

**An examination of the attributes influencing Chinese
travellers' selection of short-term accommodation
platforms**

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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), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

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ABSTRACT

The three aims of this research are to: establish and test a model regarding attributes that influence Chinese travellers' selection of a short-term accommodation platform (STAP) in China; provide an analysis of Chinese domestic STAPs and foreign STAPs (Airbnb) by Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA); and investigate the effects of attributes on Chinese travellers' satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour.

This research used a deductive approach and quantitative research method. Based on an online anonymous questionnaire, data was collected from 200 Chinese respondents through social networking sites. Data analysis applied frequency descriptive analysis, IPA, independent sample t-test analysis, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis, to address the research questions and test hypotheses. This research found that the attributes of product price, product review, product variety, information quality, customer service quality, trust and privacy features, payment methods, loyalty programmes and product brand image, are important attributes in Chinese travellers' selection of STAPs. However, product reviews, customer service quality and trust and privacy features in the platforms are most important deciding attributes for Chinese travellers when selecting a platform. By comparing Chinese domestic STAPs with foreign STAPs, weaknesses in Chinese domestic brands were identified. Additionally, product price is the most important factor influencing travellers' satisfaction toward the platform and product variety is the most important factor influencing travellers' future loyalty behaviour.

This research investigates the relationships among STAP attributes, traveller satisfaction and loyalty behaviour in the field of STAP, theoretically establishing the selection model about STAP. Practically, this research provides information about strengths and weaknesses of domestic and foreign STAP companies for managers.

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

Short-Term Accommodation Platform	STAP
Importance- Performance Analysis	IPA
Product Price	PP
Product Review	PR
Product Variety	PV
Information Quality	IQ
Customer Service Quality	CSQ
Trust and Privacy features	TP
Payment Methods	PM
Loyalty Programmes	LP
Platform Brand	PB

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

The tourism industry has established itself as an important contributor for the developing Chinese economy and it is expected that by 2020 the number of Chinese domestic trips will exceed 2.4 billion (Xinhua, 2018). Hotels and motels have been the traditional accommodation providers for Chinese travellers and therefore their first option when they plan a trip (Nicoli & Papadopoulou, 2017; Wang & Wang, 2017). However, in recent years increasing numbers of Chinese travellers, especially young travellers, are choosing to book accommodation in the homes of local residents (Bie, Wang, & Wang, 2017; Guttentag, 2013). This kind of accommodation booking platform can be defined as a short-term accommodation platform (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016).

Short-term accommodation platform (STAP), refers to a web-platform where travellers book or rent a house or apartment directly from local respondents (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). Forgacs and Dimanche (2016) suggest that one of the reasons this kind of new accommodation booking platform has become more and more popular is because they provide travellers a chance to experience living and interacting with local residents. Prior research has been undertaken to investigate customer selection of hotel booking channels. However, there is no research concerning whether the attributes influencing travellers' selections of hotel booking channels are the same as the attributes influencing travellers' selections of STAPs. Consequently, this research adapts Liu and Zhang's travellers purchase intention model (2014) toward hotels to investigate attributes influencing Chinese travellers' selection regarding STAP.

In China, STAPs can be divided into local Chinese brands (e.g. Tujia, Xiaozhu) and foreign brands (e.g. Airbnb). Airbnb is a global STAP which connects landlords and customers. The mission of Airbnb is to provide homes which give travellers a sense of belonging (Miller, 2015). However, although Airbnb is well-known globally, it also faces great competition with local rivals, especially Tujia, the industry leader in the Chinese domestic market (China-Daily, 2017). Therefore, questions arise as to whether Chinese domestic or foreign STAPs give

a higher level of satisfaction in China. To address this question, this research uses Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) to compare the attributes and satisfaction levels of Chinese domestic STAPs and foreign STAPs.

It is generally thought that some attributes, such as product price and product review, could influence consumer satisfaction and loyalty behaviour, and consumer satisfaction could also directly and positively influence travellers' future loyalty behaviours in different industries (Chen & Chen, 2010; Kassim & Abdullah, 2010; Zhang & Mao, 2012). However, questions concerning whether those attributes influencing Chinese travellers' selection of STAP, which will be investigated in this research, will also have effects on Chinese travellers' satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour. Therefore, this research uses multiple regression analysis to test the relationships between attributes, Chinese travellers' satisfaction and future loyalty.

1.2 Research Objectives

Based on above discussion, the objectives of the study are summarised as follows:

1. To find which attributes influence Chinese travellers' selection of a STAP in China and to find which attributes are most important for Chinese travellers in selecting a STAP in China
2. To find the satisfaction level regarding each attribute of Chinese domestic brands and foreign brands of STAPs and compare their weaknesses and strengths
3. To investigate the effects of the attributes in STAP on Chinese travellers' satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour

1.3 Significance of the Dissertation

This research makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this research will provide knowledge of STAPs, particularly after establishing the selection model about STAP and investigating the relationships between STAP attributes, traveller satisfaction and travellers' future loyalty behaviour. Considering previous research focused on customer selection of hotel booking channels, there is a significant gap in the research investigating the selection of STAP. This research will be a first step towards filling the existing research gap.

Practically, this research will identify the attributes that are important in travellers' selections and satisfaction of STAP and thus how they can improve travellers' future loyalty behaviour. Additionally, by using IPA to compare Chinese domestic and foreign short-term accommodation platforms, managers will be able to gain the understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their STAPs. Using this knowledge, they can implement practices that may enhance their STAPs' competitive advantage.

1.4 Dissertation Overview

This research is organised as follows:

Chapter Two provides a review of current literature. Initially, this chapter introduces the concepts of STAP and makes comparisons with online hotel booking channels. This is followed by a discussion about the attributes which influence travellers' selection of STAP in China and develops research questions based on Liu and Zhang's (2014) online booking channel's purchase intention model. The IPA model will then be introduced. This is used for providing a descriptive analysis of both Chinese domestic and foreign STAPs and for further discussion in this chapter. The concepts of traveller satisfaction and traveller loyalty behaviour are also introduced, followed by developing hypotheses of the relationships between attributes, traveller satisfaction and traveller loyalty behaviour regarding STAP.

Chapter Three introduces the methodology and methods used in the study. The positivist theoretical perspective and objectivist epistemology applied within this study are introduced. Additionally, the use of the quantitative research method, the online questionnaire and the data analysis methods, including independent-sample t-test, one-way analysis of variance, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis, are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Four presents the findings from various types of analysis. This chapter introduces basic demographic information of participants, based on frequencies descriptive analysis. The chapter also presents the findings of IPA to address the research question concerning whether all the attributes are significant on Chinese travellers' selection of STAP, and to provide descriptive analysis of Chinese

domestic and foreign STAPs. Then, the findings from the independent-sample t-test and one-way analysis of variance for group comparison are presented. Finally, the findings from the correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis used to test relationships between variables and test the hypothesis model about the relationship between those attributes, travellers' satisfaction and travellers' future loyalty behaviour are presented.

Chapter Five presents a discussion of the findings from Chapter four. This chapter introduces the theoretical and practical implications of this research. It also discusses the limitations of this research and points out the directions of future study. A conclusion of this research is then provided.

Finally, the references, questionnaire, invitation message, information sheet, questionnaire and original data analysis outputs from the SPSS are presented.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Preview

The aims of this research include establishing and testing a model of the attributes which influence travellers' selections regarding short-term accommodation platforms (STAPs) in China, providing an analysis of both Chinese domestic and foreign brands concerned with STAP, and investigating the relationships between attributes, traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour toward STAP. To meet the aims of this research, this chapter introduces the literature and the main concepts related to STAP, travellers' satisfaction and loyalty behaviour, and the development of research questions and hypotheses.

This chapter introduces the concepts of STAP and makes comparisons with online hotel booking channels. This is followed by a discussion of attributes which influence travellers' selection of STAP in China and developing research questions, based on Liu and Zhang's (2014) online hotel purchase intention model. The Importance-Preference Analysis (IPA) model is then introduced. Following this, the concepts of traveller satisfaction and traveller loyalty behaviour are introduced, followed by developing hypotheses of the relationship between traveller satisfaction and traveller loyalty behaviour regarding STAP.

2.2 Short-Term Accommodation Platforms

STAP is a web-platform which provides peer-to-peer services, enabling people to lease or rent short-term lodgings easily and conveniently (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). Forgacs and Dimanche (2016) suggest that, currently, increasing numbers of teenagers desire authenticity and out-of-the-ordinary experiences, which STAP can provide. Through authentic experiences travellers can learn local knowledge when communicating with their hosts. In comparison with traditional hotel accommodation, people are often offered more engaging and creative neighbourhood experiences through STAPs (Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015; Forgacs & Dimanche, 2016).

