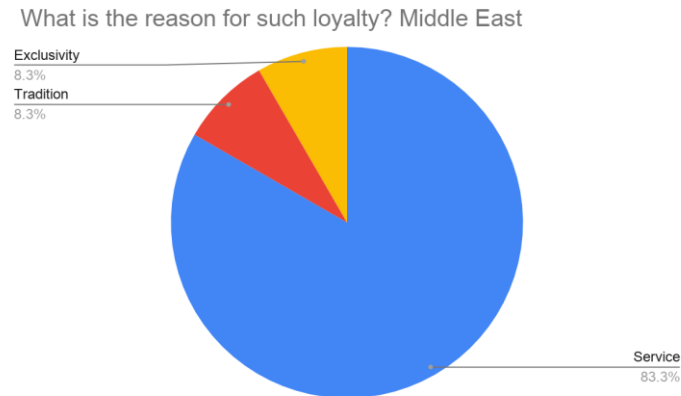


Figure 50. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

Figure 51 shows the following results about which brands are they loyal: the most repeated it is the loyalty to Ritz-Carlton and St. Regis with a 30.8% followed by Four seasons with a 23.1% and finally, it comes Kempinski and Bvlgari with a 7.7%.

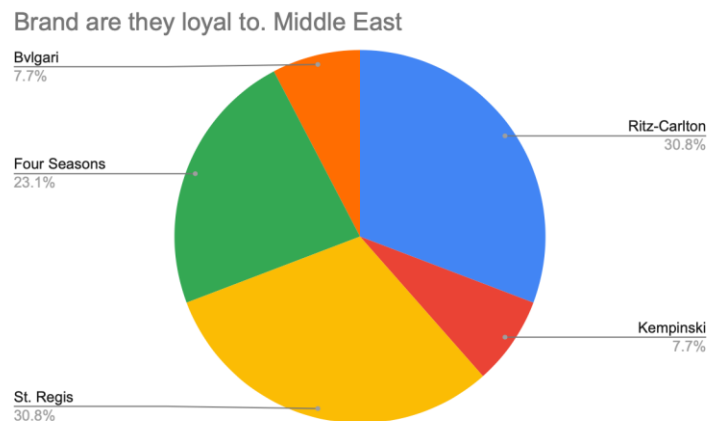


Figure 51. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

Secondly, in figure 52 the results of the Asian population are displayed, and it was found that the 52.4% of the population that answered the survey are loyal to a brand.

Asia Are you loyal to any hotel brand? Asia

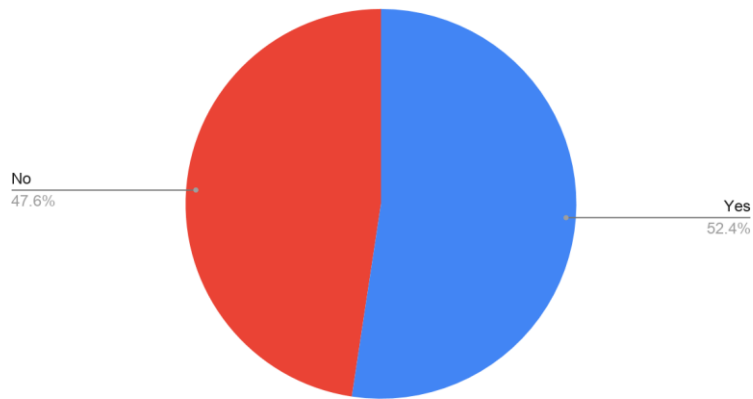


Figure 52. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

Furthermore, in figure 53 the reasons that stand out more are the service with 70% of the answers and the benefits that such loyalty provides to them with 30% of the answers.

What is the reason for such loyalty? Asia

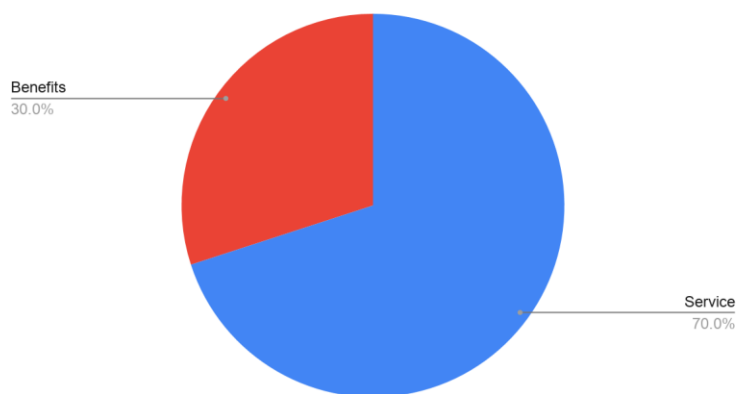


Figure 53. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

The brands with more loyalty inside the Asian population that responded the survey are according to figure 45: first of all, Shangri-La with a 36.4% of the responses, followed by the Mandarin Oriental with a 18.2% and in the third place a fifth draw between The Peninsula, Taj Hotels, Jetwing and Cinnamon Hotel chains, Hilton and Ritz-Carlton with a 9.1% of the responses.

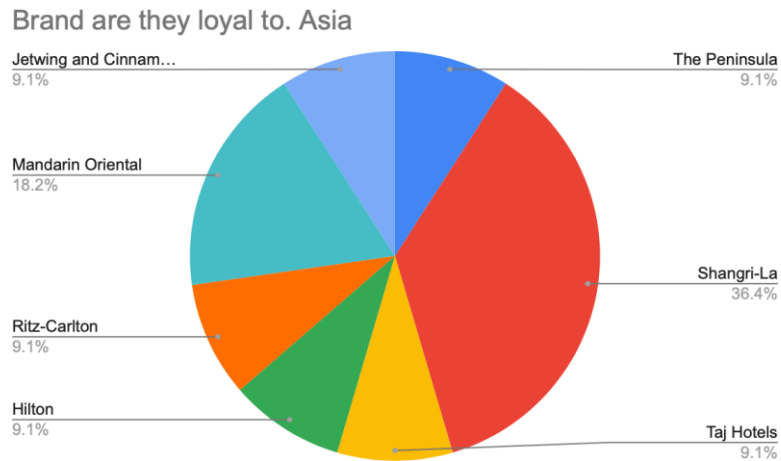


Figure 54. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

Hence, with respects to the what the American population replied to all the questions related to loyalty and it was exhibited that only 14.3% of the respondents were loyal to one brand in figure 55.

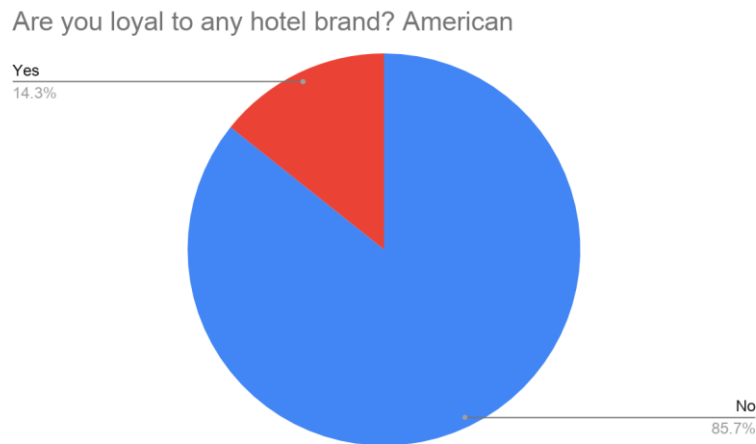


Figure 55. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

As the number of respondents that are loyal to a hotel brand is minimum, it was considered that there was not enough data to consider valid the responses to “the reasons for such loyalty” or “to what brands are they more loyal”.

