

An exploration of Chinese customer satisfaction factors in 4-star hotels in Auckland

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Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), no material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or their institution of higher learning.”

Signature of Candidate:

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Abstract

According to the New Zealand Trade and Enterprise “Regional Hotel Market Analysis and Forecasting” report from 2016, 4-star plus hotels are most popular with all markets except for the Chinese market, which currently prefers 4-star hotels. The Chinese tourist market is a potential market for 4-star hotels in Auckland. Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland. Chinese customers’ online reviews of 4-star hotels in Auckland on TripAdvisor were used to find out what factors affect their satisfaction with 4-star Auckland hotels. A total of 257 online reviews from Chinese customers on TripAdvisor were collected, providing data on 11 4-star hotels in Auckland. A qualitative approach was used, and a content analysis used to analyse the data. According to the results of this study, the main factors that Chinese customers are satisfied with in 4-star hotels in Auckland, are service, rooms, location and the restaurant. These are the main factors influencing their reasons to choose 4-star hotels in Auckland. There are also other factors worth noting, namely price, public areas, free parking, beds and bars. The results are very useful for 4-star hotels and can help them to improve Chinese customer satisfaction. The conclusions of this study can also help in the analysis of the Chinese market in the hospitality industry in Auckland.

Chapter 1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore the satisfaction of Chinese customers of 4-star hotels in Auckland. This chapter includes the following contents: the research background, research objectives, research questions, research significance and methodology, and the structure of this study.

1.1 Research background

New Zealand is a country where international tourism plays an important role in the economy (Balli, Curry & Balli, 2014). According to the report “Hotel Investment Attraction” in 2018, the number of international tourists in New Zealand continues to increase. From 2013-2018, the number of international tourists in Auckland increased by 7.5 percent per year, accounting for the largest tourism market in New Zealand. The annual report of Tourism New Zealand in 2017 showed that the top three groups of visitors came respectively from Australia (46.5%), China (8.9 percent) and the United States (USA) (2.2 percent). According to a report (2018) by New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, as of March 2018, Chinese tourists spend an average of 6.6 nights in Auckland, with a year-on-year growth of 16% between 2014 and 2018, which is the fastest growth rate among international visitors. The “Auckland Destination Overview” report (2018, June) noted that in the year to June 2018, Chinese visitors spent NZD914m, up 15.2% on the previous year, while spending from the United Kingdom (UK) (NZD350m) was up 18.1%, the USA (NZD375m) up 3.4 percent and Australia (NZD828m) up 3.7 percent. Although Chinese tourists do not account for the highest proportion of international tourists in Auckland, the growth rate of visitors and the benefits brought to the hospitality market in Auckland are obvious. So, Chinese tourists play an important role in the New Zealand accommodation market, especially for the hotel industry in Auckland.

Schiff and Becken (2011) suggested that the development of tourism has brought more opportunities to the hotel industry in New Zealand. A report by Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development in 2018, pointed out that as of June 2018, Auckland, as the largest city in New Zealand, and due to the increasing number of

visitors, experienced an average occupancy rate in local hotels as high as 84.5% for the year ending June 2018.

The report of website MarketToChina (June, 2012) predicted that one in three Chinese inbound tourists would choose 4-star hotels and one tenth of them would choose to stay in 5-star hotels. When Chinese tourists choose hotels, prices, transportation, and environment are the dominant influencing factors, followed by hotel brands and decorations. According to another report, “Regional hotel market analysis and forecasting” by New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (2016), Chinese customers account for approximately 20% of the international occupants in 4-star hotels, while in the other 3 to 4-star hotels occupancy rate, Chinese customers make up approximately 10%. In 2016, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise also reported that 4.5-star hotels are most popular across all except the Chinese market, which currently prefers 4-star hotels. Sun, Zhang and Ryan (2015) emphasised that this preference is significant, given that the Chinese market will play an important role in driving tourism and hospitality growth of New Zealand over the next 10 years.

Qualmark is New Zealand tourism’s official quality assurance organisation, providing a trusted guide to quality travel experiences (www.qualmark.co.nz). According to Qualmark (2019), hotels with consistently high quality levels of facilities and service are rated as 4-star hotels. According to the Qualmark Licence Holders (2019), there are 11 4-star hotels in Auckland, accounting for 29% of all 37 three to five-star hotels in Auckland. New Zealand Trade and Enterprise in 2018 pointed out that the Auckland region has the largest number of hotels in New Zealand with a current inventory of 65 properties, offering a total of 9,459 rooms, with 4-star hotels accounting for 19%, 4.5-star hotels accounting for 43% and five-star hotels accounting for 19%. It can be seen that 4-star hotels are an important part of the star-rated hotels in Auckland.

Through their survey of 941 Chinese customers, Gu and Ryan (2008) found that Chinese customers’ satisfaction with different star-rated hotels focused on clean rooms and the comfort of the bedding. It is also important for restaurants to provide high quality services for hotels, as well as efficient and friendly staff, and efficient check-in and check-out procedures (Gu & Ryan, 2008). Li, Ye, and Law (2013) suggested that Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Western countries is focused on

personalised services. Chinese tourists want employees to be polite and have the ability and knowledge to help them (Li, Ye & Law, 2013).

Some literature has discussed the satisfaction factors of Chinese customers in hotels, which is a broad research direction, usually applicable to various types of hotels, but the satisfaction factors for different customers will have specific characteristics. Moreover, there is not much research on Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels, because most of the literature does not focus on 4-star hotels, but 4-star hotels together with five-star and luxury hotels. In particular, there is no literature on the satisfaction factors of Chinese customers in 4-star hotels in Auckland, so this study used online hotel reviews from TripAdvisor to explore these factors to fill the research gap.

1.2 Research aims and questions

Customer satisfaction has a significant impact on hotel service quality, reducing complaints and improving customer loyalty (Torres & Kline, 2013). The purpose of this research is to explore the satisfaction of Chinese customers of 4-star hotels in Auckland.

For this purpose, the main research question of this study is:

What are the most important satisfaction factors for Chinese customers staying in 4-star hotels in Auckland?

TripAdvisor provides a wealth of data, with guests expressing their satisfaction with their stay through online reviews. Based on these online reviews, this study analysed and identified Chinese customer satisfaction factors with 4-star hotels in Auckland. The results provide directions and suggestions for future research.

1.3 Research methodology

This study used content analysis based and a qualitative approach. This was used to explore Chinese customer satisfaction factors through online reviews on TripAdvisor.

Content analysis was used to categorise and analyse data from TripAdvisor. Content analysis is a suitable technique as it enables researchers to identify key themes or precise meanings of the message in the text data (Krippendorff, 2013). The study used a

sample of hotels defined as 4-star hotels by Qualmark New Zealand. All 11 Auckland 4-star hotels were selected and relevant reviews of these hotels were collected from TripAdvisor.

Purposeful sampling was used to select and collect appropriate information. The study analysed 257 Chinese customer reviews of 11 4-star hotels in Auckland from December to February (2014 – 2019). Inductive reasoning was used to categorise the data into codes and generate underlying themes. The content analysis method was used to explore the factors of customer satisfaction, and meaningful findings were obtained. The generated themes were the satisfaction factors of Chinese customers with 4-star hotels in Auckland.

1.4 Dissertation structure

This dissertation consists of five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion. The structure is as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature review.

This chapter first explains the context of the hospitality industry in New Zealand and Auckland. Then, it describes the classifications of hotel quality, particularly in 4-star hotels. This is followed by an explanation of what customer satisfaction is, and how online comments reflect customer satisfaction. Finally, the literature on Chinese customer satisfaction in hotels in New Zealand and in 4-star hotels is reviewed.

Chapter 3: Methodology.

This chapter explains the qualitative approach, supported by the research philosophy underpinning the study, which was the interpretivist paradigm. The content analysis method is also explained. The chapter then explains the population and sample size, and finally, the data collection and data analysis processes are described.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.

This chapter describes the main findings concerning the factors relating to Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland. In combination with the discussion, the main findings and analysis results are compared with the results from previous research to determine the similarities and differences. This chapter refers to the common satisfaction factors of Chinese customers in hotels and the satisfaction factors of Chinese customers in different 4-star hotels.

Chapter 5: Conclusion.

This chapter briefly summarises the key results of this study, explains the limitations of the research, and finally suggests future research directions.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a review of the hospitality industry in New Zealand, which included an overview of the hospitality industry in Auckland, followed by a review of the definition of 4-star hotels, including the definition of a 4-star hotel in New Zealand. Then, this chapter reviews the literature on customer satisfaction, including the definition of customer satisfaction, satisfaction display platforms, and measurement methods of satisfaction. Finally, the literature on Chinese customers' choice of hotel preferences is reviewed, including Chinese customers' choice of hotel star ratings and Chinese customer satisfaction factors with their hotel stay.