In China, STAPs can be divided into Chinese local STAPs, such as Tujia, Xiaozhu, and foreign STAPs, such as Airbnb. Although Airbnb is the most popular online STAP on a global scale, its growth in the Chinese domestic market has been less

than predicted (Global-Times, 2017). It is thought that the main reason for this is that there are several Airbnb imitators in China who have attempted to duplicate Airbnb's business model (Forbes-Asian, 2016). Lim and Bouchon (2017) point out that, compared with Airbnb whose potential customers are from every corner of the world, Chinese local STAPs may provide similar services to Airbnb but cater only to Chinese customers. In the Chinese domestic market, there is fierce competition amongst STAPs, and therefore it may be useful for companies to know why travellers prefer one STAP over another.

2.3 Comparison of Online Booking Channels

Online booking channels could be divided into STAPs and online hotel booking channels which include hotel website booking channels and online travel agent booking channels (OTA). Liu and Zhang (2014) explain that online hotel booking channels are web-platforms which provide information on hotel accommodation and connect customers to the websites of hotels and online travel agents (OTAs). Both hotel websites and OTAs aim to book customers into hotels. However, STAPs are web-platforms which provide peer-to-peer services, enabling people to lease or rent private short-term lodgings from individuals (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). In other words, STAPs are third-party websites where travellers can book houses or apartments from strangers who live in the area to which they are travelling (Guttentag, 2013; Bie, Wang, & Wang, 2017).

As can be seen in Table 1, considerable research has investigated attributes which could influence travellers' selection of hotel online booking channels. However, only Liu and Zhang include all attributes in their research. Other researchers only investigate the influence of one single factor. Considering that both STAPs and online hotel booking channels are web-platforms providing accommodation information (Liu & Zhang, 2014; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016), the attributes influencing travellers' selections of online hotel booking channels may be the same as the attributes influencing travellers' selections of STAPs. Therefore, Liu and Zhang's customer purchase intention model was adapted and used in this research to investigate attributes influencing travellers' selection regarding STAP in China.

Attributes	Product Price	Product Review	Product Variety	Information Quality	Customers Service Quality	Trust and Privacy features	Payment Methods	Loyalty Programmes
(Lockyer, 2005)	x							
(Park & Stoel, 2005)			x					
(Kim, Ma, & Kim, 2006)							x	
(Chiang, 2007)	x							
(Dahlberg & Oorni, 2007)							x	
(Leenheer, Van Heerde, Bijmolt, & Smidts, 2007)								x
(Beldad, Jong, & Steehouder, 2010)					x			
(Gorla, Somers, & Wong, 2010)				X				
(McCole, Ramsey, & Williams, 2010).						x		
(Wei, Cheung, & Law, 2010)	x							
(Xue & Zhou, 2010).		x						
(Kim & Eastin, 2011).					x			
(Lee, Park, & Han, 2011)		x						
(Lee & Wu, 2011)					x			
(Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011).			x					
(Belanche, Casaló, & Guinalíu, 2012).						x		
(Gong, Stump, & Maddox, 2013)							x	
(Metzger & Flanagan, 2013)				X				
(Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus, & Cobanoglu, 2013)						x		
(Kim, Kim, Kim, & Magnini, 2014).				X				
(Liu & Zhang, 2014)	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x
(Rhee & Yang, 2014)			x					
(Xie & Chen, 2014).								x
(Qiu, Ye, Bai, & Wang, 2015)			x					

Table 1: Previous research about attributes affecting customer choices of online hotel booking channels

2.4 The Attributes Influencing Travellers' Selections of STAP

In this section, each attribute in Liu and Zhang's (2014) customer purchase intention model, will be used and discussed to establish a model about the attributes that influence travellers' selections concerning STAPs in China.

2.4.1 Product price (The level and value for money)

Liu and Zhang (2014) state that product price is not the only factor that influences customer selection, but they believe that it is the most important factor. A number of studies have investigated the importance of accommodation price on traveller selection when booking accommodation. For example, Chiang (2007) states that, whenever customers make decisions about purchases, they must consider price. Lockyer (2005) states that, for travellers who plan to book accommodation during a trip, they always select a price range based on their travel budget. Wei, Cheung and Law (2010) point out that, as travellers today are offered many online booking channels because of the rapid development of the internet, service providers not only need to provide accommodation at different price ranges but also need to create price advantages. In other words, if the accommodation price shown on one web-platform exceeds a traveller's budget, they are more likely to search on other web-platforms. Furthermore, as many Chinese travellers are price conscious (Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline, & Wang, 2011), accommodation price may be a crucial factor for travellers in China. Moreover, Tsai, Yeung and Yim (2011) suggest that travellers in China prefer to spend more of their travel budget on shopping rather than accommodation.

However, this does not mean that travellers will always select accommodation from platforms with lowest prices because customers may be interested if they consider the price to be reasonable, but not the cheapest. Chen and Chen (2010) point out that value for money is also very important. Perceived value can be defined as the overall benefits provided by a certain product, and different customers can have their own ideas regarding this. When customers decide to purchase products, a higher price may be reasonable if they believe they are gaining more overall perceived value (Chen & Dubinsky, 2003).

2.4.2 Product review (Feedback of other customers)

Liu and Zhang (2014) point out that product reviews were shown to be the second most important factor. Product reviews can be defined as information, recommendations or comments created by other customers (Lee, Park, & Han, 2011). An abundance of literature exists that investigates the influence of product reviews on customers' decisions. Su, John Mariadoss and Reynolds (2015) state that, in terms of online business, product reviews are one of the most important attributes influencing customer selection. Customers are likely to check previous customer reviews of a certain product before making purchase decisions on the internet (Aberer & Despotovic, 2001). Furthermore, the hospitality industry is strongly influenced by customer word of mouth (WOM) (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). Sparks and Browning (2011) suggest that travellers prefer to book accommodation with positive reviews rather than reserving accommodation with negative comments.

Considering there are different information-search behaviours between Chinese and Western consumers, contributed by social and culture differences, the influence of product reviews on Chinese consumers and consumers in Western countries also differs (Doran, 2002). This is because consumers in Western countries are more likely to judge products based on their knowledge of products, but Chinese consumers are more likely to judge the credibility of products depending on online product reviews (Xue & Zhou, 2010). In other words, compared with buyers in Western countries, Chinese consumers are more likely to trust and have purchase intention for products with positive comments.

Customers who use STAP face higher risks as they are dealing with individuals rather than businesses (Xiong & Liu, 2003). This is because, compared with online hotel booking channels which connect customers and hotels, STAP connects strangers, which means they may face more trust issues. Considering trust to be a critical element in the peer-to peer-market, Xiong and Liu (2003) suggest that, from the perspective of merchants in online communities, in order to establish trust and promote consumer purchase intention, it is important to create positive feedback from their buyers. It is because of this that product reviews can increase a customer's sense of security.

2.4.3 Product variety

Based on their customer purchase intention model, Liu and Zhang (2014) state that product variety may affect purchase intentions regarding online hotel booking channels. They indicate that, compared with hotel websites which only sell their own hotel accommodation, OTA websites, as third-party websites, contain information about a variety of hotels (Liu & Zhang, 2014). Therefore, customers who use OTA websites can compare different rooms from different hotel groups before making decisions (Liu & Zhang, 2014).

Similarly, if more accommodation options are available in those STAPs, they may be more attractive. This is because travellers may not only have different requirements regarding accommodation (Rhee & Yang, 2014), but also may have different preferences for different types of accommodation (Qiu, Ye, Bai, & Wang, 2015). In China's domestic market, the number of travellers in the first half of 2017 exceeded 2.4 billion (Xinhua, 2018) and increasing numbers of them like to try STAP (Wang & Wang, 2017). That being the case, in order to cater to travellers' individual requirements and preferences, STAP should offer different types of accommodation. Additionally, in terms of online product sales in China, product variety is one of the most important determinants influencing online customer satisfaction (Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011). This is because a wider assortment of products may satisfy different consumer requirements in different locations (Guo, Ling & Liu, 2012).

From the perspective of consumers, Park and Stoel (2005) state that customers are more likely to select web-platforms which provide more options (Park & Stoel, 2005). Similarly, Guo, Ling and Liu (2012) claim that customers are attracted to web-platforms which offer a wide range of accommodation and that an assortment of products on web-platforms can improve customer e-satisfaction. As a result, customers are more likely to purchase and repurchase. Additionally, Park and Stoel (2005) suggest suggest that web-platforms which provide customers with a greater choice of products, are more likely to keep customers coming back.

2.4.4 Information quality

Liu and Zhang (2014) state that travellers are more likely to book accommodation from websites which contain high quality information. Information regarding accommodation can be divided into textual information and pictorial information (Kim, Kim, Kim & Magnini, 2014). Therefore, the quality of information in STAP refers to the quality of textual descriptions and pictures displayed on the websites.