Finally, the European responses were analysed, and in figure 56 it is exhibited that only the 29% of the people who respond to the online survey consider themselves loyal to a hotel brand.

Are you loyal to any hotel brand? Europe

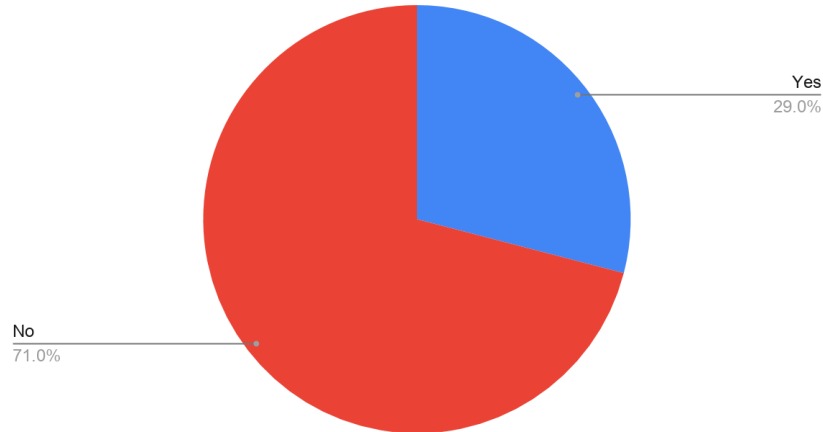


Figure 56. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background. Own creation.

In the reason for such loyalty from figure 57, there is more variety than in the other cultures but the one that stands out as in the other cultures with a 52.2% of the answers is the service. In this case, followed by the location and the exclusivity with a 15.2% and an 8.7%, respectively. Later it comes the benefits and the facilities with a 6.5% and the tradition with a 4.3%. The last ones are safety, familiarity and because it is their place of work with a 2.2%.

What is the reason for such loyalty? Europe

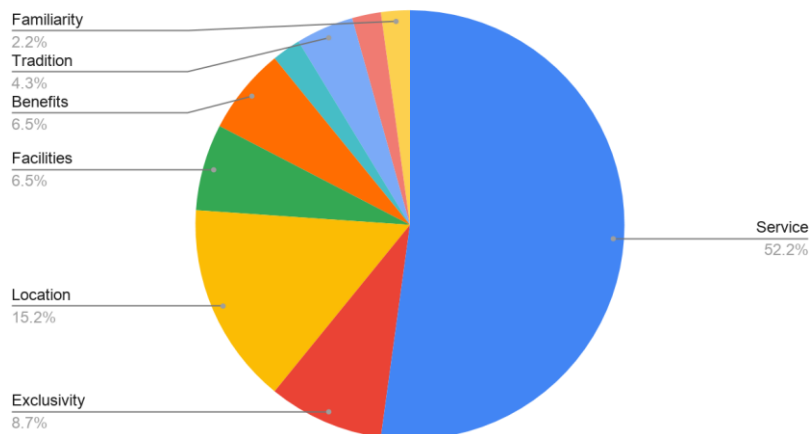


Figure 57. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background. Own creation.

Also, in Europe, there is a lot of variety about the brands, and in figure 58 the following results are displayed: Four seasons with a 17.2%; Ritz-Carlton and Hilton with a 13.8%; W brand with a 10.3%;

Leading hotels of the World, Marriott (as a brand no as a chain) and Barceló with a 5.2%; St. Regis, Gran Meliá, Shangri-La and Mandarin Oriental with a 3.4%; and finally, Kempinski and Rocco Forte with a 1.7%.

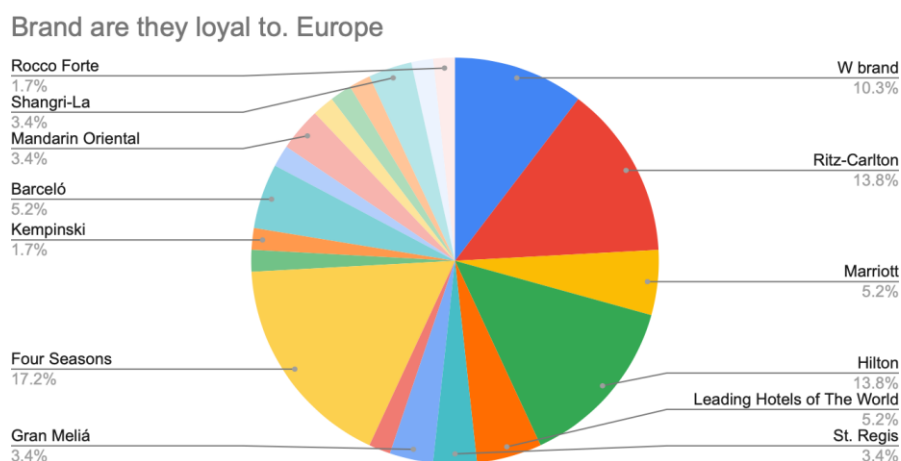


Figure 58. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background. Own creation.

To finish, figures 59 and 60 display a comparison about the results that the Spaniards and the rest of Europe have provided, where people from the rest of Europe are much more loyal than the Spaniards, with a 47.4% while the Spaniards only 27.2% of them are loyal.

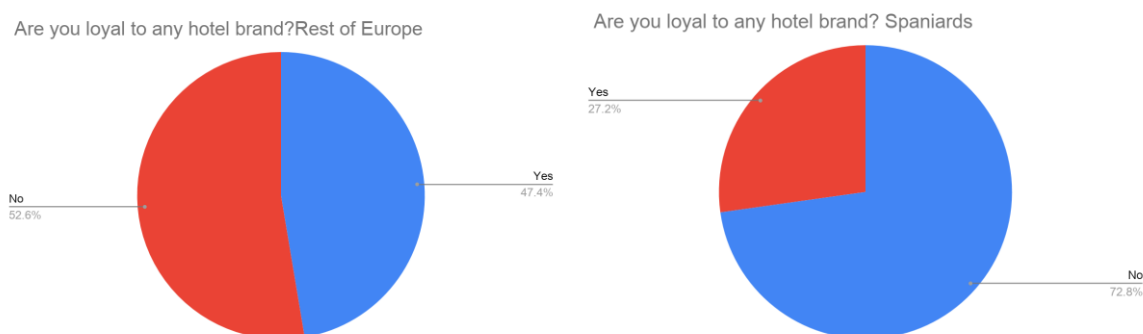


Figure 59 & 60. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background. Own creation.

The reason for such loyalty, in the rest of Europe showed in figure 61 is focussed on only 3 aspects: Service with 66.7%, and exclusivity and familiarity with 16.7%. However, the Spaniards in figure 62 give more varied reasons, as the rest of Europe they give a big importance to the service with a 50%,

later comes location with a 17.4%; facilities, benefits, and exclusivity with a 7.5%, then tradition with a 5% and finally safety and place of work with a 2.5%.