2.2 The hospitality industry in New Zealand

The hospitality industry in New Zealand is flourishing, driven by strong domestic economic performance and record tourism growth. International visitors in 2016 increased by 11% compared to 2015, and total tourism revenue is driven by nearly 10% growth annually (Williamson, 2017).

China is one of the largest international tourist markets in New Zealand (Sun, Zhang & Ryan, 2015). In 2016, the number of Chinese tourists reached 409,000, accounting for 11.7% of the international market, and the year-on-year growth rate was 14.9%, which exceeded the growth rate of other international tourists (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, 2016). Cropp (2018) suggested that China will overtake Australia as New Zealand's largest tourist market by spend, reaching just over NZD3b annually by 2024. This means that the development of the Chinese market will be an important influence on the hotel industry market in New Zealand (Lohmann & Zahra, 2010).

According to the report by New Zealand Trade and Enterprise in 2015, hotels with a 4-star rating accounted for 21%, 3.5-star and 5-star 16% respectively and 3 to 3.5 star [accounted for 7%](#). As of 2016, 2% of international visitors chose to stay in a 3-star hotel in New Zealand, 14% chose 3.5 stars, 22% chose 4 stars, 45% chose 4.5 stars, and 16% of tourists chose 5 stars (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, 2016). The report by New Zealand Trade and Enterprise also emphasised that 4.5-star hotels are most popular with

all markets except the Chinese, which currently prefers 4-star hotels. A 4-star hotel, as a high-star hotel, is usually expected by guests to provide high standards and excellent service, and the rooms and catering must meet the standards of a high quality hotel (Grissemann & Brunner-Sperdin, 2013). Auckland's position as New Zealand's largest city and main international gateway gives it a major advantage in attracting a large and growing number of international and domestic visitors each year (Pearce & Schänzel, 2015). The trend that Chinese customers prefer 4-star hotels in New Zealand is clearly worth studying (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, 2016). The next section therefore overviews the Auckland hotel industry.

2.3 The hospitality industry in Auckland

Auckland has the largest number of hotels of any city in New Zealand, with 65 hotels offering a total of 9,459 rooms, in which 4 to 4.5-star hotels accounted for 62%, 19% 5-star hotels and 19% 3 to 3.5-star hotels in 2016 (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, 2016). While 70% of hotels in Auckland are located in the Central Business District, the rest are evenly distributed between the airport area and the suburbs (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, 2016).

According to the Qualmark Licence Holders, in 2019, there are 37 'three to five star' hotels in Auckland. Among them, there are 11 4-star hotels, accounting for 29% of the 37 3 to 5-star hotels in Auckland. The report of New Zealand Trade and Enterprise in 2015 states that the room supply of 3 to 5-star hotels (according the star rating of Qualmark) in Auckland is 9,459 rooms, with 4-star hotels accounting for 19% and 4.5-star hotels accounting for 43%. It can be seen that although the proportion of 4-star rooms is not the highest, it is nevertheless an important sector of Auckland star-rated hotels.

Ye (2018) observed that the proportion of 4-star hotels in Auckland is relatively high, and the proportion of medium-sized hotels (hotels ranging from 50 to 150 rooms) is also high. Therefore, it can be seen, firstly, that 4-star hotels are a very important part of the hotel market for New Zealand and for Auckland. Secondly, Chinese customers prefer 4-star hotels, as noted in the report mentioned. The next section explains the classification of 4-star hotels.

2.4 Hotel quality classification – the 4-star hotel

Different organisations, such as central and local governments, independent organisations, hotel associations, national consumer travel organisations, guidebooks, travel websites and volunteer organisations assign star ratings to hotels using their own criteria, so that there is no standardised star rating system throughout the world (Rhee & Yang, 2015). However, hotels are rated according to objective criteria such as service, facilities, room size and infrastructure (Martin-Fuentes, 2016), but under each classification system, the specific objective criteria, or criteria for awarding a star rating, vary.

In Europe, hotels are typically ranked as having between one and five stars, with five being the highest rated. In Australia and Canada, five stars are used, and sometimes half-star increments are used. In the USA, hotels in the Forbes travel guide are usually ranked on a one to five star scale, while American Automobile Association (AAA) still uses diamonds on a one to five star scale (Foris, 2014). Many European countries have joined the Hotel, Restaurants and Cafes (HOTREC) stars system, so they define a 4-star hotel as 'First Class'. Reception must be open 18 hours, and accessible by phone 24 hours from inside and outside, for 4-star hotels of these European countries (Kosar, Kosar, & Masic, 2015). This type of 4-star hotel also includes a lobby with seats and beverage service, breakfast buffet or breakfast menu card via room service, minibar or 24-hour beverages through room service, upholstered chair with side table, bathrobe and slippers on demand, cosmetic products, vanity mirror, tray of a large scale in the bathroom, and internet access and internet terminal (Kosar, Kosar, & Masic, 2015). An "à la carte" restaurant is generally expected in these 4-star hotels (Kosar, Kosar, & Masic, 2015).

In New Zealand, hotels and other tourism services are graded by Qualmark, which is owned by Tourism New Zealand, a government organisation (Rhodda, Darcy & Ambrose, 2012). According to Qualmark (2019), 4-star hotels are excellent and consistently achieve high quality levels with a wide range of facilities and services. Specifically, most of the 4-star hotels are large formal hotels with a large reception area, front desk service and baggage service (<https://nz.hotels.com>). The bedroom is well lit and fully furnished and restaurant dining is usually available and may include more than

one menu choice. Breakfast should be provided (<https://nz.hotels.com>). The service level is far above average, room service is available most of the time and valet parking and/or parking is usually available (<https://nz.hotels.com>). A 4-star hotel usually offers concierge services, a fitness centre and one or more swimming pools (Qualmark, 2019). Ariffin and Maghzi (2012) noted that the higher the hotel star rating, the higher the level of service provided. The cleanliness of 4-star hotels is clearly better than that of budget hotels in New Zealand and 4-star hotels have better staff service and facilities (Ye, 2018).

2.5 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is an important aspect of every successful business, including the hotel industry (Clemes, Gan & Ren, 2011). Customer satisfaction is the difference between a customer's expectations and the customer's experience (Song, Li, van der Veen & Chen, 2011). Liat, Mansori and Huei (2014) stated that when investigating the determinants of customer satisfaction, especially in the hotel industry, service is one of the most important factors in customer satisfaction. Also, physical factors such as bars located in rooms, air-conditioning in rooms, free wireless internet, and membership with discount for dining, have positive associations with guest satisfaction (Radojevic, Stanasic & Stanic, 2015). Corporate culture, staff behaviour, facilities and service quality are all factors affecting customer satisfaction with a hotel (Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu & Okumus, 2016). Xu and Li (2016) also pointed out that in addition to the physical attributes and services provided by a hotel, enterprise spirit and business philosophy, such as practices of corporate social responsibility and sustainability, can also contribute to customer satisfaction.

Aside from overall customer satisfaction of Asian and Western tourists, Asian tourists are most concerned about service, while Western tourists believe that room quality is the most important criterion for satisfaction (Torres & Kline, 2006, as cited in Alrousan & Abuamoud, 2013). Therefore, although the customer satisfaction factors for hotels are similar, there are some differences in the factors according to the customer group. The next section reviews literature on online reviews of customer satisfaction and the TripAdvisor platform.

2.5.1 Online reviews of customer satisfaction

As a medium between customers and service providers in hotels, online reviews not only reflect the satisfaction of the consumer experience, but also provide valuable information to help potential consumers make decisions (Bissell, 2012). With the penetration of information technology in daily life, in addition to searching for information, communicating with others and purchasing products, people can also share their travel and accommodation experience through different online platforms (Ren, Zhang & Ye, 2015). Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu and Okumus (2016) believed that it is important to note that the internet makes it easier for customers to share their experiences on review websites, social media, blogs, and other online platforms. There are various online review platforms, which range from community-based sites such as Lonely Planet, TripAdvisor and Yelp to transaction-based online travel agencies (OTA) such as Expedia and Bookings.com, where reviews are incorporated as electronic word-of-mouth (Gligorijevic, 2016).

TripAdvisor represents the largest travel community in the world, with more than 35 million visitors per month, and contains more than 45 million reviews and opinions on more than 1.3 million hotels, restaurants, and attractions (TripAdvisor, 2019). Reviews are also found on the virtual travel agency sites, such as Expedia.com and Booking.com. Booking.com offers more than 135,000 hotels and is consulted by more than 30 million different visitors each month (Booking, 2019). Expedia has more than 1400 accommodation providers and 7.5 million verified reviews on its site in New Zealand (Expedia, 2019).