Gorla, Somers and Wong (2010) point out that high quality textual information is important for web-platforms with most high-quality information containing four dimensions: accuracy, completeness, consistency and currency. Accuracy of information is important to establish trust with consumers. Wang, Law, Guillet, Hung and Fong (2015) indicate that with sufficient accurate information, a web-platform can promote the trust of customers which positively affects online purchase intentions. Referring to completeness of textual information, Chung and Law (2003) suggest that accommodation websites should include information on facilities, reservations, the surrounding area, the management of the website and the ways in which customers can get in contact. Consistency of information refers to the fact that there should be no conflict between two datasets (Gorla, Somers & Wong, 2010). Metzger and Flanagin (2013) point out that consistency of information in a web-platform is important for service providers in order to increase reputation and credibility of their web-platform. Currency of information means that information in the web platform should be kept up to date (Gorla, Somers & Wong, 2010). Kim, Galliers, Shin, Ryoo and Kim (2012) suggest that information currency may positively influence shopping value and customer purchase intention. With the development of the internet, travellers are more likely to book accommodation directly from any place and anytime, using their own devices (Chung & Law, 2003). Therefore, it is important for accommodation web-platforms to establish not only websites with good quality information but also mobile applications with good quality information in order to attract visitors (Chung & Law, 2003).

In terms of pictorial information, Dickinger and Mazanec (2008) indicate that an ideal online booking platform should include pictures of the hotel and its rooms. Additionally, picture quality is an important factor of web aesthetics and the

aesthetics on a web platform may attract more customers and become the competitive advantage of certain online service providers (Wang, Minor, & Wei, 2011). Wang, Minor and Wei (2011) suggest that the aesthetics in a web platform are presented not only by systematic layout of items and clear text but also by the size, clarity and added decoration of images. Therefore, the quality of pictorial information may influence the aesthetic of the websites and further influence online consumer satisfaction toward websites..

2.4.5 Customer Service Quality

Liu and Zhang (2014) indicate that customer service quality, as a part of a website's overall quality, is also an important factor that influences customers in their selection of online hotel booking channels. As Lee and Wu (2011) state, a web-platform is not only used to deliver information but is also used to interact and communicate with customers. Therefore, in this research, customer service quality in STAP refers to the communication between travellers and online service providers.

Online communication between travellers and online service providers is important for web-platforms because effective communication not only enhances the trust of consumers (Beldad, Jong, & Steehouder, 2010) but can also stimulate a feeling of fun and enjoyment (Kim & Eastin, 2011). Dickinger (2010) points out that, if tourist websites or service provider websites establish effective lines of communication channels, their websites are perceived as being more trustworthy. Similarly, Kim and Park (2013) suggest that the communication in online commerce plays a significant role in establishing successful relationships between consumers and sellers. Lee and Wu (2011) also claim that e-service quality positively influences customer satisfaction and purchase intention. In other words, if a web-platform can provide customers with not only quality information but also interactive communication channels, they tend to attract more customers. As a result, customer service quality in STAP appears to hold some influence over consumer selection.

2.4.6 Trust and privacy features

Customers may also consider the trust and privacy features of a website when deciding to book hotels (Liu & Zhang, 2014). Trust and privacy features in the web-platform refer to the policies that are displayed on the website.

Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus and Cobanoglu (2013) explain that online consumers may have privacy and security concerns stemming from a lack of experience in using a new web platform. They may experience feelings of uncertainty before taking the decision to receive online service. These kinds of feelings can also be defined as perceived risk which may strongly influence consumer purchase behaviour (Belanche, Casaló, & Guinalíu, 2012). In order to eliminate the concern regarding privacy and security, online service providers should establish more commitment or privacy policies and notices (Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus, & Cobanoglu, 2013). Liu, Marchewka, Lu and Yu (2004) claim, that sufficient privacy and security notices on a website can improve a customer's level of trust and further influence their online purchase intention. From the perspective of service providers, McCole, Ramsey and Williams (2010) state that internet merchants should display relevant privacy policies when they interact with customers, especially when customers are making transactions. These behaviours can improve brand image and reputation as well as enhance trust in customers (McCole, Ramsey, & Williams, 2010). With sufficient trust, customers are more likely to make purchases (McCole, Ramsey, & Williams, 2010).

2.4.7 Payment methods

STAPs may need to offer payment options for consumers in order to cater for different payment habits. Dahlberg and Oorni (2007) believe that the demand for different payment methods can be attributed not only to demographic attributes, but also to the payment method's perceived security as well as being user-friendly. Ching and Hayashi (2008) also point out that some payment methods may offer reward programmes to attract consumers, in which case, some clients may opt for this payment method. Therefore, if STAP offers a variety of payment methods, they may attract more customers with different payment habits to book accommodation (Wong & Law, 2005).

Additionally, finding suitable payment methods is also important for online service companies. Kim, Ma and Kim (2006) claim that suitable payment methods can increase the reliability of a web-platform and provide both travellers and landlords convenience as well as eliminating uncertainty concerning the safety of financial transactions. Gong, Stump and Maddox (2013) point out that, in addition to cultural barriers and government policies, lack of a safe payment mechanism can aggravate the difficulty for foreign companies to operate online. For Chinese travellers, payment methods may be a very important factor. Kim, Ma and Kim (2006) state that most Chinese travellers prefer to use offline payment methods such as bank transfers, Alipay, or delivering the payment in person due to concerns surrounding the security of credit card payments. Considering that Chinese travellers' exhibit a high degree of uncertainty avoidance in this area (Litvin, Crotts, & Hefner, 2004), when they book accommodation using STAP, they are more than likely to choose familiar payment methods (Kim, Ma & Kim, 2006).

Some web-platforms also establish trust mechanisms to build trust between two strangers. For instance, some web-platforms set regulations regarding security deposits. In such cases, if guests do not break any of the stipulated rules, they will get their deposit back. Considering that two strangers are unlikely to engage in a monetary transaction without trusting one another, such trust mechanisms are essential ingredients for online marketplace transactions (Heo, 2016). Compared with online hotel booking channels which connect customers and hotels, STAPs connect strangers and therefore, face more trust issues. As a result, the availability of a variety of payment methods can increase a customer's sense of security and, in turn, can have an important influence on a customer's selection of a STAP.

2.4.8 Customer previous experience

Kim and Kim (2004) point out that a customer's online booking intention is directly influenced by their experience with a business. In the online service industry, customers' repeat purchase intentions can be seen to be a result in eliminating dissatisfaction and improving satisfaction (Guo, Ling, & Liu, 2012). Considering that STAP aims to provide online booking services for travellers, it can be seen as a web platform which combines travel services and online services. Travellers' selections of STAP may be also be influenced by reviews from

previous customers relating their experiences. In other words, a memorable experience is very important and can promote travellers' loyalty behaviour intentions (Tanford, Raab, & Kim, 2012). Kim, Ma, & Kim (2006) also point out that customers who have had good purchase experiences with a certain web-platform will feel more at ease about repurchasing from it. Similarly, Deng, Lu, Wei and Zhang (2010) conclude that most customer selection intentions can be seen as a function of previous satisfaction experience of booking accommodation. Hu, Huang and Chen (2010) explain that if travellers are satisfied with their previous experience, they reduce price sensitivity and acquire a perceived higher value of the trip. In contrast, customers not satisfied with their experience may likely trigger negative electronic WOM (Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu & Okumus, 2015).

Additionally, Hu, Huang and Chen (2010) suggest that customer satisfaction regarding previous experiences is a key determinant for loyalty behaviour. If customers feel satisfied with previous experiences, they are more likely to convey positive comments to others, which may serve to not only attract more customers to the site but also increase the likelihood of repeat usage. The relationship between traveller satisfaction levels regarding previous short-term accommodation experiences and its impact on future loyalty behaviour will be investigated separately in section 2.7.

2.4.9 Loyalty programmes

Loyalty programmes can be defined as value commitment or value of benefits (Tanford, Raab, & Kim, 2010). In the current hotel industry, an increasing number of hotel chains, including hotel websites, OTA websites and STAPs, establish various loyalty programmes to increase customer loyalty and attract new customers (Xie & Chen, 2014). Tanford (2013) also points out that loyalty programmes are a significant factor in promoting customer future loyalty behaviour. Bie, Wang and Wang (2017) also state that loyalty programmes can improve customer satisfaction levels and also positively motivate their purchase intentions. Similarly, Leenheer, Van Heerde, Bijmolt and Smidts (2007) claim that loyalty programmes motivate consumers to spend a much higher share of their wallet. Therefore, it is likely that loyalty programmes can help web-platforms

grow more rapidly and attract more customers (Cusumano, 2014). Additionally, Hu, Huang, and Chen (2010) investigated the influence of loyalty programmes on customer satisfaction. They found that loyalty programmes can enhance customer satisfaction when customers already feel satisfied with the experience. However, if consumers feel dissatisfied with service providers and they decide not to repurchase, reward programmes can be seen as a means of service recovery (Hu, Huang, & Chen, 2010). In other words, immediate rewards may pacify dissatisfaction and retain customer loyalty.

In the Chinese domestic market, loyalty programmes are also important for the online service industry. Suh and Yi (2012) indicate that a loyalty programme can contribute to sales increases and promote online consumer loyalty. For instance, some online service providers may directly deliver coupons and free gifts to membership consumers to cultivate consumer loyalty to their web-platform. Loyalty programmes are important for hotel booking channels and online service providers, therefore STAP could be perceived as a combination of these two services. Considering this, consumer selection of STAP may also be influenced by loyalty programmes.

2.4.10 Brand image

In their study of online hotel booking channels, Liu and Zhang (2014) found that there was not enough evidence to support the theory that a hotel's brand will influence channel choice. However, conversely, Chiang (2007) claims that the brand image of both a hotel and a channel are important attributes in a customer's selection.