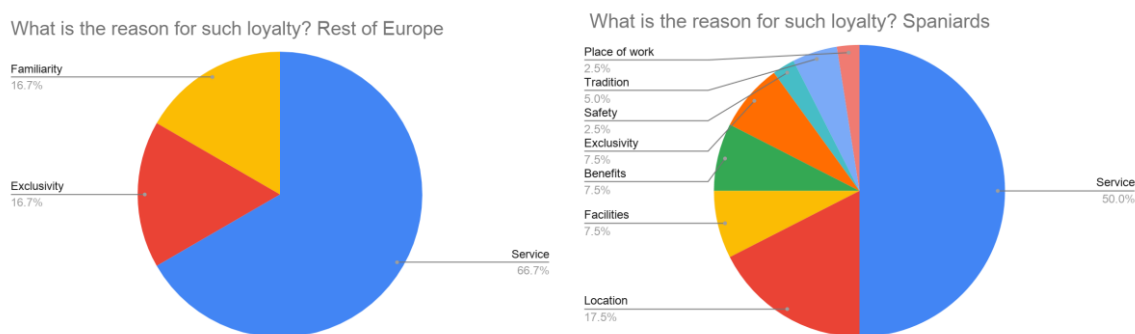


Figure 61 & 62. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background. Own creation.

In terms of what brands are they loyal, it is displayed in figure 63 that the rest of Europe is focalised in six brands: Ritz-Carlton with 33.3%, Four Seasons with 22.2% and W brand, Rocco forte, St Regis and Mandarin Oriental with 11.1%. In contrast, the Spaniards in figure 64 have significantly more variety with 14 different brands: Hilton and Four seasons with a 16.3%; Ritz-Carlton and W brand with a 10.2%; Leading hotels of the world, Marriott (as a brand not a chain) and Barceló 6.1%; Gran Meliá and Shangri-La with a 4.1% and finally St. Regis, Aman, Singita, Kempinski, Relais & Chateaux and Bvlgari with 2%.

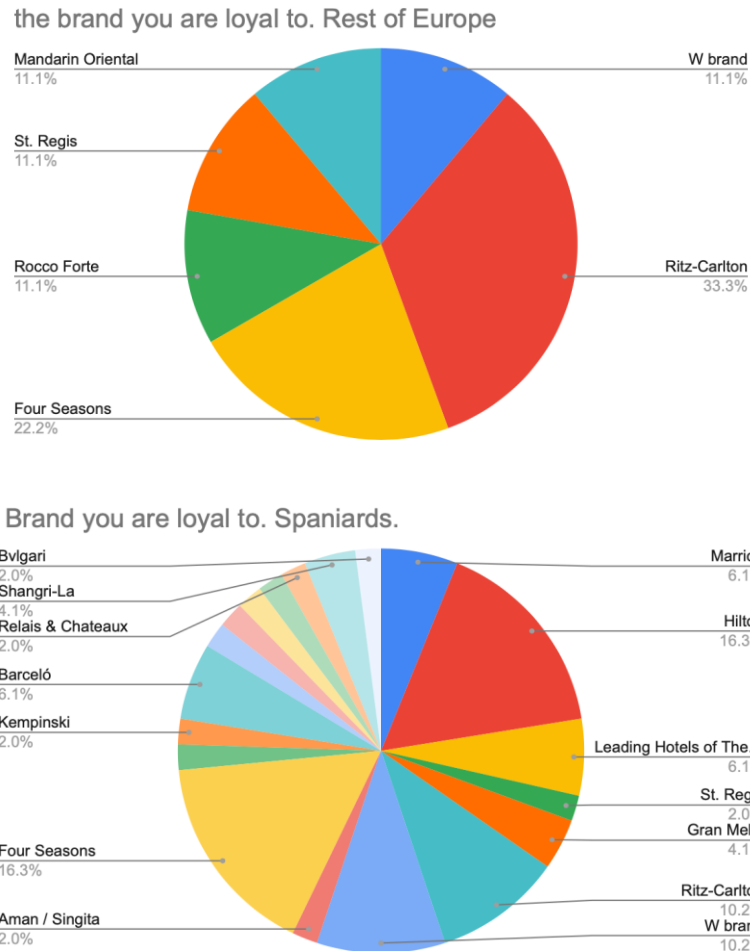


Figure 63 & 64. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background. Own creation.

4.2.3. Does the motivation of their trips change depend on their nationality?

Another aspect necessary to research in is if the motivation of the trip changes depending on the nationality of the traveller and results in figures 65, 66, 67 and 68 show:

- The Middle East population travels 75% of the time for leisure and 25% of the time for Business.
- The Americans travel 71.4% of the time for leisure and 28.6% of the time for Business.
- The Asian travel 90.5% of the time for leisure and 9.5% of the time for Business.
- The Europeans travel 87.5% of the time for leisure and 12.5% of the time for Business.

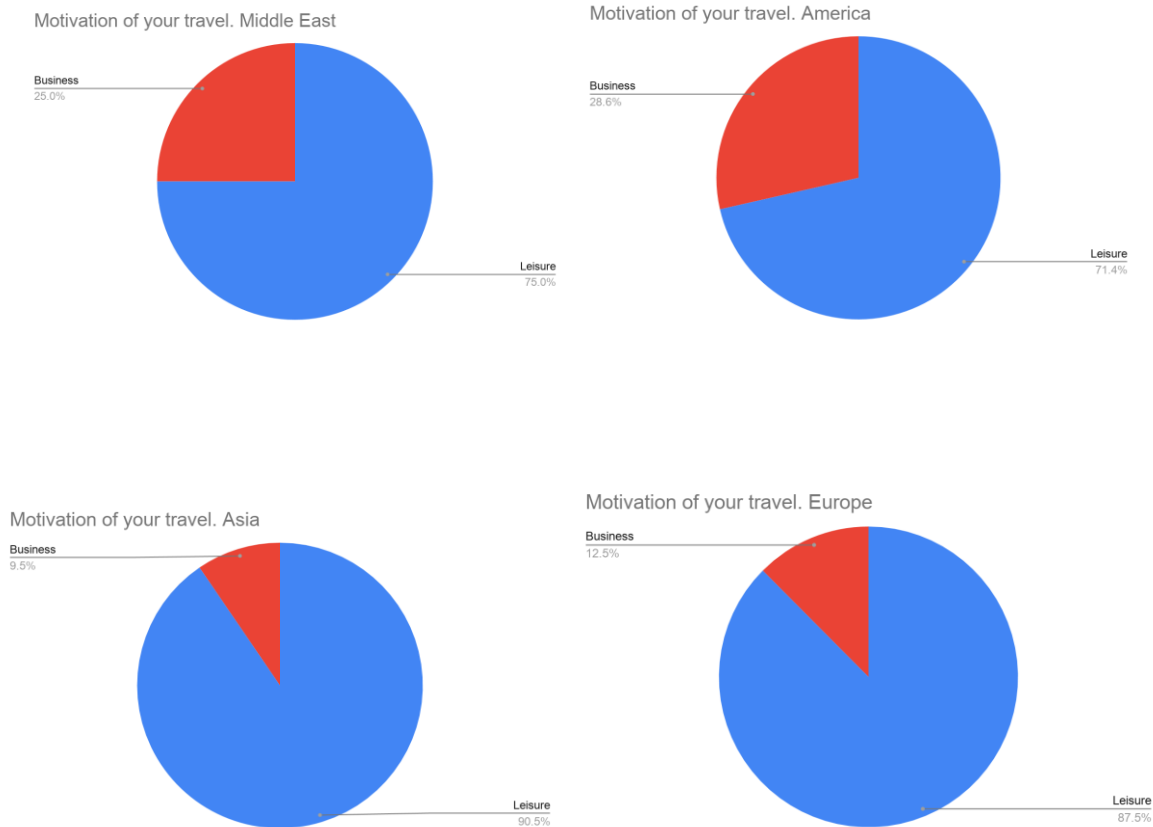


Figure 65, 66, 67 & 68. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background. Own creation.