Xiang, Du, Ma and Fan (2017) pointed out that TripAdvisor is the most popular independent online review platform for hotel consumers. In the scholarly community, TripAdvisor represents one of the most widely investigated hotel review websites (Banerjee & Chua, 2016). Therefore, TripAdvisor is an important window into insights about Chinese customers' views on 4-star hotels in Auckland. The next section reviews the relevant literature on this platform.

2.5.2 TripAdvisor as a platform for measuring customer satisfaction

TripAdvisor's primary function is to collect and disseminate user-generated travel content such as reviews, ratings (reviews), photos, and videos, with the key feature being the reviews (Limberger, Dos Anjos, de Souza Meira & dos Anjos, 2014). Approximately 20 million people visit TripAdvisor every month to read reviews from other travellers, and user-generated content creation is a good way for hotels to understand their guests (Barreda & Bilgihan, 2013). Also, 90% of travellers think the hotel reviews are helpful (Stringam, Gerdes & Vanleeuwen, 2010). In online reviews, guests discuss diverse hotel facilities and service-related elements (Gunasekar & Sudhakar, 2019). Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu, and Okumus (2016) found that customer satisfaction in online reviews is affected by both tangible (e.g., food and table aspects, sports facilities) and intangible aspects of service quality, such as hotel staff attitudes. O'Connor (2010) confirmed in his research that the data presented on TripAdvisor is very important and suitable for use when planning a trip.

When writing reviews on TripAdvisor, users can consider criteria such as overall satisfaction, value (cost-effectiveness), location, sleep quality, rooms, cleanliness, service and/or adding new standards (Limberger, Dos Anjos, de Souza Meira & dos Anjos, 2014). Ekiz, Khoo-Lattimore and Memarzadeh (2012) investigated data collected through online reviews on TripAdvisor. Their analysis showed that in high-star hotels, factors affecting customer satisfaction included space (physical properties of hotel rooms and quality of facilities in the room) and the attitude of the hotel staff (Ekiz, Khoo-Lattimore & Memarzadeh, 2012). Through a content analysis of online hotel reviews in China, Zhou, Ye, Pearce and Wu (2014) suggested that the physical environment (including rooms, hotels, and food), value, location and employees were the most important attributes of hotel customer satisfaction. Schuckert, Liu and Law (2015) used more than 88,000 online reviews of Hong Kong hotels from TripAdvisor and found that hotel facilities such as value, location, sleep, room, cleaning and service were all factors affecting customer satisfaction. In addition, by investigating online reviews from 56 hotels from TripAdvisor in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Gunasekar and Sudhakar (2019) found that hotels with superior location and superior hotel service had a positive impact on customer satisfaction in 4-star and other high-

rating hotels. The next section describes Chinese customer satisfaction with New Zealand hotels and Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels.

2.6 Chinese customer satisfaction in hotels

Chinese customers are very concerned about the convenience, politeness and professionalism of hotel staff, room quality and food variety (Tsai, Yeung & Yim, 2011). These factors appeared in a report by “hotels.com” in 2017, which stated that room quality, service, facilities, on-site dining, language convenience were all factors that affect Chinese customer satisfaction when they stay at hotels outside China.

Yang and Lau (2015) suggested that quality rooms and services are the concern of Chinese generations X (40-54 years old) and Y (25-39 years old). Also, in the Chinese International Travel Monitor for 2017 (IPSOS, 2017), when Chinese tourists book their accommodation, travellers put a high value on Wi-Fi and internet facilities, with 60% of travellers listing this amenity as a key consideration. The Chinese International Travel Monitor for 2018 (IPSOS, 2018) noted that having an on-site restaurant was important to half of the travellers, again even more so to generation X (56%); room service was also high on the list (36%) as was in-room entertainment (33%). Kucukusta (2017) explained that adequate facilities and equipment, sanitation, safety, price and quality are important criteria for Chinese tourists. In particular, Chinese tourists tend to choose a hotel in a good location, such as close to the city centre or tourist attractions, and they want to spend a lot of time shopping, not only for themselves, but also for friends, relatives and acquaintances (Kucukusta, 2017). Therefore, factors affecting Chinese customer satisfaction include not only room quality and service, but also internet equipment, on-site restaurants and the hotel’s location.

Sun, Tong and Law (2017) proposed that Chinese tourists have higher expectations for service quality in United Kingdom (UK) hotels, because they have higher expectations for service quality in developed countries. Chinese customer satisfaction also varies for different regions and different types of hotel. Therefore, the next section reviews Chinese customer satisfaction with New Zealand hotels.

2.6.1 Chinese customer satisfaction with New Zealand hotels

Clemes et al. (2010) stated that staff professionalism and tangible assets such as cleanliness and comfort, noise levels, parking and safety are important factors affecting guest satisfaction in New Zealand hotels. Chinese tourists usually want Chinese tour guides, signs, and Chinese speaking staff (Xu & McGehee, 2012). Therefore, language facilitation is one of the important factors influencing Chinese customer satisfaction with New Zealand hotels (Ying, Wen & Wang, 2018). There is limited literature on Chinese customer satisfaction in New Zealand's hotel industry, especially in Auckland. The next section is a review of the literature on Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels.

2.6.2 Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels

Li, Ye and Law (2012) stated that in a 4-star hotel, the hotel's public space and facilities (lounge atmosphere, lobby, swimming pool and fitness centre) can usually satisfy Chinese customers. Zhou, Ye, Pearce and Wu (2014) proposed six factors affecting Chinese customer satisfaction of 4-star hotels, namely, physical settings of rooms, the hotel itself, value, location, and staff. The high quality service, pleasant atmosphere and relaxing experience are essential for Chinese customer satisfaction when they stay in 4-star hotels (Lu, Berchoux, Marek & Chen, 2015), and the atmosphere and food quality in the hotel lobby are important factors for Chinese customer satisfaction. McCartney and Ge (2016) stated that excellent service and good room facilities are important factors for Chinese tourists choosing 4-star or higher rated hotels. Guest satisfaction of Chinese in 4-star and higher rated hotels is mainly based on the factors of service quality, food and beverage quality, accommodation, location, facilities, security and safety, transportation and innovation (Allan, 2016).

It can be seen that Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels mainly focuses on high quality service, pleasant atmosphere (from the layout and setting of the hotel) and the restaurant.

2.7 Research gaps

In summary, the report by New Zealand Trade and Enterprise in 2016, presented the trend that Chinese customers in Auckland prefer 4-star hotels. This study reviewed the hospitality industry in New Zealand and Auckland, demonstrating the importance of both the Chinese market and 4-star hotels to Auckland. However, there is no literature focusing on the satisfaction of Chinese customers with 4-star hotels in Auckland. After reviewing the literature on the quality classification of 4-star hotels, this study reviewed customer satisfaction and the significance of TripAdvisor as a sharing platform. Finally, the satisfaction of Chinese customers with New Zealand hotels and 4-star hotels was reviewed. Although this literature is not directly relevant, it provides a theoretical basis for this study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to find the factors influencing Chinese customers' satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland. This chapter discusses the qualitative method and interpretivist paradigm. The process of population and sample selection, data collection and data analysis are also explained.

3.2 Research objectives

Based on TripAdvisor's online reviews of Chinese customers of 11 4-star Auckland hotels, this study aimed to explore Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star Auckland hotels. Therefore, this research proposed the question:

What are the most important satisfaction factors for Chinese customers staying in 4-star hotels in Auckland?

3.3 The choice of research approach

Gray (2014) stated that the research approach is an approach for gathering data. There are two main research approaches: quantitative approach and qualitative approach. Quantitative methods are derived from scientific methods and rely on statistical procedures for data analysis. In contrast, qualitative methods rely on descriptive narratives of data analysis (Gunnell, 2016). Qualitative research is undertaken to observe human choices and actions, and research from the perspective of nature and overall behaviour. Researchers try to understand the multiple dimensions and layers of reality, such as the type of person of a group, how humans think and how humans interact, what kind of agreement or specification there is, and how these dimensions integrally describe the group together (Thomas, 2010). However, quantitative research does not allow for detailed discussion or interpretation (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach has been selected for this study, as explained in the next section.

3.3.1 Qualitative approach

The qualitative approach to hospitality and tourism research has been gaining attention as an alternative to the more traditional quantitative approach (Slevitch, 2011). Qualitative research has the advantage of placing more emphasis on meaning, experience and description (Yin, 2015).