For those consumers who have never used STAP, brand image may be an important factor influencing their decision. As has already been stated, Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus and Cobanoglu (2013) point out that online consumers may have concerns because they lack the experience of using a new web platform. In that case, they may feel uncertainty about making decisions to receive online services. This research acknowledges that travellers may have to accept that there are higher risks involved in using STAP compared with using online hotel booking channels. This being the case, a good brand image may positively influence

travellers' selections when they have concerns prior to making a decision. A good brand image represents quality service (Chiang, 2007) and goes some way to eliminating the concern of product quality (Park & Stoel, 2005). Additionally, it may be easier for a platform with a good brand image to cultivate consumer loyalty (Louis & Lombart, 2010). Therefore, consumers using STAP with a good and well-known brand image, are more likely to repurchase. Furthermore, Chinese consumers are sensitive to maintaining 'face' in every aspect of life. Hence, a product carrying a good brand image and reputation will always be perceived as conspicuous consumption among Chinese consumers (Hu, Liu, Wang, & Yang, 2012).

Therefore, although Liu and Zhang (2014) claim that brand image does not significantly affect customer selection of online hotel booking channels, it is likely that the brand image of STAP is an important factor in influencing travellers' selections in the Chinese domestic market.

2.5 Development of Research Question

Based on the above discussion, traveller selection of a STAP may be influenced by product price, product reviews and product variety, information quality, customer service quality, trust and privacy, payment, customers' previous experience, loyalty behaviour and brand image. However, the relationship between travellers' satisfaction toward previous experience of using STAPs and travellers' future loyalty behaviour will be investigated separately in section 2.6 Traveller Satisfaction and Future Loyalty Behaviour. Figure 1 presents a model showing the attributes influencing traveller selection of STAPs.

However, as the significance of each factor is not yet clear, this research aims to address the following two research questions: Q1: are all the attributes significant in Chinese travellers' selection of STAP? Q2: what is the main factor significantly influencing Chinese travellers' selections of STAP?

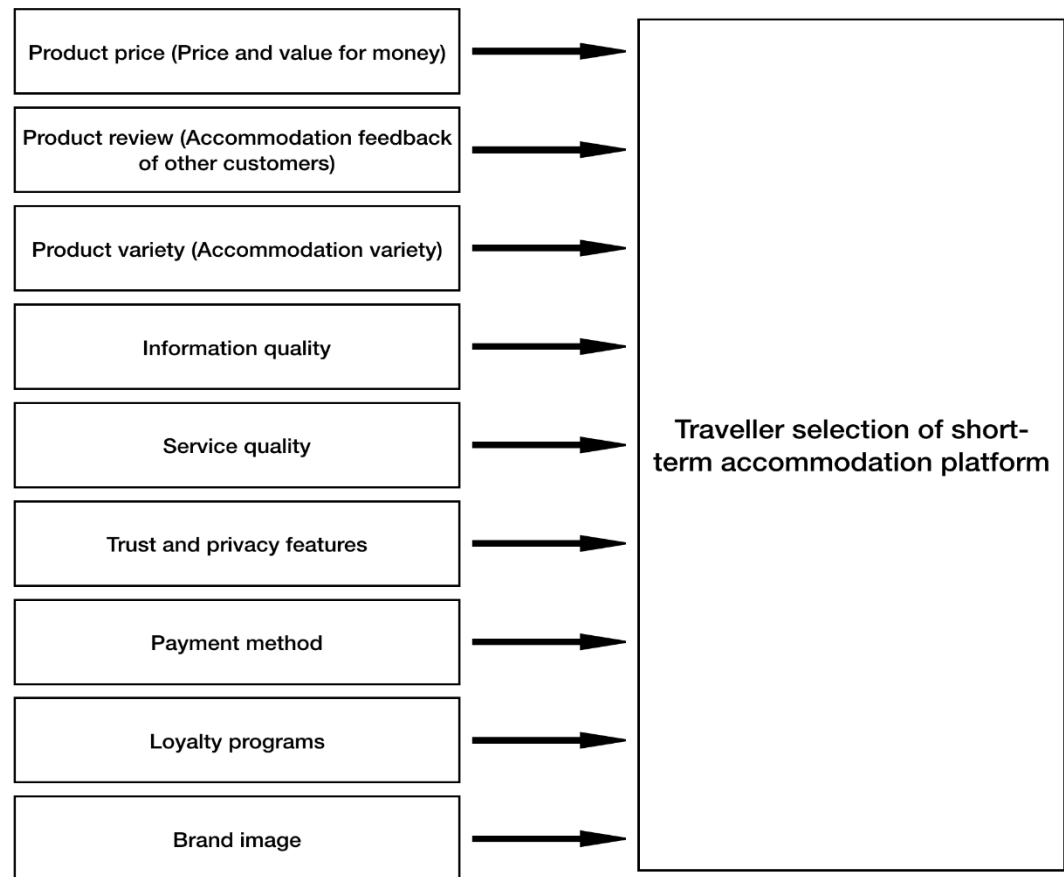


Figure 1: The attributes influencing travellers' selections of STAP

2.6 Importance-Performance Analysis

Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) is an easily understood technique used to measure the importance of certain attributes and customer satisfaction toward those attributes (Martilla & James, 1977). Based on the primary data relating to customer opinion toward the importance of certain attributes and the satisfaction level of customers toward these attributes, companies can identify strengths and weaknesses and make strategic plans for future development (Kang & Park, 2016). There is an abundance of literature investigating the application of IPA in the hotel and service industry. For instance, Chu and Choi (2000) used IPA to analyse hotel selection attributes in Hong Kong hotels. Tzeng and Chang (2011) utilised IPA to analyse service quality in the Taiwan food service industry. Sorenson and Von Friedrichs (2013) also used the same method to investigate the performance of social and environmental sustainability of certain tourist destinations to draw a

comparison between the preferences of international tourists and those of national tourists.

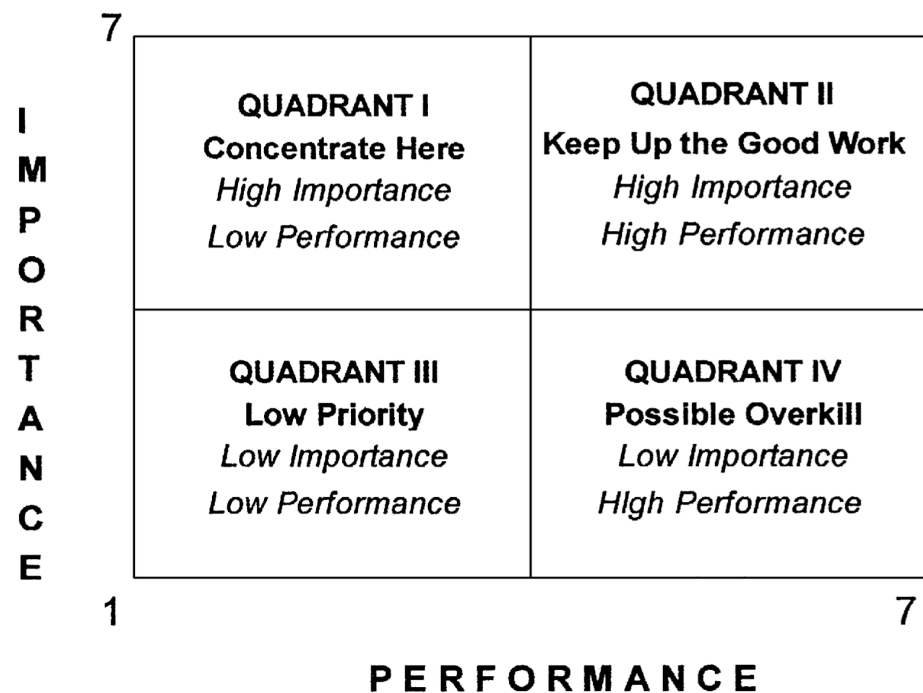


Figure 2: Importance-performance analysis graph (Chu & Choi, 2000)

Important-Performance Analysis can be used to identify the strength and weakness of certain companies by collecting the opinions of customers about the importance of certain attributes and the satisfaction level felt towards certain attributes (Martilla & James, 1977). After collecting the data, the results indicating the importance and satisfaction regarding the attributes is displayed on a two-dimensional grid. As can be seen in Figure 2, a grid is divided into four quadrants (i.e. “Concentrate Here”, “Keep up the Good Work”, “Low Priority”, and “Possible Overkill”) by two axes: the Y-axis represents the level of importance of the attribute while the X-axis scores the level of satisfaction or performance (Mullins & Spetich, 1987).

Attributes in Quadrant I, Concentrate Here, have high scores of importance, but low scores of satisfactions (Martilla & James, 1977). These attributes can be seen as a weakness in the company because customers perceive them as important attributes influencing their selection, however, they are not satisfied with the way those attributes are being handled within the company (Martilla & James, 1977).

In cases like this, Martilla and James (1977) suggest that companies should spend more time and effort concentrating on these attributes in order to improve customer satisfaction.