It was additionally necessary to make a comparison between the motivation for travelling of the Spaniards and the rest of Europe. In figures 69 and 70 the following results are displayed:

- The Spaniards travel 86.9% of the time for leisure and 13.1% of the time for Business.
- The Rest of Europe travels 94.1% of the time for leisure and 5.9% of the time for Business.

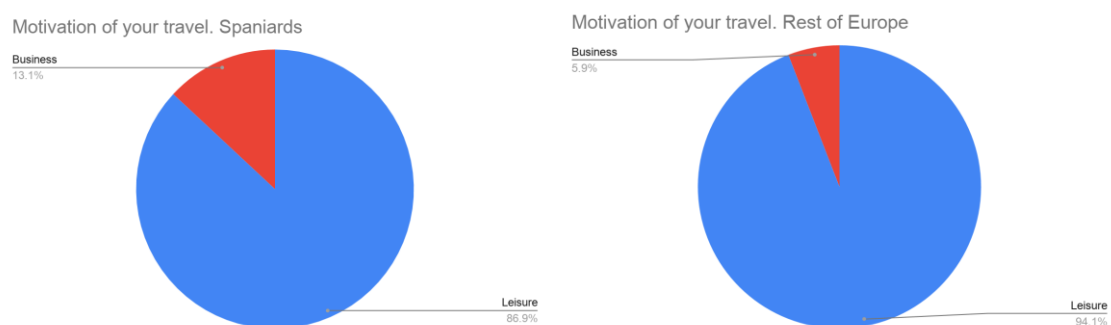


Figure 69 & 70. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

4.2.4. The information that the client searches about the hotel changes depending on the cultural background.

In the survey it was asked if respondents are used to search information of the hotel before travelling and what they search. After analysing the answers of the surveys made by the respondents the following findings were observed:

As exhibited in figure 71, in the Middle East the 46,7% of the population search internet reviews of the hotel, the 33.3% about the location, a 16.7% search about the price and the 3.3% search pictures.

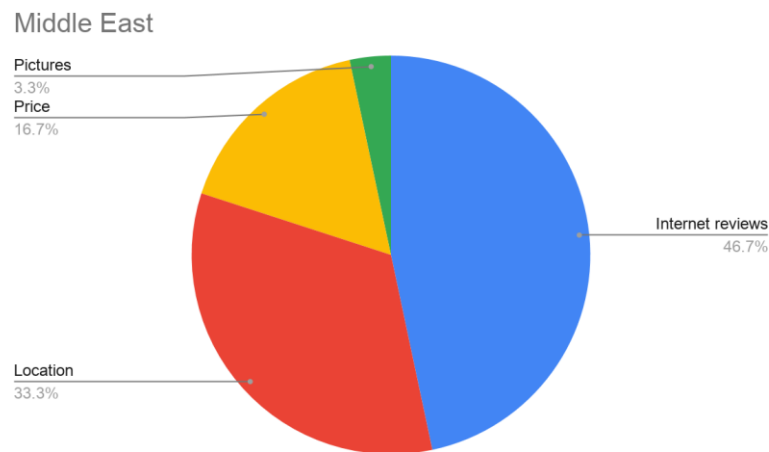


Figure 71. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Internet searching depending on the cultural background. Own creation.

In Asia, figure 72 shows that the 36.4% of the population search the location, the 31.8% read internet reviews, a 27.3% search about the price and the 4.5% search pictures.

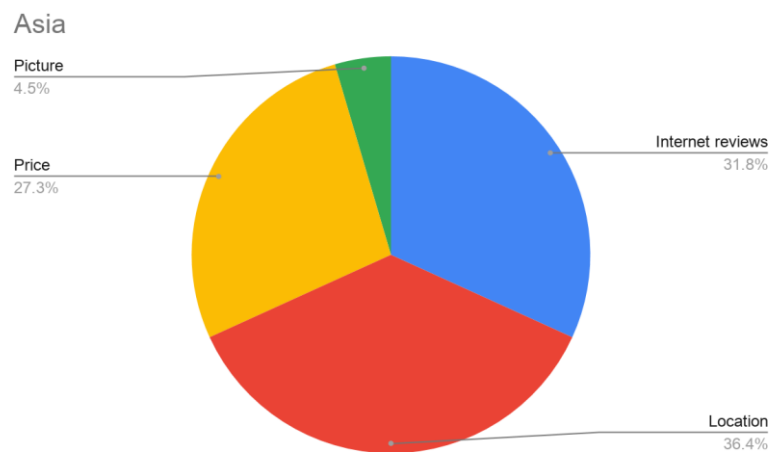


Figure 72. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

The following findings were resulted with the American population: the 42.9% search about the location, the 35.7% about the price and the 21.4% about internet review.

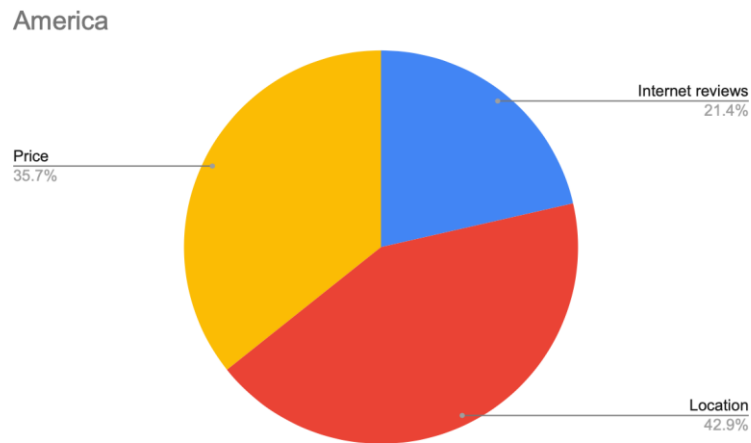


Figure 73. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

And last but not least it was observed that in Europe the 36.1 % population search about the location of the hotel, the 32.4% read internet reviews, the 29.9% search the price and the 1.6% look at pictures.

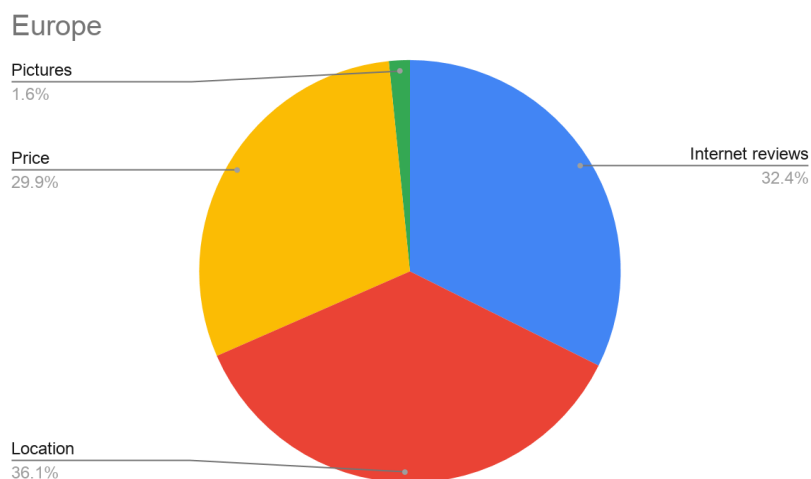


Figure 74. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

A comparison in figure 75 was also made between the rest of Europe and the Spaniards. In the rest of Europe, the 40% of the population search about the location of the hotel, the 33.3% about the price and the 26.7% read internet reviews. Otherwise in figure 76, in Spain the 35.8 % of the population search about the location of the hotel, the 32.8% read internet reviews, the 29.7% search the price and the 1.7% look at pictures.