The current research focuses on the personal experience of Chinese guests in 4-star hotels in Auckland. The secondary data collected by TripAdvisor were qualitative, consisting of written descriptions and explanations of the experience. Secondary data already exists because it has been collected by other researchers for other purposes (Johnston, 2017). Secondary data can be collected from relevant books, library resources, journals, magazines, newspaper articles, corporate data and the internet (Johnston, 2017). It has some advantages in that it saves time and cost (Johnston, 2017). This study used qualitative secondary data, which can be used for exploratory and descriptive research. As the research time for this study was limited, the selection of secondary data for the study was considered suitable. A qualitative approach was believed to be more suitable than a quantitative approach for this study. Devi (2009) stated that the qualitative research method is usually supported by an interpretivist paradigm, which was used in this study. Therefore, the next section will explain why a qualitative approach was suitable for this research from the perspective of the research philosophy and research paradigm.

3.4 Research philosophy

A research philosophy involves examining the nature of knowledge itself, how it comes into being, and how it is transmitted through language (Schlegel, 2015). Four main trends of research philosophy are distinguished and discussed in the works of many authors: the positivist research philosophy, interpretivist research philosophy, pragmatist research philosophy, and realistic research philosophy (Žukauskas, Vveinhardt & Andriukaitienė, 2018).

A research paradigm is the philosophical foundation of research and representative of the research method. (Wahyuni, 2012). Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) showed that the term “paradigm” is used to describe the researcher's "world view", which is a

perspective, or thinking, or a set of common beliefs that guides the meaning or interpretation of the research data. Also, as Kumar (2019) explained, the research paradigm essentially reflects the researcher's beliefs about the world they live in and want to live in. Different research paradigms can help researchers discover and explain the results of a study from different perspectives or worldviews, based upon their philosophical assumptions (Gray, 2014).

A paradigm defines the researcher's philosophical orientation, which is of great significance for every decision in the research process, including the choice of methodology and method (Kumar, 2019). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) stated that the composition of the research paradigm is based on the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions of researchers. The interpretivist paradigm was used in this study and is discussed in the next section.

3.5 Interpretivist paradigm

Research paradigms include post-positivism, positivism, interpretivism, and critical enquiry (Gray, 2014). Shah and Al-Bargi (2013) stated that both the terms “positivism” and “post-positivism” are based on the objective epistemological position and the ontological view of "being", which means that they believe the world will not change and the truth will not change. Tuli (2011) suggested that the interpretivist and critical inquiry paradigm is based on the subjective epistemological position and the ontological perspective of "becoming", which refers to the view that the world is changing all the time.

The interpretivist paradigm as applied in this study usually uses a qualitative approach from the internal logic between ontology, epistemology and methodology (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Scotland (2012) stated that an enquirer's belief in the nature of the world (ontology) will influence their knowledge of the nature of the world (epistemology), which in turn will influence the enquirer's belief in how to reveal this knowledge (methodology). The aim of the interpretivist paradigm is to explore the experience and views of people (Gray, 2014). Mathison (2005) also stated that the main argument of the interpretivist paradigm is to understand and interpret reality, which has multiple meanings and interpretations, and involves feelings or emotions. The approach of

interpretive studies mainly involves interviews, focus groups, case studies and analysis of documents, visual materials or personal experience (Given, 2008).

Bryman (2012) stated that the selection of each paradigm is based on research purposes and methods. The main purpose of this study was to explore the satisfaction of Chinese customers with 11 4-star hotels in Auckland. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the online reviews were processed, and the user-generated content were collected as data, then the data analysis was completed according to the researcher's interpretation and viewpoint. The presentation of research results was based on the researcher's understanding of online reviews of Chinese customers.

As explained by Willis (2007), qualitative methods often provide a wealth of information that helps interpretivist researchers fully understand the context. Consistent with Willis's (2007) ideas, Thomas (2006) maintained that qualitative methods are usually supported by interpretivists, because the interpretive paradigm "portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing..." (p.6). Therefore, the qualitative approach for this research was based on the interpretivist paradigm, because it focuses more on people's experience and opinions (see Gray, 2014), and can be used to analyse experience (Given, 2008).

3.6 The content analysis method

In qualitative research, several analytical methods can be used, such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology and content analysis (Bryman, 2017). The qualitative content analysis method was adopted in this study. Qualitative content analysis is a research approach in which text data can be systematically classified through coding and identifying themes according to the researcher's subjective interpretation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

In qualitative content analysis, data are presented in words and themes, which makes it possible to draw some interpretations from the results (Bengtsson, 2016). Words, images, pictures, symbols and content regarding communication can also be used as data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A characteristic of qualitative content analysis is to provide a specific description of the material under analysis (Schreier, 2014).

Qualitative data can be interviews, open questions and pictures (which are data expressed in words), so researchers cannot use statistical analysis to give meaning to data (Bengtsson, 2016).

The advantage of qualitative content analysis is that the underlying meaning of the collected text data can be analysed (Bengtsson, 2016). The basic principle applied in the content analysis method involves direct extraction of coding categories from the text data and building on these codes, which are subsequently used in the analysis and interpretation of the final results (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015).

This study collected Chinese customers' online reviews of 4-star hotels in Auckland and explored Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland through qualitative data collected from TripAdvisor. Therefore, the content analysis method was applied in this study. The next section explains the selection of population and sample size from TripAdvisor reviews.

3.7 The selection of population and sample size

Boddy (2016) referred to the population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. According to Qualmark (2019), there are 11 4-star hotels in Auckland, as shown in Table 1. Due to the small number of 4-star hotels in Auckland, in order to improve the accuracy of the research results, this research selected all 11 4-star hotels as the research population.

Slevitch (2011) stressed that sample size becomes irrelevant in qualitative methods, because it is common to try to understand the frame of reference and worldview of a small number of participants rather than test the assumptions of a large sample. Due to the large number of 4-star hotels, it was impossible to include all online Chinese guest reviews as also shown in Table 1. Purposive sampling was adopted in this study because representative information was needed to achieve the target sample size in a timely and effective manner (see Slevitch, 2011). Summer is the peak tourist season in New Zealand (Mitchell & Hall, 2003), and lasts from December to February. Unfortunately, when the data collection for this study started there did not seem to be enough data to analyse; for example, on the online reviews page of Mount Richmond Hotel, just one

online Chinese review was posted in 2016, two reviews in 2015, and three in 2014. Chinese reviews of the 11 4-star hotels on TripAdvisor, revealed that the earliest Chinese reviews were in December 2014 and the latest one in February 2019. Therefore, it was decided to collect Chinese reviews from each of the 4-star hotels from December to February between 2014 to 2019. Through the screening of Chinese language and the time setting from December to February between 2014 to 2019, this study identified a sample size of 257 Chinese customers' online reviews of 4-star hotels in Auckland. Invalid reviews, such as one-word reviews like "excellent", and "normal", were not included in the data.

Overall, the data set for this study was 257 reviews of the Chinese guests of 11 Auckland 4-star hotels collected on TripAdvisor from 1st December 2014 to 28th February 2019, by the purposive sampling method. The next section details the data analysis process for the study.

Table 1 The population and sample

HOTELS	Number of online reviews
Amora Hotel Auckland	27
Auckland City Hotel - Hobson Street	27
Copthorne Hotel Auckland City	0
Holiday Inn Auckland Airport	43
Ibis Auckland Ellerslie	48
Mercure Hotel Auckland	11
Mount Richmond Hotel & Conference Centre	6
Quality Hotel Parnell Limited	30
Scenic Hotel Auckland	37
The Surrey Hotel	14
Waipuna Hotel & Conference Centre	14
Total: 11	Total: 257

3.8 Data collection

The online review data for this study were collected from TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor was chosen as the data source because it is the most popular and largest hotel review website

(Xiang, Schwartz, Gerdes & Uysal, 2015). In addition, TripAdvisor covers almost all hotels in a specific destination and publishes comments provided by guests who have stayed in the hotel and want to share their experiences (Guo, Barnes & Jia, 2017). Because TripAdvisor is one of the largest online travel communities and collects reviews exclusively from customers (Hargreaves, 2015), it was an appropriate source of data for this study.

TripAdvisor provides a standard format for each traveller's hotel reviews, including their ratings and reviews of their experiences (Matos-Rodríguez, 2014). Secondary data analysis involves the use of existing data by researchers who are not involved in the collection of raw data (Greenhoot & Dowsett, 2012). Secondary analysis is the use of secondary data in research, which saves time and money and avoids unnecessary research duplication (Windle, 2010). In secondary data analysis, the research questions are first developed, followed by identifying the secondary data set, then evaluating the secondary data set, then preparing and analysing the secondary data (Greenhoot & Dowsett, 2012). This study used content analysis to analyse the Trip Advisor reviews, as explained in detail in the next section.