Attributes in Quadrant II, Keep Up the Good Work, have high scores in both importance and satisfaction of attributes (Martilla & James, 1977). These attributes are seen as a strength in the company because customers believe them to be important and they are also satisfied with the implementation of those attributes within the company (Martilla & James, 1977). Therefore, the company should maintain the development of those attributes in Quadrant II.

Attributes in Quadrant III, Low Priority, have low scores in both importance and satisfaction (Martilla & James, 1977). In other words, the attributes in this quadrant can be seen as unimportant attributes for customers who are also, currently, not satisfied with these attributes (Martilla & James, 1977). In this case, a company would not need to consider taking these attributes into consideration when developing future strategies.

Attributes in Quadrant IV, Possible Overkill, have low scores of importance, but high scores of satisfaction (Martilla & James, 1977). In other words, these attributes can be seen as a potential strength in a company because customers are satisfied with the attributes, even though they are not perceived as important attributes influencing their selection. In cases like this, companies would be advised to maintain those attributes without necessarily taking them into account when planning into future strategy (Martilla & James, 1977).

IPA is a common technique used to analyse traveller satisfaction in the hotel industry but no previous research has adopted IPA to investigate the selection of STAP. Considering that currently, in the Chinese domestic market, there is fierce competition among STAPs, it is important for those companies to know which attributes are important for travellers when selecting a platform. In addition, it is important to know whether travellers are satisfied with the attributes in their own platforms. Therefore, this research will utilise IPA to provide a descriptive analysis of travellers' experiences using different STAPs in China. IPA will

provide information reflecting the importance and satisfaction of the attributes and from which relevant practical implications for companies may be derived

2.7 Attributes of STAPs and Traveller Satisfaction

By adopting expectation disconfirmation theory to model satisfaction, satisfaction can be defined as the perceived discrepancy between prior expectation and perceived feeling after experiencing a service or consumption (Clemes, Gan, & Ren, 2010). Consumers will feel dissatisfied when the service performance is different from their prior expectation (Clemes, Gan, & Ren, 2010). In terms of using a web-platform, customer satisfaction could be assessed by comparing pre-using expectation and post-using feelings. Consumers may feel satisfied when their post-using feeling is one of gratification, compared with pre-using expectation (Chen & Chen, 2010).

In contrast, when the post-using feeling is displeasure, customers would most likely feel dissatisfied (Chen & Chen, 2010). Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between product price, product reviews, product variety, information quality, service quality, trust and privacy, payment, loyalty programmes, brand image, and traveller satisfaction with online hotel booking channels. For instance, Yeh and Sung (2013) point out that the level of accommodation price will directly influence customers' perceived value, and further influence customer satisfaction. Han and Hyun (2015) believe that value for money is important in creating customer satisfaction. Sparks and Browning (2011) state that good previous consumer feedback can promote cognitive trust in hotel booking channels, thereby influencing new customers' satisfaction toward a particular hotel booking channel. Ye, Law, Gu and Chen (2011) cite that product variety has a positive effect in influencing online customer satisfaction. Wang, Minor and Wei (2011) state that the quality of pictorial information may influence the aesthetics of the website and further influence online consumers' satisfaction toward the website. Lee and Wu (2011) also indicate that e-service quality positively influences customer satisfaction and future purchase intention. Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus and Cobanoglu (2013) found that setting commitment or privacy policies and notices can eliminate the concern of privacy and security,

followed by improvement in consumer satisfaction. Kim, Ma and Kim (2006) claim that suitable payment methods can increase the reliability of a web-platform and provide both travellers and landlords with convenience thereby promoting satisfaction. Bie, Wang and Wang (2017) also state that loyalty programmes can improve customer satisfaction levels and also positively motivate their purchase intentions. Louis and Lombart (2010) inform us that a platform with a good brand image may find it easier to cultivate consumer loyalty and preference.

Both online hotel booking channels and STAPs belong to online accommodation booking service web platforms (Liu & Zhang, 2014; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). Therefore, as outlined in Figure 3, this research aims to examine the direct relationships between the attributes of product price, product reviews and product variety, information quality, customer service quality, trust and privacy, payment, loyalty programmes, brand image, and traveller satisfaction to STAP. Based on the above discussion, the hypothetical relationships between attributes and traveller satisfaction with STAPs are proposed as follows:

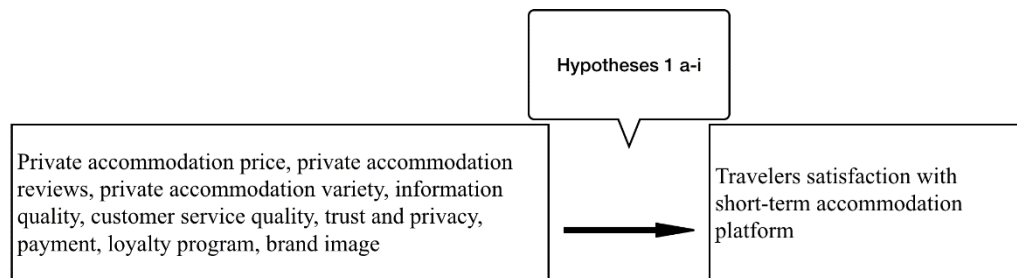


Figure 3: Development of hypotheses 1 a-i

H1-a: Accommodation price has a positive effect on traveller satisfaction regarding STAP

H1-b: Product reviews have a positive effect on the traveller satisfaction regarding STAP

H1-c: Product variety has a positive effect on the traveller satisfaction regarding STAP

H1-d: Information quality has a positive effect on the traveller satisfaction regarding STAP

H1-e: Customer service quality has a positive effect on the traveller satisfaction regarding STAP

H1-f: Trust and privacy have a positive effect on the traveller satisfaction regarding STAP

H1-g: Payment has a positive effect on the traveller satisfaction regarding STAP

H1-h: Loyalty programmes have a positive effect on the traveller satisfaction regarding STAP

H1-i: Brand image has a positive effect on the traveller satisfaction regarding STAP

2.8 Attributes of STAP and Travellers' Future Loyalty Behaviour

Travellers' future loyalty behaviour refers to those behaviours determined by strong attitudinal loyalty towards a certain brand (Kassim & Asiah Abdullah, 2010). Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) point out that customer loyalty behaviour may include making positive comments about the products to other people, recommending products to someone seeking advice, encouraging friends and relatives to use those products, considering products as a first choice and repurchasing within a few years. Tanford, Raab and Kim (2012) found that the two most common loyalty behaviours towards hotels are revisiting and WOM. Casaló, Flavián, Guinalíu and Ekinci (2015) believe that loyalty can be seen as a commitment to do business with a company, which leads to benefits such as repeat purchases and recommendations of products to friends and associates.

The positive effect of product price, product reviews and product variety, information quality, customer service quality, trust and privacy, payment, loyalty programmes and brand image on travellers' future loyalty behaviour to online hotel booking channels has been investigated in many previous research studies. For instance, Han and Hyun (2015) point out that if the price of accommodation is reasonable, hotel booking channels will easily promote customer retention and loyalty. Park and Stoel (2005) found that web-platforms which provide customers

with a greater choice of products, are more likely to retain customers. Bilgihan and Bujisic (2015) claim that loyalty to a web-platform may be derived from information, reviews conducted by other customers, and privacy policies. Lee and Wu (2011) also state that e-service quality positively influences customer satisfaction and future repurchase intention. Bie, Wang and Wang (2017) agree that loyalty programmes can improve customers' satisfaction levels and positively motivate purchase intentions. Louis and Lombart (2010) claim that a platform with good brand image may find it easier to cultivate consumer loyalty and preference.

Online hotel booking channels and STAPs are both online service web platforms providing an online accommodation booking service (Liu & Zhang, 2014; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). As can be seen in Figure 4, this research aims to examine the relationships between the attributes of product price, product reviews and product variety, information quality, customer service quality, trust and privacy, payment, loyalty programmes and brand image, and traveller future loyalty behaviour to STAP. Based on the above discussion, the hypothetical relationship between those attributes and travellers' future loyalty behaviour to STAP are proposed as follows:

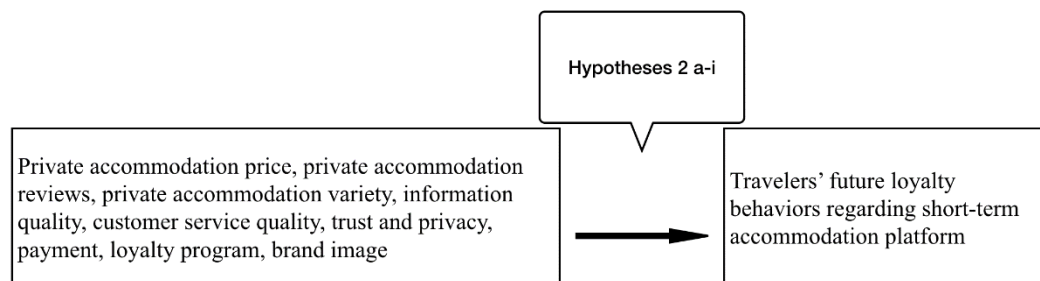


Figure 4: Development of hypotheses 2 a-i

H2-a: Product price has a positive effect on travellers' future loyalty behaviour regarding STAP