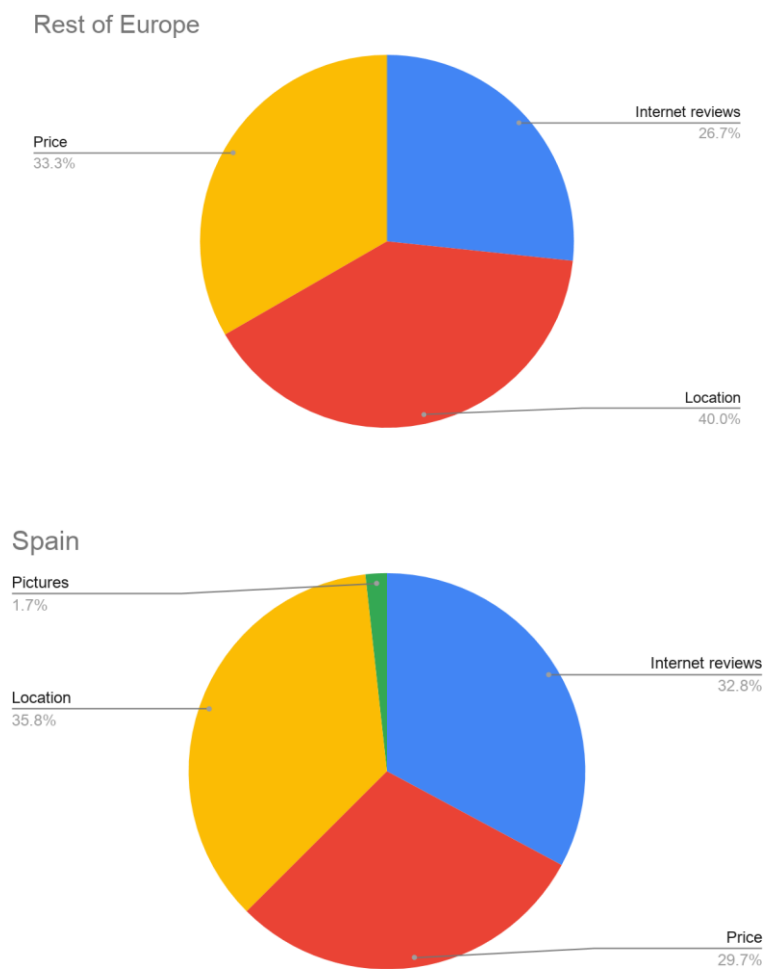


Figure 75 & 76. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Loyalty depending cultural background Own creation.

In conclusion, there are some trends with respect to how different cultural backgrounds affect the importance that each profile gives to each aspect of a luxury hotel. Then, companies should consider how expectations are created, focusing on satisfying them and go a step further in order to achieve an excellent product.

4.3. Findings objective 3: To measure consumer satisfaction and how to improve it.

With regards to consumer satisfaction, collecting and analysing customer value is key to understanding how a company is doing and it is essential to improve the current ways or methods to acquire that information (Phillips, 1999).

4.3.1. Age-Use of internet

An important data that the hotels need to know about their clients is if they use the internet to search information before choosing a hotel and it was found that 96.8% of the 251 respondents that visit luxury hotel search information about the hotel before going.



Figure 77. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Relation between Age and the use of internet. Own creation.

Responses were also analysed, and the following results were found:

As showed in figure 78, the 98.1% respondents between 18-25 years old use the internet before choosing a hotel.

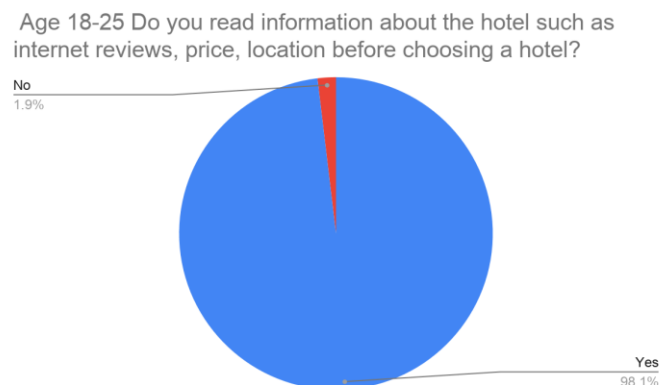


Figure 78. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Relation between Age and the use of internet. Own creation.

Additionally, as exhibited in figures 79 and 80, 100% of the respondents between the age of 26-35 years old and 36-45 years old use the internet before choosing a hotel.

Age 26-35 Do you read information about the hotel such as internet reviews, price, location before choosing a hotel?



Age 36-45 Do you read information about the hotel such as internet reviews, price, location before choosing a hotel?



Figure 79 & 80. Graphs from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Relation between Age and the use of internet. Own creation.

The 97.8% of the respondents between the ages of 46-65 use the internet before choosing a hotel.

Age 46-65 Do you read information about the hotel such as internet reviews, price, location before choosing a hotel?

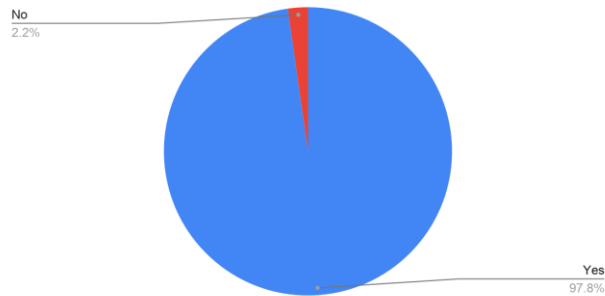


Figure 81. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Relation between Age and the use of internet. Own creation.

The 55.6% of the respondents with more than 65 years old use the internet before choosing a hotel.

Age +65 Do you read information about the hotel such as internet reviews, price, location before choosing a hotel?

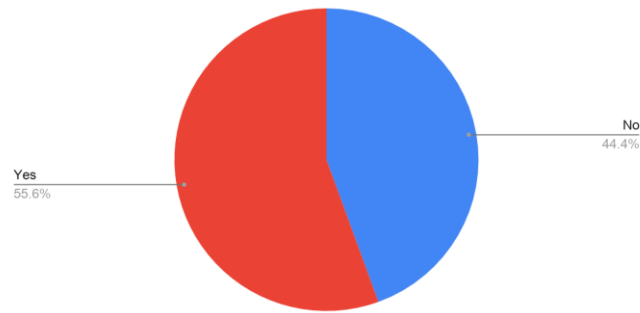


Figure 82. Graph from surveys to luxury hotel visitors. Relation between Age and the use of internet. Own creation.