3.9 Data analysis process

This research was conducted in accordance with the qualitative content analysis process presented by Schreier (2012). This process is: identifying relevant data, coding by examining the text including the context and background, generating themes to represent the underlying meanings of data, and using the themes to address the research question.

Step 1: Identifying relevant data:

From Chinese customers' online reviews with one of the eleven 4-star hotels in Auckland on TripAdvisor, 257 reviews were selected, as shown in Table 1. Since all reviews selected were Chinese and this study used English as the written language, Google translation was adopted to help the researcher translate the Chinese comments into English, so as to facilitate the presentation of the research results. "Google translate" is a free web-based service that translates between multiple languages

(Matos-Rodríguez, 2014). Matos-Rodríguez (2014) stated that Google translation is a suitable translation tool that can be used in academic research. The first step was to gain familiarity with the data set.

All online reviews were in Chinese. Firstly, the reviews were translated into English by the researcher, as in the example below. During this process, Google Translate assisted the researcher in completing the translation.

Example:

“In December, on our honeymoon trip we came to Auckland. Here we stayed for one night. The staff were very polite and helpful. The hotel was in a central location, close to the sky tower. The room was very good, the stay was very comfortable, the basic facilities are very complete.”

Chinese version:

“十二月，我们的蜜月之旅来到了奥克兰。我们住了一晚。工作人员非常有礼貌，乐于助人。酒店位于市中心，靠近天空塔。房间非常好，住宿非常舒适，基本设施非常齐全。”

Step 2: Coding by examining the text including the context and background:

Inductive reasoning was applied through the content analysis method. The aim of inductive content analysis is to explore phenomena that no previous research has addressed, or which are fragmented (Thomas, 2006). This means that there is no pre-set code, and new codes are developed and modified during the coding process. Instead of computer coding, manual coding was adopted for this coding process. One of the main reasons for this is that gaining proficiency in coding software is time-consuming (Welsh, 2002). Blair (2015) noted that manual coding is also in line with interpretivism, which enables researchers to better process data presented in different languages.

Open coding was used in this stage of analysis. In open coding, researchers write notes and headings in the text as they read it (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). When the researchers read through it again, they write down as many headings as possible to describe various

aspects of the content. Finally, these headings are collected, and categories are generated freely at this stage. The specific process of open coding is explained by way of an example. In this study, the research proceeded as follows; “the staff were very polite” was coded as “polite service”; “helpful” was coded as “friendly staff” and “efficient service”; “a central location” was coded as "Location is close to the CBD", and so on. Using this method, 20 open codes were coded by processing the 257 comments as shown in Table 2 (below).

Table 2 Open codes from 257 Chinese online reviews

Open codes (counts)	Text words
Friendly staff (73)	friendly service, smile, helpful, patient
Efficient service (49)	service quickly, service efficiently, helpful
Service in detail (21)	gift card, update the room, careful, detailed service
Polite staff (10)	careful, gentle, happy with guests
Space of the room (40)	room size, big room, design of room
Cleanliness (39)	new decoration, clean bathroom, cleanliness
Quiet (30)	no noise, quiet room
View (29)	garden view, sky tower, harbour, street review
Close to CBD (40)	Queen street, city
Close to transportation (28)	bus stop, airport, convenient transportation
Close to restaurant (19)	fast food restaurants, many restaurants
Close to shops (17)	gift shop, shopping centre, convenience store
Buffet breakfast (45)	buffet breakfast
Food choice (19)	variety of food, good food
Afternoon tea (3)	afternoon tea
Price (11)	price, value for money
Public areas (10)	hotel lobby, leisure area, swimming pool, gym, other facilities
Free parking (9)	free parking

Open codes (counts)	Text words
Bed (9)	Bedding
Bar (7)	Bar

Step 3: Generating themes to represent the underlying meanings of data:

In data analysis, researchers must try to find out the essence of the phenomenon they are studying (Bengtsson, 2016). When conducting qualitative content analysis, the researcher should analyse the underlying topic by identifying the code (Bengtsson, 2016). For accuracy, researchers are still aware of the need to reference the original text, which may be closer to the original meaning of the text content (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

Therefore, at this stage, the researcher generated themes from the open coding, as shown in Table 3. It should be emphasised here that the original online comments were processed again after these themes were identified, and the number of new themes was counted again in the 257 online customer reviews. The themes relating to the satisfaction factors of Chinese customers with 4-star hotels in Auckland, and the dimensions representing the aspects of these satisfaction factors that affect Chinese customers, are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Themes (The identified customer satisfaction factors)

Themes	Count (n=257)	Percentage	Dimensions from codes
Service	91	35%	Friendly staff; Efficient service; Service in details; Polite staff
Room	68	26%	Space of the room; Cleanliness; Quiet; View
Location	61	24%	Close to CBD; Close to transportation; Close to restaurant; Close to shops
Restaurant	60	23%	Buffet breakfast; Food choice; Afternoon tea
Price	11	4%	Reasonable
Public areas	10	3.8%	Lobby; Swimming pool; Other facilities
Free parking	10	3.8%	Free parking
Bed	9	3.5%	Bedding quality

Step 4: Using the themes to address the research question:

In this stage, the research question was reviewed: What are the most important satisfaction factors for Chinese customers staying in 4-star hotels of Auckland? Writing a qualitative research report is to simply report key findings under each theme, using appropriate verbatim quotes to illustrate the results (Wilson, 2016). To address the research question, the comments related to the themes were counted, the factors affecting Chinese customer satisfaction were ranked, and tables were generated to present the results (see Table 1 and Table 2).

The results showed the main and other satisfaction factors of Chinese guests with 4-star hotels in Auckland. Chinese satisfaction factors with 4-star hotels of Auckland include all the themes in the findings of this study, which were: service, rooms, location, the food of restaurant, price, public areas, free parking, the quality of the bed and the presentation of the bar. Each factor in Table 3 shows a different percentage, which represent the ratio of each factor in the 257 online reviews. It can be seen that service was the factor with the highest proportion (35%) among all themes, which means that

service was the factor that they were most satisfied with in 4-star hotels in Auckland. The percentages in the study clearly show the rank of these factors, which makes the results easier to understand; the higher the percentage, the higher the degree of satisfaction.

3.10 Data cleansing

Data processing and management need to be of good quality so that users can get good results (Anagnostopoulos, Zeadally & Exposito, 2016). Data quality can be defined as the applicability of data to certain desired uses. These data must be error-free, complete, correct, up-to-date, and consistent. In order to improve the quality of data, the process of identifying and correcting errors and inconsistencies is used, and called “data cleansing” (Azeroual & Abuosba, 2019). Azeroual and Abuosba (2019) stated that data cleansing includes all necessary activities to clean up dirty data (incomplete, incorrect, not up to date, inconsistent, and redundant).

The sample size of this study was 257 online comments from Chinese customers, and the Chinese reviews’ content was translated into English by the researcher for analysis. Due to the possible problems of data quality, this study went through the data cleansing process and invited a professional Chinese-speaking teacher, Dr Liu (who works in the School of Hospitality and Tourism at Auckland University of Technology) to verify the data.

3.11 Summary

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis method based on the interpretivist paradigm. The study selected 257 online reviews of Chinese customers about 11 4-star Auckland hotels by means of purposive sampling. Data analysis using inductive reasoning and the technique of manual coding were adopted to help identify the factors influencing Chinese customer satisfaction, and the different factors that affect the customer satisfaction of Chinese customers were presented. Among the 257 comments, service was mentioned in 35%, which was the most important factor influencing customer satisfaction. The second most important factor was the room, accounting for 26%, and location was the third factor, accounting for 24%. The fourth factor was the restaurant, accounting for 23%. These were listed as the main factors influencing

Chinese customer satisfaction. Other factors were mentioned less often, such as price at 4 percent, public areas at 3.8 percent, free parking at 3.8 percent, the bed at 3.5 percent and the bar at 2.7 percent. Therefore, price, public areas, free parking, the bed and the bar were considered secondary factors. The next chapter introduces and describes the data findings and discussions.

Chapter 4 Findings and discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of this study, compares them to relevant literature, and discusses similarities and differences. Nine themes emerged from the analysis of Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland, among which service, room, location and restaurant were the main ones, while other, lesser factors were price, public areas, free parking, bed and bar. Tables are used to display the main themes categorised from TripAdvisor reviews. Each theme is subdivided into several dimensions for in-depth discussion.