H2-b: Product reviews have a positive effect on travellers' future loyalty behaviour regarding STAP

H2-c: Product variety has a positive effect on travellers' future loyalty behaviour regarding STAP

H2-d: Information quality has a positive effect on travellers' future loyalty behaviour regarding STAP

H2-e: Customer service quality has a positive effect on travellers' future loyalty behaviour regarding STAP

H2-f: Trust and privacy have a positive effect on travellers' future loyalty behaviour regarding STAP

H2-g: Payment has a positive effect on travellers' future loyalty behaviour regarding STAP

H2-h: Loyalty programmes have a positive effect on travellers' future loyalty behaviour regarding STAP

H2-i: Brand image has a positive effect on travellers' future loyalty behaviour regarding STAP

2.9 Traveller Satisfaction and Future Loyalty Behaviour

The positive influence of travellers' satisfaction on future loyalty behaviour has been widely verified in existing literature. For instance, Chen and Chen (2010) point out that the higher the level of satisfaction that heritage travellers experience, the more future loyalty behaviour they show. Zhang and Mao (2012) claim that customers' overall satisfaction with their hotel experience is associated with future loyalty behaviour. Kassim and Abdullah (2010) add that not only consumer satisfaction but also trust significantly influences consumer future loyalty. However, to date there is no research investigating whether travellers' satisfaction with STAP has a positive effect on travellers' future loyalty behaviour to those web-platforms, as can be seen in Figure 5. Therefore, the relationship between travellers' satisfaction and their future loyalty behaviour toward STAP is proposed as follows:

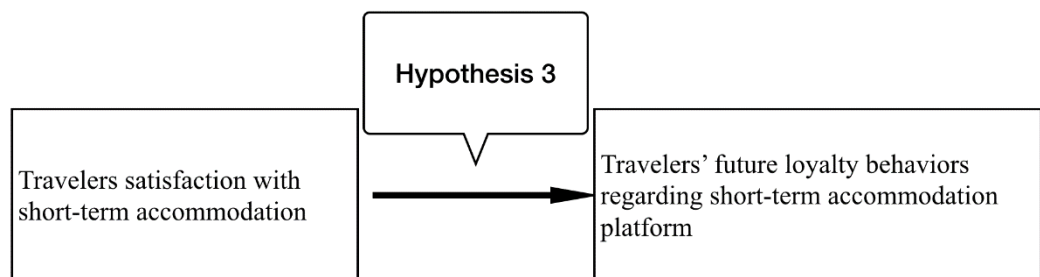


Figure 5: Development of hypothesis 3

H3: Traveller satisfaction promotes a positive effect on loyalty behaviour toward STAP.

2.10 Proposed Research Model

Based on the discussion and information of previous literature presented in sections 2.7 Attributes of STAP and traveller satisfaction, 2.8 Attributes of STAP and traveller satisfaction, and 2.9 Traveller satisfaction and traveller future loyalty behaviour, a proposed research model is designed to summarise the relationships between attributes of STAP, traveller satisfaction and future loyalty, as displayed in Figure 6.

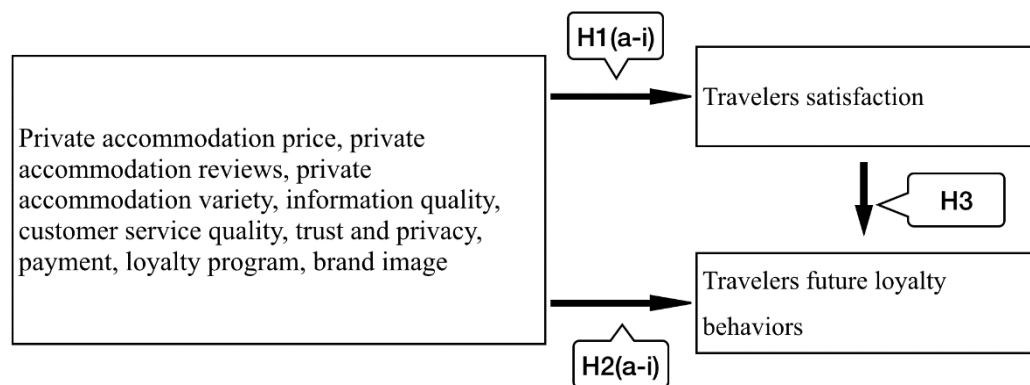


Figure 6: Summary of hypotheses 1, 2 and 3

2.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the attributes (i.e. product price, product review, product variety, information quality, customer service quality, privacy, payment method, loyalty programmes and platform brand) which may influence traveller selection when choosing a short-term accommodation platform in China. IPA, traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour was also discussed. Based on the information found in previous literature and discussions, this chapter firstly developed research questions to determine the significance of these attributes and

their bearing on Chinese travellers concerning their selection of STAP. The research questions also sought to determine which factor generates the most impact on Chinese travellers' selections of STAP. This chapter then introduced IPA which was used in the discussion section to analyse both foreign and Chinese domestic STAPs. Finally, this chapter also presented research hypotheses and a proposed research model demonstrating the relationships between those attributes, traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter focuses on introducing the methodology and methods used in the study. The research paradigm which includes realism ontology and objectivism epistemology is introduced. Then, the chapter introduces the quantitative research method, research design and questionnaire design. After that, it discusses the data collection process, the data analysis process and research ethics. Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided.

Methodology aims to address the question of how to find knowledge and may be defined as the “systematic analysis of the methods applied to a field of study, which is based on the different perspectives of epistemology and theory” (Crotty, 1998, p. 4). In addition, it also means a systematic system of methods, principles, and rules for regulating a given discipline (Jackson, 1990). Gray (2013), points out that the selection of a research methodology is influenced by several attributes and that different methodologies may be contributed by different types of epistemologies and theoretical perspectives.

3.2 Paradigm

A paradigm is a “worldview” or a set of assumptions about how things work (Gray, 2014). Considering positivism supports that knowledge is obtained by direct measurements and observations (Bahari, 2010), this study adopts a positivist research paradigm which focuses on verifying hypotheses by direct measurement and observation. This research carries out quantitative research methods to verify the hypothesis that satisfaction toward short-term accommodation platforms (STAPs) will impact customers’ loyalty behaviour. Therefore, the aim of this research is to verify a hypothesis by direct measurement which matches the purpose of a positivist research paradigm.

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology aims to address the question of what reality is and may be defined as the study of being and the nature of reality (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). It is a set of concepts in a subject area or domain that shows their properties and the relations between them (Scotland, 2012). Realism holds that there is a single objective reality (Scotland, 2012) and therefore provides an ontological position that is consistent with positivism (Healy & Perry, 2000). Therefore, as this study centres on using a survey to verify the objective reality of travellers, realism ontology is adopted.

3.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology aims to address the question of how reality is known and is a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012; Scotland, 2012). There are three epistemological positions: subjectivism, objectivism, and constructivism (Gray, 2013, p. 34). Subjectivism holds that human behaviour is based on the perspectives of researchers (Bahari, 2010). In contrast, objectivism holds that knowledge is absolute and exists regardless of whether human beings are aware it (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Additionally, researchers of the objectivist school are prone to explain knowledge and test theories and hypotheses (Bahari, 2010). Constructivism believes that a social environment may have influence on human beings (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

The epistemological position within this study aligns with objectivist epistemology. This is because researchers of the objectivist school are prone to explaining knowledge by verifying theories and hypotheses (Bahari, 2010) and arriving at a conclusion objectively as an outcome of their research rather than obtaining information by self-transformation.

3.3 Research Methods

There are two research methods: quantitative and qualitative (Bryman, 2006). Seale (1999) points out that the purpose of a quantitative approach is to test or verify hypotheses and find generalisable results. On the other hand, the purpose of

a qualitative approach is to expand the understanding of certain issues (Bryman, 2006).

There are three aims to this research. One is to establish a model regarding attributes that influence travellers selection of STAPs in China. Second is to provide an analysis of Chinese domestic STAPs and foreign STAPs (Airbnb) by Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA). Third is to investigate the effects of attributes on Chinese travellers' satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour. In order to acquire objective data and travellers' opinions, this research uses a quantitative research method. In contrast to qualitative research which is based on the researcher's interpretation of observation (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012), quantitative research aims to establish objective facts and address research questions (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 86), therefore quantitative research aligns with the purpose of this research.

3.4 Research Design

Analytical survey is an effective method for quantitative research and is used in this research. Gray (2013) points out that an analytical survey is a process to verify a theory by testing the relationship between variables. To guarantee the generalisation of a study, researchers need to be careful about selecting random samples (Kraay, Kaufmann, & Mastruzzi, 2010). The main reason for selecting an analytical survey is because this research aims to test the relationship between the importance of STAP attributes, the level of satisfaction toward STAP attributes and customer loyalty behaviour; therefore to help with the generalisation of a study, samples are chosen randomly in this research.