With regards to consumer satisfaction, collecting and analysing customer value is key to understanding how a company is doing. Therefore, in this section it is explained the correlation between the age of the customer and how they use the internet before booking a hotel.

To sum up, along this chapter findings resulted from the online surveys have been successfully defined. Thus, the main ideas that researchers have obtained from them are:

- Findings for objective 1: To identify the different factors that impact on the customer perception of excellence.
 - Demographic: Each gender and age group have different expectations regarding the hard (tangible aspects) and soft (intangible aspects) products and loyalties.
 - Younger generations are more likely to prefer amenities as the most important tangible aspect, while older generations facilities.
 - Between 18 and 25 years old are very disloyal and between 26 and 35 years old are very loyal to hotel brands.
 - Younger generations prefer more juvenile brands, while older generations prefer less carefree brand styles.
 - Younger respondents added more juvenile brands to the answers
 - Males are more likely to give more attention to the facilities while women to the amenities of the room.

- Males and females tend to give more importance to the housekeeping service. However, privacy is more important for males than females.
- Males tend to be more loyal to hotel brands than females
- Females tend to be more loyal to some types of brand styles which meet their specific needs.
- Psychographic: Each group defined by the frequency that they visit luxury hotels (every time they travel & sometimes) has different expectations with regards to hard and soft products and loyalties.
 - Both groups care about the same tangible and intangible aspects of the visit.
 - Those who always visit luxury hotels tend to be more loyal to hotel brands than respondents who sometimes go to luxury hotels.
- Behavioural: Different conducts that visitors to luxury hotels have, from the business/leisure and brand loyalty points of view have been explained.
 - Visitors with a leisure motivation tend to give more importance to the facilities of the hotel, such as a private beach, pool, spa...
 - Business profiles are inclined to give more importance to the amenities of the room.
 - Business profiles are more likely to care more about the location of the hotel and both profiles give attention to the housekeeping service.
 - Business profiles are inclined to search about the location of the hotel.
 - In both cases location, internet reviews and price are key aspects that they search before visiting a luxury hotel.
 - Most of the respondents who visit luxury hotels are disloyal to hotel brands.
 - Those respondents who are not loyal to hotel brands are more likely to give more importance to the facilities and the housekeeping services.
 - Those that are loyal to hotel brands tend to care more about the facilities and amenities in the room and the housekeeping service and location of the hotel.

- Findings objective 2: To assess how the cultural background of the clients affects the perception of excellence.
 - All the cultures prefer intangible aspects rather than the tangible ones.
 - In terms of loyalty, there were more discrepancies between the cultures. In the Middle East, the 81.3% are loyal, in Asia the 52.4%, in America the 14.3% and in Europe the 29%. Also, there are discrepancies between the rest of Europe where the 47.4% loyal and the Spaniards where the 27.2% are loyal.
 - The motivation of the trips of all the cultures in their majority are for leisure.
 - The four aspects that they search more on the internet are: The location of the hotel, read internet reviews, check the price, and look for pictures.

- Findings objective 3: To measure consumer satisfaction and how to improve it.
 - From 18 to 65 years old more than 97.8% of the people search information on the internet. However, in the group of people with +65 only 55.6% of the respondents search it.

Finally, in the below discussion researchers also proceed to explain how hotels can improve the customer satisfaction by applying the findings explained above (in the three different objectives).

4.4. Discussion

After explaining objectively step by step the results of the survey answering each of the research objectives, in this section detailed explanations and discussion is provided based on the findings of this research, comparing them with the findings of other scientific papers, explaining the difficulties the researchers had with the survey and finally expound examples of how the findings are essential for companies to improve their performance.

As McCombes (2019) states, the discussion is what the researchers have used to develop the meaning, the importance, and the relevance of the results of the survey.

As it has been mentioned throughout this degree thesis, the main goal of this research is to understand the main factors that customers perceive as excellence within the luxury hotel industry. Then, it is essential to compare how other authors have defined these factors with the ones that findings from this paper show.

4.4.1. Authors' contrasts

According to Dash, Kiefer and Paul (2020), younger profiles have a special point of view about how they perceive service quality. They focus more on brands as being part of a service, as findings show that these customers relate more to juvenile brand identities. In addition, it is important to highlight the trend as Ganesan-Lim, Russell-Bennett and Dagger (2008) showed, which manifests that age has a big impact on how customers perceive service quality.

In other respects, results show that those who have enough incomes to always visit luxury hotels and those who have enough to sometimes visit them, they all care the same for the aspects of the hard and soft products of the hotel experience. Therefore, this fact contradicts what Schieff (1993) stated about how the level of income of a customer completely affects the way that the consumer perceives a service. This fact may have changed because nowadays visiting luxury hotels has been normalized and the globalization of education, which Farley (1964) supposed as a big gap for people to have more information about the service, before visiting a hotel. Thus, there are more people that sometimes go to luxury hotels and they have the same expectations about the service that they are going to receive. Moreover, following the results, customers who always consume this product do not seek for more service quality as Ganesan-Lim *et al.*, (2008) confirmed.

From the surveys undertaken, the researchers have observed that business profiles are more likely to care more about the location of the hotel, an idea that is supported by Lavanchy (2018)'s research, as they need to visit a hotel that is close to where they are going to work. Additionally, the results also show that these customers are inclined to look for the location of the hotel prior to visiting it. Additionally, as Lavancy (2018) affirmed, findings demonstrate that business profiles are inclined to give more importance to the amenities of the room. Furthermore, according to these results, leisure clients tend to give more importance to the facilities of the hotel, such as a private beach, pool, spa...; this fact is confirmed by Lavanchy (2018), who expressed that facilities are one of the keys for the success for this kind of guests. However, the researchers have observed that both leisure and business clients have similar key aspects while they search before visiting a luxury hotel internet reviews and price. This fact denies what Hoang (2014) stated about leisure clients being more price sensitive and focusing more on reviews, as business visitors also do.

Hence, like Rather and Sharma (2016) explained that brand loyalty is essential as loyal clients make the profitability of service providers such as luxury hotels increase (Reichheld, 1996). In addition, commitment is the key component for establishing and maintaining a long-term relationship with business partners (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Geyskens, Steenkamp *et al.*, 1996; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Wherefore, the researchers have observed that most of the respondents who visit luxury hotels are non-loyal to hotel brands, which is very negative for this sector.

Regarding how customer's cultural backgrounds may affect the perception of the services provided by hotels, every culture has their own values, which finally determines the way that consumers perceive those service attributes (Mariani, Di Fatta and Di Felice, 2019). This is shown when the researchers analysed the score that each culture attributes to the different tangible and intangible aspects. The researchers found out that every culture gives a different score to each aspect.

Therefore, managers have to understand and analyse them to delete the gap between the expectations and the final perception (Mariani, Di Fatta and Di Felice, 2019), because as Riddle, D. (1992) states, those businesses that can take advantage of cultural factors, are able to create competitive advantages. One example of a company that takes advantage of this cultural factor is Shangri-la, they apply the Asians preferences and are reflected when 36.4% of Asians are loyal to them.

Otherwise, it is necessary to focus on how a cultural identity will affect the customer perception considering the service of luxury hotels. In the findings the researchers show how all the cultures have the same main reason for the loyalty to a company: The service. But after, they choose different chains as Shangri-la, Ritz Carlton, W hotels, brands that provide to the customer excellence service, but with a different interpretation of what excellence service is.