4.2 Factors influencing Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland

Through analysis of the data, this research revealed four main factors influencing Chinese customers' satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland, namely, service, room, location and restaurant, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Themes on Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland

Main themes (factors)	Count (n=257)	Percentage
Service	91	35%
Room	68	26%
Location	61	24%
Restaurant	60	23%
Price	11	4%
Public areas	10	3.8%
Free parking	10	3.8%
Bed	9	3.5%
Bar	7	2.7%

As can be seen from the percentage distribution (Table 4), the satisfaction levels of service, guest room, location and restaurant were all above 20%, so were the main four factors affecting Chinese customer satisfaction. Secondary factors affecting customer

satisfaction of 4-star hotel in Auckland were all less than or equal to four percent (Table 4), so were deemed to have relatively little impact on customer satisfaction. The secondary factors influencing customer satisfaction were price, public areas, free parking, bed and bar.

All the factors were ranked high and low by percentage, as shown in Table 4. Service is the most important factor for Chinese customer satisfaction in Auckland 4-star hotels according to this study. As Lu, Berchoux, Marek and Chen (2015) suggested, service is the most critical factor in a 4-star hotel. Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline and Wang (2011) also emphasised that Chinese tourists are very concerned about the politeness of the hotel staff, professionalism, and the timeliness of their service. Providing services important to customers is clearly an important basis for customer satisfaction for 4-star hotels (Dabestani, Shahin, Saljoughian & Shirouyehzad, 2016). Clemes (2010) stated that staff service is the factor that Chinese customers find most important in New Zealand's hotels. Therefore, the findings of this research support previous research findings on 4-star hotels and Chinese customers. In particular, when Chinese customers stay in a 4-star hotel in Auckland, they feel that the service is what impresses them most.

Chinese customers usually prefer 4-star hotels with clean rooms (McCartney & Ge, 2016), convenient location (Allan, 2016) and high quality restaurants (Zhou, Ye, Pearce & Wu, 2014). Compared with prior studies on the factors influencing Chinese customer satisfaction in 4-star hotels, the findings of this study similarly showed that the other main factors influencing Chinese customer satisfaction included room, location and restaurant. In terms of Chinese customer satisfaction with hotels in New Zealand, Clemes (2010) proposed that most Chinese customers are satisfied with the cleanliness of hotel rooms in New Zealand and with other physical factors. Secondary factors were price, public areas, free parking, bed quality and bars. These secondary factors may have affected Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland, but the influence was not significant. However, rooms, location, the food of restaurant, price, public areas, free parking, the quality of bedding and the presentation of bars were physical factors affecting Chinese customer satisfaction during their stays in 4-star hotels in Auckland. Many of the attributes that affected customer satisfaction in a hotel were physical factors, such as rooms, location and food (Lahap, Ramli, Said, Radzi &

Zain, 2016). For 4-star hotels, physical factors are important factors affecting customers' next choice of hotel (Ramanathan, 2012). The findings of this study are similar to the Chinese customers' satisfaction factors for 4-star hotels mentioned in prior studies, but the difference is that this study visually demonstrated the importance of different satisfaction factors.

Summarised from the findings in Table 4, service was identified as the primary factor of Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland. The physical factors were the room, location and restaurant: these are also important Chinese customer satisfaction factors. Price, public areas, free parking, bed and bar were other secondary physical factors, which are also of concern to Chinese customers in 4-star hotels of Auckland.

4.3 Main factors influencing Chinese customer satisfaction

4.3.1 Service

Data in Table 4 show that 35% of the comments expressed that the service quality of 4-star hotels in Auckland affected the satisfaction of the Chinese customers writing the reviews on TripAdvisor. Data in Table 5 show that the main service factors affecting customer satisfaction were friendly staff, efficient service, polite service and detailed service.

Table 5. Factors influencing customer satisfaction with service in 4-star hotels in Auckland

Different factors of service	Count (n=91)	Percentage of reviews
Friendly staff	73	80%
Efficient service	49	54%
Detailed service	21	23%
Polite staff	11	11%

As can be seen from Table 5, 80% of Chinese guests said friendly staff affected their satisfaction with 4-star hotels in New Zealand. Efficient service was also an important factor and was mentioned by 54%. Other aspects were detailed service and polite staff. Four examples have been selected from Chinese customer reviews on TripAdvisor to

illustrate different aspects of service affecting Chinese customer satisfaction when they stay at 4-star hotels in Auckland.

Friendly staff: *“Staff friendly, helpful and with good local knowledge. Thanks to Vanessa at the Customer Enquiry for recommending Thai restaurants.”*

Efficient service: *“Mercure Auckland is a nice hotel located close to the waterfront. Very warm welcome, check in very fast.”*

Service in details: *“The staff left us 2 macaroons and 2 bottles of water every night on the bedside table.”*

Polite staff: *“The staff are so great! I watched them take care of check-out, and they showed great patience with rude and impatient guests.”*

In terms of service, 80% of Chinese guest satisfaction came from the friendly staff. “Staff are friendly” appeared directly in 80% of total comments, such as an employee's enthusiastic recommendation of a nearby restaurant to a customer, which is also employee-friendly behaviour. Khozaei, Nazem, Ramayah and Naidu (2016) explained that friendly staff in customer service can make guests feel happy and increase their positive feedback on the hotel. This finding matches that of a study by Tsai, Yeung and Yim (2011), who suggested that Chinese customers value the positive attitude of hotel staff. Therefore, friendly staff are the most important factor influencing Chinese customer satisfaction in a 4-star hotel in Auckland, and also the most important factor for them when choosing a 4-star hotel in Auckland.

Secondly, effective service accounted for 54% of satisfaction, which means that more than half of Chinese customers believed that effective service in Auckland 4-star hotels made them satisfied. “Check in very fast” indicated that the service was efficient. This is similar to the research by Clemes et al. (2010), who stated that employee efficiency is an important factor affecting Chinese customer satisfaction when they stay in hotels in New Zealand.

Detailed service and politeness of staff were also important factors for Chinese customer satisfaction in 4-star hotels in Auckland, mentioned by 23% and 11% respectively. Lu, Berchoux, Marek and Chen (2015) stated that 4-star hotels or above

usually have a high quality of service, and that detailed service is a significant characteristic of this kind of high-star hotel. In the online comments, for example, Chinese guests mentioned that there was food and water on the bedside table every night, indicating that detailed service appeared in 4-star hotels.

In the comments, it emerged that employees were patient with customers, which means the staff were polite. Employees need to interact with guests with different attitudes in the hospitality industry and maintain good quality service when encountering rude guests. (Christou, Avloniti, & Farmaki, 2019). Tsai, Yeung and Yim (2011) suggested that polite service is an aspect that Chinese customers pay attention to in hotels.

4.3.2 Room

As can be seen in Table 6, there is little difference between the percentage of each specific aspect of the room factor. Generally speaking, when Chinese guests described a hotel room, the room space, cleanliness, quietness and view were often mentioned in one sentence. However, data in Table 6 also shows that the most important factor for Chinese customer satisfaction in Auckland 4-star hotel rooms was spaciousness.

Table 6. Factors on customer satisfaction with rooms of 4-star hotels in Auckland

Different aspects of room	Count (n=68)	Percentage of reviews
Spaciousness	40	59%
Cleanliness	39	57%
Quiet	30	44%
View	29	43%

The room factor was also one of the reasons Chinese customers chose 4-star hotels in Auckland. For different types of travellers and different levels of hotel, a clean and comfortable room is the most important attribute (Rhee & Yang, 2019). China's travellers prefer hotel room amenities such as a pot to make hot water for tea, and a double sink with a separate vanity (Liu, Zhou & Chandnani, 2013). Li, Law, Vu and Rong (2013) stated that the quality of rooms, such as room size, has an impact on Chinese customer satisfaction. The next section explains how to satisfy Chinese

customers with 4-star hotel rooms in Auckland from several different aspects, using online reviews from TripAdvisor as examples.

Space of the room: *“We have stayed here twice. The first time was great, we stayed in a large, well-equipped room.”*

Cleanliness: *“Very lovely room, recently renovated. The entire hotel is new and clean, and their recent renovations make it look great.”*

Quiet: *“For a big hotel we never found the room to be noisy.”*

View: *“Very nice, you can see the sky tower”*

As noted previously, space in the room was an important factor influencing Chinese customer satisfaction with Auckland 4-star hotels. Like “large” and “well-equipped”, these similar kinds of adjectives for space in a room emerged in approximately 59% of the descriptions of the room, and these characteristics give the Chinese customers a “great” feeling. A similar study emphasised that exquisite design (McCartney & Ge, 2016) and space of a 4-star hotel room (Kim-Soon, Rahman & Visvalingam, 2014) are factors that Chinese guests value.