For the purpose of this study, an online anonymous questionnaire was used as the main research instrument to collect primary data. The reason for using a questionnaire is because this research aims to collect travellers' opinions and questionnaires are an effective collection method for quantitative research to collect a large amount of data (Bryman, 2006).

The target respondents of this research are travellers with experience in using STAP in China. It is expected that 200 participants are involved in this research

because, as Lenth (2001) points out, to minimise study error, a sufficient number of respondents should be used. In terms of factor analysis, Hair (1992) states that 100 or more respondents is an appropriate sample size. Therefore, in keeping with Lenth (2001) and Hair's (1992) recommendations and considering the number of participants in other similar research, it is expected that 200 travellers will be involved in this research. In terms of respondent criteria, for this research participants are selected from travellers who have experience in using a STAP in China. The second criterion is that all participants need to be over 18 years of age because in China individuals over 18 are legally allowed to make decisions by themselves.

3.5 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire (refer to Appendix One) is divided into five sections: screening questions (Part One), questions about the importance of each attribute (Part Two), questions about the satisfaction level of each attribute during the traveller's last experience (Part Three), the traveller's potential loyalty behaviour (Part Four) and participants' demographic questions (Part Five).

In the first section, the screening questions are designed to screen participants, ensuring that all participants are over 18 and have experience in using STAP in China. In the second section, the questions about the importance of each of the attributes (i.e. product price, product review, product variety, information quality, customer service quality, trust and privacy, payment method, loyalty programmes and platform brand), are designed to achieve the first research purpose: to find which attributes influence travellers' selection of a STAP in China and to find which attributes are most important for travellers in selecting a STAP in China. These attributes are adapted from the attributes in Liu and Zhang's (2014) online booking intention model. The questions about the importance of each attribute on travellers' selection of STAP were assessed using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from Very Unimportant to Very Important, which is in line with the research conducted by Liu and Zhang (2014).

In the third section, the questions about satisfaction levels regarding each attribute in the traveller's last experience are designed to achieve the second research

purpose: based on travellers' opinions, to find the satisfaction level regarding each attribute of Chinese domestic and foreign STAPs and compare their weaknesses and strengths. Two multiple choice questions about favourite platforms and the latest platform used were designed, followed by 10 seven-point Likert scale questions to investigate the satisfaction level for each of the attributes of the traveller's last experience using a STAP in China and one question about the traveller's total satisfaction level regarding their last experience. Considering the attributes are also adjusted based on Liu and Zhang's (2014) online OTA websites booking intention model and to ensure consistency of the questions, all the questions are assessed using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from Very Dissatisfied to Very Satisfied.

In the fourth section, the questions about agreement with statements about traveller loyalty behaviour are designed to achieve the third purpose of this research: to investigate the relationships among attributes in STAPs, traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour. Five items measuring travellers' future loyalty behaviour are adopted from the research of Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996). In their research, they describe travellers' loyalty behaviour as saying positive things to other people about their experiences, recommending products to someone who seeks advice, encouraging friends and relatives to use the products, considering the products as first choice in the future and using products frequently in the next few years. Considering this information, the five above-mentioned items are included in the questionnaire but have been adjusted and presented as five questions about agreement levels in section four of the questionnaire. All of them are assessed using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

In the last section, demographic questions are designed to acquire respondents' information, such as gender, age, nationality, education background, annual income, frequency of using STAPs and the number of people that the respondent travels with. It was estimated to take approximately 20 minutes for respondents to complete the questionnaire.

Additionally, the invitation message and information sheet were designed to clearly explain how to undertake the survey and the purpose of participating. The questionnaire was made available in both English and Mandarin versions, because target respondents are from China and they may not be familiar with English.

3.6 Data Collection Process

Prior to the formal data collection process, this research conducted a pre-test for testing the feasibility of the questionnaire. According to Hansen (1996), a pre-test can not only help researchers to identify difficulties that respondents may have understanding the questions but also help researchers to find systematic problems and unsystematic errors.

In the pre-test of this research, a questionnaire link, including both Mandarin and English versions, was distributed to 41 respondents consisting of 25 respondents in China and 16 respondents in Auckland. Of these, 23 selected the Chinese version and 18 selected the English version. Based on the results of the pre-test, no systematic error appeared in the questionnaire as all output data was reasonable. For instance, when respondents assessed the importance of each attribute, most of them believed those attributes were either important or very important, and over 15 percent of respondents indicated that product price was the most important factor influencing their selection of STAPs. However, some unsystematic errors were found. For instance, when respondents answered the question of ‘when were you born?’, 24 is likely to be an error as it seems to indicate how old the respondent was rather than the date they were born. What’s more, when respondents answered ‘how many times a year do you book accommodation with a STAP when you travel in China?’, 100 is likely to be an error. After testing for unsystematic errors, some questions were modified and improved, for example setting digital character limits, before formal distribution.

The formal data collection process was undertaken from 20 March 2018 to 10 April 2018. The questionnaire with an invitation message (refer to Appendix Two) and information sheet (refer to Appendix Three) were added to Qualtrics software and distributed by using the general message board on WeChat and Weibo. The reason for using WeChat and Weibo is that both are leading social media sites in

China with over 600 million Chinese citizens using them (Harwit, 2016). Using the general message board on WeChat and Weibo enabled potential respondents to view the invitation message and follow a link to the questionnaire. By clicking on the link, respondents were provided with detailed information about the research and were then asked to answer questions.

3.7 Data Analysis Process

After the data collection stage, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was utilised as an analysis tool. Initially, descriptive statistics were sought from survey respondents' demographic characteristics and their experiences concerning STAPs. After that, IPA was used to address the research questions of whether all the attributes are significant regarding Chinese travellers' selections of STAPs and determining which of these main attributes most significantly impacted their choices. Then, independent-sample t-test and one-way analysis of variance was used for group comparison. ANOVA testing was conducted to gauge the significance of the ten independent variables on respondents' selection decisions of STAPs. Field (2013) suggests that when more than two groups are to be compared, ANOVA is preferred. Additionally, to test the hypothesised relationships between satisfaction about each attribute during their last experience and travellers' future loyalty behaviour, a correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis was used.

3.8 Research Ethics

This research got ethical approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee. Ethical considerations in this research are related to the rights of participants based on seven principles from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee, as follows:

1. Informed and voluntary consent
2. Respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality
3. Minimisation of risk
4. Avoidance of conflict of interest
5. Truthfulness, including limitation of deception
6. Social and cultural sensitivity, including commitment to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi

7. Research adequacy

In this research, the link of the online anonymous questionnaire was distributed with the invitation message and information sheet. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous, and the participants were informed about the research prior to participating. In this research, no personal information or identifiable information of participants was recorded, and all data collection was only used for academic purposes. The data has been stored in a locked drawer by the primary researcher at AUT and is accessible only to the researcher and thesis supervisors upon request, which achieves principles two and seven. As this research does not involve research on financial or cultural relationships, there is no conflict and risk, which achieves principles three, four and six. The participants were informed that a summary of findings would be available on the website of New Zealand Tourism Research Institute: <http://www.nztri.org>. Participants were informed that they are more than welcome to visit the website and view the findings, which achieves principle five.

3.9 Chapter Summary

The methodology for this study is based on ontological realism, objectivism epistemology and a positivism theoretical perspective. Additionally, a quantitative research method and online anonymous questionnaire, which included multiple choice questions using a seven-point Likert scale was used to acquire information from 200 potential respondents who have experience in using STAPs in China. SPSS was utilised as an analysis tool and ANOVA and multiple regression analysis were used to analyse data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter mainly focuses on presenting findings compiled from different data analysis methods. Initially, this chapter introduces basic demographic information of participants, based on frequency descriptive analysis. After that, this chapter uses IPA to test how important all the attributes were for Chinese travellers' selection of short-term accommodation platforms (STAPs), and to identify which of these main attributes most significantly impacted on their choices. A descriptive analysis of both foreign and Chinese domestic STAPs is also provided in this chapter. Then, the independent-sample t-test is conducted for group comparison of total satisfaction levels and future loyalty behaviour toward both foreign and Chinese domestic STAPs, and one-way analysis of variance is conducted for group comparison of satisfaction levels and future loyalty behaviour within different demographic situations. Finally, a correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were used to examine the relationships between variables and test the hypothesis model about the relationships between the attributes, traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour.

4.2 Respondents Profile

The data for this research was collected by way of an online anonymous questionnaire. Although 246 respondents participated in this survey, some did not meet the requirements (N=28) and some did not answer all the questions and left the survey (N=18). Therefore, this research analysed only information from the relevant data of the 200 remaining respondents, all of whom were Chinese.

The demographic information of those 200 respondents was compiled using frequency analysis, based on the fifth section of the questionnaire (demographic questions) as can be seen in Table 2. In terms of gender, the respondents consisted of 125 females (62.5%) and 75 males (37.5%). The largest age group was between 25 and 34 years old (N= 67, 33.5%). There were 11 respondents in the age group of 55 to 64, and 6 respondents in the age group of 65 and older. It can be seen that there is a greater percentage of female respondents and younger age categories than male and older respondents. This distribution could be explained by the

significant numbers of young females who use social media in China (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009).