Furthermore, even though there are trends to the Western values and modern changes in the Asian customer behaviours, the Asian context has endured robustly. Therefore, Western customers have dissimilar cultural values than their Asian equivalents (Kugler, Ralph, 1998). This is demonstrated in the findings where the researchers found that the biggest differences in all the topics the researchers speak about (tangible and intangible aspects, loyalty, etc) were between the Asian and the Americans and in some cases with the Europeans (both with western values).

The researchers have to take into account that the perceptions of personalized service are also affected by the customer's cultural background (Mattila, 1999). The researchers found out that to the population from Asia, the aspect they take more into account is the respect of their privacy, but to the population of the Middle East what is more important are the facilities of the hotel. In contrast, the Europeans and Americans think that the most important is the Housekeeping service. These are facts that the hotel has to take into account when they are planning how to provide a personalized service to each of their clients.

Among consumer satisfaction theories, some authors together with Parasuraman and his colleagues determine service quality as the gap between service perceptions and consumer expectations (Vinagre and Neves, 2008). This means that applying all mentioned above you cannot treat all your clients the same way, because all of them have different expectations. Subsequently, if you want to have all of them satisfied providing to them the same service, the result you will reach is that most of your clients will leave the hotel disappointed and with no intentions to come back or to provide to you their loyalty.

4.4.2. Managerial implications

When viewed through the lens of companies, these findings have some managerial implications. They give businesses the opportunity to create buyer personas, according to Aquino and Filgueiras (2005), buyer personas are users created to represent behaviours and motivations. They will effectively help them to target different market segments from the luxury sector, as the researchers will understand their expectations so that luxury hotels can fulfil them and achieve excellence.

4.4.2.1. Demographic factors

On the one hand, one of the main factors that affect how customers perceive excellence are demographics. Subsequently, businesses are able to create profiles, considering the results with respect to how these factors affect their expectations of the hotel experience.

For example, when a hotel wants to create an excellent service for a younger market, they should consider that they have more expectations about amenities regarding the tangible aspects, so these amenities should focus on this target, so they could satisfy their needs. Furthermore, they tend to be more disloyal than other age groups to hotel brands and they prefer those brands to have a juvenile or careless brand identity. Then, hotels who want to target this market should focus on the amenities provided and their brand identity. In addition, females also tend to give more importance to the amenities than males and females also are more likely to be loyal to some types of brand styles which meet their specific needs. Hence, in order to target the female market, hotels should focus on amenities and brand styles that satisfy their wants.

One luxury hotel brand which currently focuses on both targets is W hotels. According to W Hotels from wonderland to worldwide (2020), born in 1998 they were able to break the old luxury norms and create a new experience based on the passion around design, fashion, fuel and music and the Whatever/Whenever guest experience. This brand identity finally attracts dynamic people who have a carefree mindset, like millennials. Thus, both targets identify this brand experience as excellence

while visiting a luxury hotel and if other hotels use it as a model, they will be able to achieve that excellence for them.

4.4.2.2. Cultural background factors

On the other hand, another factor that affects how customers perceive excellence is the client's cultural background, using the findings companies can create the profile of the most representative cultures in the world (Asian, European, American or from Middle East).

For example, if one hotel wants to be focused on the Asian sector, they have to know that usually Asians give more importance to the intangible aspects (soft product) of the hotel, especially the privacy. This is the most important aspect of the hotel for them. Also, they give a big importance to the tangible aspects (hard product), where the researchers can highlight the amenities of the room. Then, the hotel will need to create spaces where the privacy of the client prevails before everything, with distance between the doors of the rooms, etc. In addition to fulfilling the room with amenities that the customer can use in the day by day, at the end small details create a big difference.

The hotel also needs to know that the 52.4% of Asians are loyal to a brand and that their main reasons for such loyalty are the service and the benefits. Hence, the hotel will need to provide them an excellent service during their stay, and also give them many rewards for coming back so that they can increase the chances of creating loyalty or maintaining it.

To continue, another important aspect to take into account is the motivation of their trips, the 90.5% of the total respondents affirm that they travel for leisure, so the hotels would have to create an offer of different activities of leisure, where the customer can enjoy their vacations that is the main objective of his trip.

The last aspect a hotel has to analyse is what his potential clients search on the internet, in the case of Asians the researchers saw that the 36.4% search about the location; the 31,8% read internet reviews; the 27.3% check price; and the 4.5% look at the pictures. Subsequently, the hotel, in order to attract them will have to explain with details the location of the hotel, with indications to go to the city centre and the principal's attractiveness of the city. The hotel will also have to control what the previous clients say about them on the internet to answer all the complaints and correct them. All this without forgetting the importance of the price, the hotel should show the price of the room explaining what is included and the most important show the offers. And finally, it is also a good idea to put pictures of the hotel so the customer can get an idea of how the hotel is.

As an example, a chain of luxury hotels that accomplish most of the requirements mentioned above is Shangri-la, in the findings the researchers show how the 36.4% of the Asians, that are loyal to a brand, choose Shangri-la. The quality dimensions that Shangri-la hotels offer including intangibility & tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy affect positively to their brand image, the customer perceived value and the customer satisfaction (Xie and Chaipoopirutana, 2014).

4.4.3. Biased results from the survey

Otherwise, as this paper is using the opinion of the respondents in order to have results, those results may be biased. Even though the sample was big enough to have different opinions, some specific cases were quite difficult to analyse. The sample of people who are more than 65 years old and Americans were hard to reach.

On the one hand, those that are more than 65 years old do not usually use the internet, so they did not know how to answer the online survey. In order to overcome this problem, some surveys were taken in person. On the other hand, Americans were a difficult profile to arrive at, as most contacts the researchers could reach through social media were Europeans, Asians and people from the Middle East.

Thus, using this type of research is frequent to have some biased results and it is essential to take into account this fact and analyse them (Farzanfar *et al.*, 2017).

To sum up, after comparing the results with those presented by other academics, the researchers observed that the degree thesis has added more necessary information about the factors that affect customer's perception of excellence in the luxury hotel industry. The results' managerial implications for this sector have been exemplified too, using some of the factors resulted from the research. Furthermore, the researchers explained some reasons why some of the results delivered may be biased, in order to consider this fact.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Previously, there was an analysis of the literature review creating a general context of what other authors have studied about this topic. Authors have generally studied each of the factors and theories defined throughout this research, however they did not put together all of them in order to give a final idea about how all of these factors affect each customer in a different manner.

In addition, after explaining some managerial implications that these findings have for the luxury hotel industry. It is necessary to present some general conclusions about the study evolution, limitations and further research and some final recommendations for companies and researchers.

Then, in this chapter some conclusions, limitations and future recommendations are presented to have the final ideas about the topics researched during this degree thesis.

This research has mostly focused on analysing about what service quality means, considering different definitions as the one given by Parasuraman, *et al.* (1985), who define it as the gap between the service perceptions and consumer expectations. Likewise, other theories and definitions provided a general context about how the research problem was going to be covered.

The main goal of this research was to contribute to the limited managerial and academic knowledge about how to create an excellent luxury service and to show how efficiently companies can consider factors that affect the way each consumer perceives excellence.

Otherwise, factors that affect the consumer perceptions of excellence in the luxury hotel industry were defined as demographic, psychographic, behavioural, and cultural background of the customer. Hence, caused by these factors, each customer has different expectations about what they consider as excellence within the luxury hotel sector.