Cleanliness also made Chinese customers happy with their rooms, with 57% of Chinese customers showing cleanliness as a satisfaction factor when they stayed in 4-star hotels in Auckland. This finding is consistent with the work of McCartney and Ge (2016), who suggested that Chinese customers are satisfied with the cleanliness of hotel rooms in New Zealand.

Of all Chinese customers, 44% thought that a quiet room was an important satisfaction factor, and 43% considered the view from the room was also a significant factor. Both of these factors can influence Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland. Comments such as “we never found the room to be noisy”, meant the customers noticed the quietness of their rooms when they stayed in a 4-star hotel in Auckland. Khozaei, Nazem, Ramayah and Naidu (2016) also found that “room quietness” was a contributing factor to Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels.

Clemes (2010) also suggested that the physical environment includes a quiet room, which can influence Chinese customer satisfaction with New Zealand's hotels.

In section 3.9, the example about the view from the room, "Sky Tower" shows this was considered to be a kind of view from the hotel. Such a view can bring a "nice" feeling to Chinese customers, which means they were satisfied with the view from 4-star hotel rooms in Auckland. Heo and Hyun (2019) stressed that scenery is not an important factor Chinese consumers would be willing to pay more for in hotels. This differs from the findings of this research, which shows that the view is an important factor influencing Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotel rooms of Auckland.

4.3.3 Location

Data in Table 7 show that the four attributes of the location factor have the most obvious influence on Chinese customer satisfaction. Due to the different locations, the ranking of Chinese customer satisfaction was different. The four different factors of location were proximity to Queen Street (Auckland's main central city street), transportation, restaurants, and shopping centres.

Table 7. Factors influencing customer satisfaction with the location of 4-star hotels in Auckland

Different factors of location	Count (n=61)	Percentage of reviews
Close to CBD	40	66%
Close to transportation	28	46%
Close to restaurants	19	31%
Close to shopping centre	17	28%

Table 4 shows that location accounted for 24% of Chinese customer satisfaction factors. Location is an important factor for customers in choosing a hotel (Ren, Qiu, Wang & Lin, 2016). In particular, Darini and Khozaei (2016) indicated that the location of a hotel is important for Chinese travellers, and convenient location has an impact on customer satisfaction. Examples are selected from TripAdvisor guests' reviews to explain the four factors and show the reasons for customer satisfaction with location.

Close to Queen Street: *“The Scenic Hotel is located right in the heart of Queen Street, a 15-minute walk from the harbour with its many restaurants.”*

Close to transportation: *“This hotel is conveniently located and the airport bus goes directly to the hotel.”*

Close to restaurant: *“There are some great cheap small restaurants near the corner.”*

Close to shopping centre: *“The hotel is close to major attractions, museums, cinemas, shopping malls and airport pick-up points.”*

“Close to Queen Street” means close to the Central Business District (CBD), which was the factor that Chinese customers were most satisfied with in terms of the location of their 4-star hotel in Auckland, mentioned by 66% of reviewers. The distance from Queen Street was their first consideration when choosing the location of their 4-star hotel. For example, customers mentioned that they were “located right in the heart of Queen Street” in their review, which means in their perception, Queen Street is the central district of the city. Therefore, it can be seen that most Chinese tourists would consider the distance to Queen Street when choosing a 4-star hotel in Auckland, as they prefer the convenience of the location. As McCartney and Ge (2016) stated, Chinese outbound tourists have higher requirements in terms of the convenience of hotel location, such as the distance from the city centre.

Closeness to transportation was the second most important factor for Chinese customers when choosing a 4-star hotel location, being mentioned by 46% of the 61 comments on location. In contrast, Darini and Khozaei (2016) stated that Chinese guests describe the location of the hotel as close to public transportation, and convenient transportation is the most important factor affecting customer satisfaction. In the results of this study, it was found that transportation was not the primary satisfaction factor for Chinese customers staying in an Auckland 4-star hotel. However, a location close to transportation was still listed as an important factor influencing Chinese customer satisfaction: it ranked second in the location factor.

When describing the satisfying factor of location, 31% of Chinese customers thought that location close to a restaurant made them satisfied. The comment “great restaurants

near the corner” indicated that this Chinese customer was satisfied with this kind of location. The convenience of eating in a nearby restaurant also affected the satisfaction of Chinese customers.

Darini and Khozaei (2016) stated, in describing the positive aspects of the hotel's location, that some Chinese travellers described their hotel as equidistant from restaurants and shops. Closeness to a shopping centre also attracts Chinese customers choosing a 4-star hotel in Auckland, mentioned in 28% of the location factor's comments. As Tsui, Yeung and Yim (2011) mentioned, Chinese tourists usually buy gifts for their relatives and friends during their travels, so like to choose hotels with shops nearby. Therefore, a location close to shops is also one of the factors that Chinese customers are satisfied with in a 4-star hotel in Auckland.

As presented in Table 4, the hotels' restaurants appeared in 23% of Chinese customer satisfaction factors. The three satisfaction attributes that mainly described restaurants were buffet breakfast, food choice, and afternoon tea, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Factors influencing Chinese customers' satisfaction with restaurants in 4-star hotels in Auckland

Different factors of the restaurant	Count (n=60)	Percentage of reviews
Buffet breakfast	45	75%
Food choice	19	32%
Afternoon tea	3	5%

TripAdvisor's online reviews can be used to explain which aspects of a hotel's restaurant are related to Chinese customer satisfaction.

Buffet breakfast: *“Buffet breakfast is delicious, very recommended.”*

Food choice: *“The food is great, with a wide variety of dinners that cater to all tastes, beliefs and picky eaters. Many children in the restaurant are as happy as we are, and we don't hear anyone complaining that they don't have what they want.”*

Afternoon tea: *“We had a great Friday afternoon tea time to celebrate my sister's birthday.”*

The buffet breakfast was the most satisfying aspect of the restaurant satisfaction factor among Chinese customers, accounting for 75% of the restaurant factor (see Table 9). The use of “delicious” to describe the breakfast buffet meant that the high quality of the food contributed to Chinese customer satisfaction. Miguéis and Nóvoa (2016) suggested that the quality of the breakfast buffet also has a direct impact on customer satisfaction. McCartney and Ge (2016) also stated that most Chinese customers are influenced by “value for money” when they stay at a hotel, and a free breakfast buffet has a positive impact on Chinese customer satisfaction with hotels.

“A wide variety” represents a wide variety of food choices and made Chinese guests feel satisfied. Among the factors of restaurant satisfaction, 32% of Chinese customers attached importance to food types. Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline and Wang (2011) stated that Chinese tourists want to sample local delicacies but also find familiar foods. The Chinese diet consists of a wide variety of vegetables with little or no milk and is more salty than sweet (Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline & Wang, 2011). Western restaurants that serve local dishes that match this description may have a better chance of winning over Chinese tourists (Li et al., 2011). This suggests that while Chinese customers were satisfied with 4-star hotels in Auckland, the wide variety of food in the restaurant also had a certain positive impact. Only five percent of customers rated satisfaction with their hotel's afternoon tea. Afternoon tea was not an obvious Chinese customer factor, but it was nevertheless one element of the main satisfaction factor.

4.4 Secondary factors influencing Chinese customer satisfaction

Secondary factors affecting Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland included prices, public areas, free parking, beds and bars. These factors had no significant impact on overall Chinese customer satisfaction, with less than or equal to four percent mentioning them, and will not be the main influence on Chinese customers' choice of a 4-star hotel in Auckland.

4.4.1 Price

Price as a satisfaction factor in the study was found in only four percent of the total comments, as shown in Table 4, which means that some Chinese guests were satisfied with the price of 4-star hotels in Auckland, but overall it was not important. When Chinese customers mentioned the price, “value for money” or “reasonable price” often appeared in their comments. For example:

“We stayed in Auckland for one night and the price was reasonable.”

“Value for money” also means a reasonable price. The research of Ren and Qiu (2019) suggests that most Chinese customers are pragmatic, so reasonable or even low prices can have an impact on the satisfaction of Chinese customers. The findings of this study also showed that reasonable prices have a certain impact on Chinese customers' satisfaction with 4-star hotels of Auckland.

Price and value for money are the most important variables for measuring Asian customers' satisfaction with a hotel, while safety and security are more important for westerners (Poon & Low, 2005). Therefore, the literature indicates that prices should play an important role in Chinese customer satisfaction. However, the findings of this study showed that a reasonable price was not an obvious factor affecting Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland and appears as a secondary factor.

4.4.2 Public areas

“Public areas” refer to factors such as swimming pool, lobby and gym that appeared in comments. For example:

“The hotel lobby is clean and bright; the gym and swimming pool are great.”

It is evident from the comments that some Chinese customers (3.8%) made comments on their hotel's swimming pool, gym and other places. Kucukusta (2017) explained that adequate facilities are becoming more and more important in terms of Chinese guest satisfaction. If these public areas are in good condition, Chinese customers will be satisfied with the hotel.

4.4.3 Free parking

Free parking was also one of the factors that Chinese customers (3.8 percent) were satisfied with in a 4-star hotel in Auckland. For example:

“We also parked for free on the street in front of the hotel. - This will add extra points to the overall impression of the hotel.”

Since many Chinese customers come to New Zealand for self-drive tours (Lohman & Zahra, 2010), parking after renting a car will inevitably be involved. Online reviews on TripAdvisor showed that some 4-star hotels do not charge for car parking, which can improve the satisfaction of Chinese customers.

4.4.4 Bed

Although the bed quality was not an obvious satisfying factor in 4-star hotels in Auckland, accounting for 3.5% of reviews, the online reviews also reflected the importance that Chinese customers attach to the quality of the bed and the comfort of bedding. The following comment is an example:

“The room was really spotless, and the bed was very comfortable.”

Usually, customers are tired at the end of a long journey (Liu & Harnett, 2018). Therefore, if a good rest is needed after a long journey, comfortable bedding and high quality beds would be a good satisfaction factor for Chinese customers.

4.4.5 Bar

The presence of the bar area in the hotel was the least influential factor in Chinese customer satisfaction, mentioned by only 2.7% of Chinese online reviews. The bar is normally a separate area, and there has been limited research on the bar in a hotel. The atmosphere of the bar and staff service will affect the experience of Chinese guests staying in the hotel (Chand & Kapoor, 2014). Two examples of this are:

“The cocktails in the bar are great.”

“Nightlife is best enjoyed at the hotel's bar”

It is evident that the presence of the bar factor is related to Chinese customers who come to the bar in a hotel. For example, they may enjoy cocktails, and may think the bar represents nightlife, which is a kind of leisure. This is consistent with the findings of Wong (2011) who suggested that the leisure factor is an important aspect for Chinese tourists, bringing them pleasure during their trip.

4.5 Conclusion

According to these findings, the main factors influencing Chinese customer satisfaction with Auckland 4-star hotels, were service, room, location and restaurant, while the secondary factors were price, public areas, free parking, bed quality, and the presence of the bar. Of these, service is an intangible factor, while the others are physical factors.

Service was the most important factor influencing Chinese customer satisfaction in an Auckland 4-star hotel; friendly staff is the main reason for high satisfaction with service. Among the physical factors, room, location, and restaurant had an obvious influence on Chinese customer satisfaction.

Clemes (2010) stated that the staff service is the factor that Chinese customers find most satisfying in New Zealand hotels. Also, Chinese customers favour 4-star hotels with clean rooms (McCartney & Ge, 2016), convenient location (Allan, 2016) and high quality restaurants (Zhou, Ye, Pearce & Wu, 2014). These findings are similar to the findings of this study.

However, Allan (2016) mentioned the importance of security and safety factors in his research on Chinese customer satisfaction in hotels. Clemes (2010) also emphasised that one of the satisfaction factors for Chinese customers in New Zealand hotels is safety. Safety did not emerge as a factor in this study. Language facilitation is another important satisfaction factor for Chinese guests staying in New Zealand hotels (Ying, Wen & Wang, 2018). If there are Chinese-speaking employees in New Zealand hotels, this is good for improving Chinese customer satisfaction (Xu & McGehee, 2012). However, in this study, Chinese customers mentioned their satisfaction with friendly and polite staff. The factors related to language services did not appear.

Although there is no specific literature describing Chinese customer satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland, this study still reviewed relevant literature on Chinese customer satisfaction with hotels generally.

Knowing the satisfaction factors of Chinese customers with Auckland 4-star hotels can help hotel practitioners working in differently rated hotels understand the demands of the Chinese customers' market with Auckland hotels from different perspectives. For example, Chinese customers in 4-star hotels of Auckland are most satisfied with the service factors. Therefore, for practitioners in the same star-rating hotels, improving service is a key factor to improve the competitiveness among these level hotels.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion to this research , overviewing its significance, limitations and future research opportunities.

5.2 The significance of this research

The purpose of this dissertation was to answer the following question:

What are the most important satisfaction factors for Chinese customers staying in 4-star hotels in Auckland?

According to the content analysis of 257 online reviews of Chinese customers on TripAdvisor, the service, room, location, and restaurant of 4-star hotels in Auckland emerged as the main satisfaction factors for Chinese customers influencing them to choose 4-star hotels in Auckland. At the same time, Chinese customers also considered the price, public areas, free parking, bedding quality, and the presence of bars as secondary satisfaction factors in a hotel.

Firstly, friendly staff, effective service, service in detail, and polite service in Auckland 4-star hotels were important satisfaction factors for Chinese customers. As Olga (2009) stated, warm and friendly service could motivate Chinese guests to give positive feedback on 4-star hotels and above. Mainland Chinese tourists thought that staff politeness, effectiveness of service, and the attention of the staff were the most important attributes of a high-star level hotel (Tsai, Yeung & Yim, 2011). When staying in a hotel, Chinese customers focus on the service attributes; among these, the friendly staff, efficient service, service in detail, and polite staff service, were often mentioned in the data of this study. These results indicate that Chinese customers were mainly satisfied by these four aspects (friendly staff, effective service, service in detail, and polite service) when staying in an Auckland 4-star hotel.

Secondly, the space, cleanliness, quietness of rooms, and view, were often mentioned in the Chinese customers' online reviews in this study. In the room factor, larger, clean,

and quiet hotel rooms, with good views of the harbour and Sky Tower, were overall Chinese customer satisfaction factors for 4-star hotels in Auckland

Thirdly, the location of the 4-star hotels in Auckland was good: closeness to the main road (Queen Street) or nearness of the main transport hub, and provision of many restaurants and shops nearby, were appreciated conveniences for Chinese customers. Therefore, location was a satisfaction factor for Chinese customers in 4-star hotels in Auckland.

Finally, restaurants in 4-star hotels were also an important factor in attracting Chinese customers. A good restaurant offers a wide variety and high quality buffet breakfast and afternoon tea. Chinese customers can enjoy various foods from a high quality restaurant. Therefore, it is understandable why restaurants are one of the most important satisfaction factors for Chinese customers in 4-star hotels in Auckland.

As for secondary factors, reasonable prices, good public areas, free parking, high quality beds and bedding, and good bars, are also among the factors that Chinese customers rate for 4-star hotels in Auckland, although in this study they were not obvious satisfaction factors.

Since 257 reviews were generated after Chinese customers stayed in 4-star hotels, this study can be used to identify the factors that Chinese customers are most satisfied with during their stays in 4-star hotels in Auckland. In this study, satisfaction factors were ranked in order of percentage. Service is shown to be the most important factor for Chinese customer satisfaction when they stay in an Auckland 4-star hotel. In online reviews on TripAdvisor, 35% of Chinese customers mentioned the key word "service" and expressed their satisfaction with the service provided by 4-star hotels. Specifically, under the keyword "service" different aspects of service were grouped, among which 80% of Chinese customers considered friendly staff as the most important factor in the service of 4-star hotels in Auckland.

5.3 Limitations

This study adopted purposive sampling method in the recruitment phase. It selected 257 online reviews from Chinese customers of 11 4-star hotels in Auckland in a period from

December 2014 to February 2019. Although the sample size of this study is relatively trustworthy, there still may be some errors. The study collected online reviews for content analysis through the TripAdvisor website, and Kozinets (2002) emphasised the possibility that some data collected from online communities might be untrustworthy. Since it was impossible to observe the participants in the sample face-to-face, the researcher was unable to assess whether the participants preferred written texts to alter their true "social expression". Furthermore, positive online reviews may be made by hotel employees to attract more customers.

Finally, errors in the TripAdvisor system can skew the results. Due to the system's text topic, when screening Chinese comments, it was found that some English comments were automatically translated into Chinese and displayed under the Chinese comment category. That may be why the site reuses reviews to get more attention from visitors. Therefore, the selection of Chinese comments in this study is affected by the website system, and the accuracy of online comments collected from Chinese people may be affected.

5.4 Future research

This dissertation only discussed the factors of Chinese customers' satisfaction with 4-star hotels in Auckland, but there was no discussion about why Chinese customers prefer 4-star hotels. Although the satisfaction of Chinese customers might be related to their reasons for choosing these hotels, further research is still needed.

In addition, this dissertation does not classify Chinese customers into different groups, whereas the literature shows that younger and older customers have different satisfaction factors for the hotel. Therefore, different Chinese customers' groups could be discussed in further research.

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