Therefore, factors were analysed and researched using an online survey, from where findings show different ways with which companies can create different profiles to target them and create an excellent product and experience for them. Thus, it is mandatory for companies to understand them to create and preserve devoted consumers (Min, Min and Emam, 2002).

This research seems to align with what other authors have already stated about how each of these aspects affect the customer perceptions of the service, but these findings have successfully focused the target on luxury profiles and their perceptions on excellence, regarding the hard and soft products of the service. The luxury hotel industry has already been studied but not with this focus due to its

broadness and difficulty. Additionally, analysing the perceptions on excellence is also a broad topic, but these findings show how perceptions from the luxury hotel sector are affected by different factors and they also depend on the perception on the hard or soft product of the visit.

Lastly, the research has provided a deep analysis of each customer profile that was proposed, which enables luxury hotels to consider expectations and perceptions inherent to such personas, so that they may be better suited to cover the existing gaps and move one step further in creating an excellent experience.

5.1. Limitations and further research

With the globalization of the world in the 21st century, free access to the internet and to the information, the limitations the researchers had during the research were few, but they still exist.

The work experience in the luxury hotel industry of the researchers allowed them to create a network of contacts without which it would have been impossible to carry out this degree thesis. However, unfortunately the researchers do not have extensive contacts everywhere so one of the biggest limitations that the investigators have had, has been the access to the American market, the representation received has not been what researchers wanted.

The method the researchers used to collect all the information was an online survey, so another important limitation that the researchers have had has been the access to people over 65 years old because they do not usually use the internet to solve surveys.

The researchers found out that to the population from Asia, the aspect they take more into account is the respect of their privacy, but to the population of the Middle East what is more important are the facilities of the hotel. In contrast, the Europeans and Americans think that the most important is the Housekeeping service. These are facts that the hotel must take into account when they are planning how to provide a personalized service to each of their clients.

The results mentioned in the paragraph above can be seen as a limitation because they generalize an entire population and can be some people that have different preferences, for example could be some Asians that do not give a big importance to their privacy or some middle east citizens that do not care about the facilities of the hotel; but the researchers wanted to create profiles models of the different types of customer analysing the different factors (demographic, psychographic, behavioural, and cultural background) that can affect to their preferences, so the hotels that want to be focus in one type of client can use those profiles models and adapt the hotel to their preferences.

The last and but not least limitation the research had during this degree thesis was the COVID-19 factor, the world pandemic impede the researchers to make face to face interviews to the people affected by the different factors analysed in the thesis, so the researchers could have gotten more in deep in the preferences of the customer and have created more concrete profiles.

5.2. Recommendations

Finally, it is necessary to concrete some final recommendations for both researchers and companies, to specify how future researchers should cover the study of the different topics analysed during this research, and the managerial suggestions to not only luxury hotels but also different companies from the tourism and service sectors.

5.2.1. Researchers

During the last decades, customer service has been gaining recognition as the path to achieve an excellent service. As it has been mentioned throughout this degree thesis, the main objective was to specify which were the factors affecting on the customer perception on excellence in the luxury hotel industry.

Therefore, future research should focalise on:

- Analysing this industry in more specific locations, to see if its implications cover different tourist destinations.
- Future researchers should make interviews and an investigation at street level. Because due to the pandemic situation mentioned before, researchers did not have the chance to go a step further and directly face the stakeholders of the research.
- To reach older profiles, researchers should also consider other ways to set foot on this target and increase the validity of the results.

It is also necessary to make more efforts in researching more each factor to specify more, as each factor is very broad and covers a lot of different profiles and characteristics.

Future research should additionally consider managerial opinions about what they consider about these topics and how they face them in their everyday business.

As this investigation covered customer perceptions, results could be used for other studies about the service industry in general and other tourism fields, such as destinations, or non-luxury accommodations.

5.2.2 Business

In the hotel industry every day is increasing more the demand of a personalized service, so that if a hotel wants to increase their clients and make them loyal, it needs to know the type of client that they receive and their preferences in the hard and soft product in order to adapt the hotel to their preferences.

The idea of this degree thesis is to help companies to know how to deliver the best “excellence”, considering customer preferences and expectations. Using our findings, the hotels can create profiles of their clients, that will help them, and offer those clients the personalization that they are demanding. Thus, hotels will be able to meet their expectations and exceed them, which will create a loyal customer (Mohsin *et al.* 2005).

Another recommendation the researchers want to suggest to the hotels is to create more accurate surveys about customer perceptions considering the findings the researchers have analysed. These can provide hotels with the precise feedback to understand the mistakes that they are making and improve them.

Another recommendation that researchers want to give to the hotels is that they must create training for the staff based on those profiles the hotel is focused on. As Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) said in one of their 5 components of their SERVQUAL model, they affirm in the assurance component that the hotel must transmit security to their guests. Therefore, if for example, clients require to have any doubts solved, management needs to train their staff to be capable of giving them the required knowledge, showing confidence and trust.

These trainings must be made for everybody so that the excellence and personalized service is delivered in all the categories, such as one of the most important steps to follow to achieve excellence is to instil your value system. The excellence has to flow from the top, to make the frontline staff able to deliver excellence you have to train your staff to be hospitable but the most important is to make them be imbibed within the culture of the organization (Hsieh, 2017).

Finally, the last recommendation is that these findings should be used not only in the luxury hotel industry but also in other tourism companies, such as Destinations Management Organizations or other companies from the service sector, like restaurants. Providing excellence is a must in order to attract loyal customers, hence all of these companies should consider how results define factors that affect customer perceptions. For example, how a strong brand identity tends to attract younger customers.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey to tourists

Model of survey for the “YES”:

1. How often do you stay in luxury hotels?

Options: Every time I travel / Sometimes.

2. What is your gender?

Options: Female / Male/ Non-binary gender/ Prefer not to say.

3. What is your age?

Options: 18-25/ 26-35/ 36-45/ 46-65/+65.

4. What is your country of citizenship?

Open answer

5. Which do you think that are the most important tangible aspects in a hotel? (0 - not important at all, 5 - very important).

Options: Size of the rooms/ Amenities in the room / Facilities of the hotel (SPA, pool, private beach)/ Number of restaurants (if they have Michelin stars, etc.)

6. Which do you think that are the most important intangible aspects in a hotel? (0 - not important at all, 5 - very important).

Options: Housekeeping service/ Privacy/ Location/ Welcome made by the staff.

7. What is the motivation of your travel?

Options: Business/ Leisure

8. Are you loyal to any hotel brand?

Options: Yes/ No.

a. If it's yes, what is the reason for such loyalty?

Open answer.

b. If yes, select the brand you are loyal to

Options: Ritz-Carlton/ Hilton/ St. Regis/ Shangri-La/ Four Seasons/ Mandarin Oriental/
One & Only/ The Luxury Collection/ Bvlgari / Others: Open answer

9. Do you read information about the hotel such as internet reviews, price, location before choosing a hotel?

Options: Yes/ No.

10. What are the most important from the previous aspects for you?

Options: Internet reviews/ Price/ Location/ Others: Open answer.

Model of survey for the “NO”:

1. Do you read information about the hotel such as internet reviews, price, location before choosing a hotel?

Options: Yes/ No.

2. What are the most important from the previous aspects for you?

Options: Internet reviews/ Price/ Location/ Others: open answer.

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