Table 2. Respondent profile

	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender (N=200)		
Male	75	37.5
Female	125	62.5
Age (N=200)		
18-24	50	25
25-34	67	33.5
35-44	34	17
45-54	32	16
55-64	11	5.5
65 and older	6	3
Education level (N=200)		
Less than high school	3	1.5
High school graduate	16	8
Bachelor's degree	137	68.5
Master's degree	42	21
Doctorate degree	2	1
Annual income (N=200)		
Less than 50000 RMB	75	37.5
50000 - 99999 RMB	59	29.5
100000 - 199999 RMB	50	25
200000 - 499999 RMB	13	6.5
More than 500000 RMB	3	1.5
Frequency (N=200)		
1 time per year	62	31
2 times per year	69	34.5
3 times per year	29	14.5
4 times per year	16	8
5 times per year	10	5
6 times per year	3	1.5
7 times per year	2	1
10 and over 10 times per year	9	4.5
The number of people that consumers travelled with (N=200)		
Only themselves	21	10.5
Fewer than three other people	142	71
More than three other people	37	18.5
Travellers favourite short-term accommodation platform in China		
Airbnb	74	37
Tujia	33	16.5
Belvedor	6	3
Mayi.com	43	21.5
Youtx.com	2	1
Xiaozhu	20	10
Ctrip.com	22	11

Note: N=200

In terms of education level, most respondents had completed a bachelor's degree (N= 137, 68%) or masters' degree (N=42, 21%). As for annual income, 37.5% of respondents earned less than 50000 RMB per year (N=75), while 59 respondents earned an annual income of between 50000 and 99999 RMB (29.5%), with 50 respondents earning an annual income of between 100000 and 199999 RMB (25%). Only 16 respondents earned over 200000 RMB per year (8%).

The respondents were then asked about the frequency of STAPs in China per year. Most used this kind of booking platform once a year (N=62, 31%) or two times a year (N=69, 34.5%). As for the number of people they travelled with, over 70% of respondents travelled with fewer than three other people (N=142) and 21 respondents travelled alone (10.5%).

When respondents selected their favourite STAP, Airbnb (N=74, 37%) was most respondents' choice, followed by Mayi.com (N=43, 21.5%) and Tujia (N=33, 16.5%). Based on respondents' data, it was found that Airbnb was the only foreign brand used as the others were all Chinese domestic brands.

4.3 Importance- Performance Analysis (IPA)

4.3.1 Importance- performance analysis for all respondents

Drawing data from section two of the questionnaire (i.e. importance of each attribute) and section three of the questionnaire (i.e. satisfaction level of each attribute during traveller's last experience), IPA was used to conduct the importance and performance means of each attribute, as displayed in Table 3 and Figure 7.

As can be seen in Table 3, considering that all the mean scores of attributes were higher than 4 which represents neither important nor unimportant, it can be seen that all the attributes were important in Chinese travellers' selection. However, only PR, CSQ, TP were higher than 6 which represents importance. In that case, it can be understood that PR, CSQ and TP were attributes of significant importance to travellers' selection choices. In terms of performance attributes during respondents' last experience of using STAP in China, payment method (M=6.06) was ranked as the best performed attribute, followed by product price (the level of

price and value for money), product review (feedback from other customers) and information quality (website aesthetic, quality of textual and pictorial information) whose mean score were 5.98.

Table 3. Importance - performance analysis of each attribute

Attributes	Importance	Performance
Product Price (PP) (The level and the value for money)	5.94	5.98
Product Review (PR) (Feedback from other customers)	6.28	5.98
Product Variety (PV) (The amount and variety of available accommodation in the platform)	5.95	5.95
Information Quality (IQ) (website aesthetic, quality of textual and pictorial information)	5.95	5.98
Customer Service Quality (CSQ)	6.37	5.87
Trust and Privacy features (TP) (Privacy policies)	6.64	5.92
Payment Methods (PM)	5.29	6.06
Loyalty Programmes (LP)	4.60	5.37
Platform Brand (PB)	5.75	5.86

As can be seen in Figure 7, all attributes related to STAP were displayed in four different quadrants in the IPA graph for presenting the strengths and weaknesses of all STAPs in China. The Y-axis represents the level of importance of the attribute while the X-axis scores the level of satisfaction or performance. The grid was divided by the average mean score of attribute importance (5.86) and attribute performance (5.89).

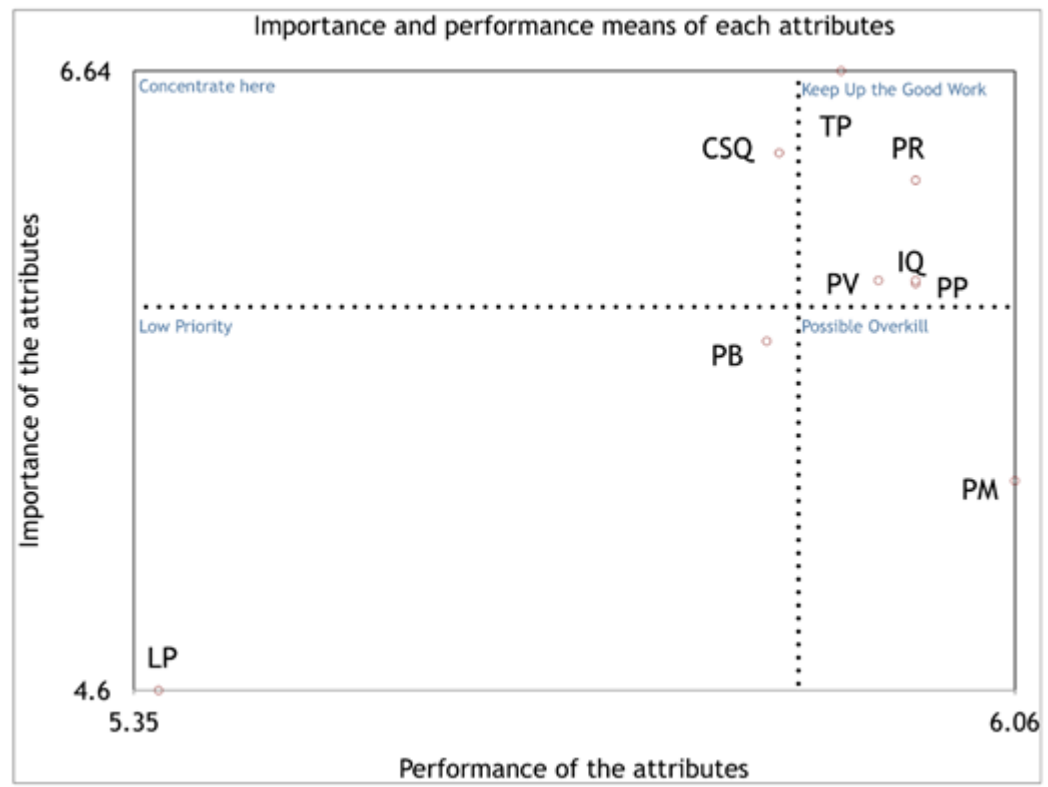


Figure 7: Importance - performance analysis of each attribute

Trust and privacy features on the website, information quality (website aesthetic, quality of textual and pictorial information), product variety (the amount and variety of available accommodation in the platform), product price (the level of accommodation price) and product review (feedback from other customers) were located in the 'Keep up the good work' quadrant. Considering that attributes in this quadrant have both high scores of importance and high scores for satisfaction managers from those STAPs should maintain the development of those attributes in this Quadrant. Customer service quality was the only attribute located in the 'concentrate here' quadrant. Considering that attributes in this quadrant have high scores of importance, but low scores for satisfaction customer service quality may be seen as a weakness within all STAP companies because travellers may perceive customer service quality as an important factor influencing their selection, but are not currently satisfied with it. In view of this, managers could put more effort into improving customer service quality, in order to improve traveller satisfaction. Although product brand and loyalty programmes were located in the 'Low Priority' quadrant, product brand is close to 'Keep up the good work' quadrant. Therefore, product brand may be seen as an important attribute than loyalty programmes, which managers could consider developing. Considering attributes

in the 'Low Priority' quadrant have both low scores for importance and low scores for satisfaction, loyalty programmes can be seen as a less important factor for travellers. In that case, managers could give less priority to loyalty programmes in future strategies. Payment method was the only attribute located in the 'Possible Overkill' quadrant. The payment method can be seen as a potential strength for those companies because travellers are satisfied with payment options, however, currently, they perceive this attribute as a less important factor influencing their selection. Therefore, companies need to maintain this attribute but do not need to invest effort into promoting it in strategic planning.

4.3.2 Importance-performance analysis for foreign and Chinese domestic brands

As mentioned in section 2.5 Importance-performance analysis of the literature review, one of the purposes of this research was to provide a descriptive analysis of both foreign and Chinese domestic STAPs. The respondents were separated into two groups: those who used Chinese domestic STAPs last time and those who used foreign STAPs. IPA of traveller satisfaction levels toward each attribute, travellers' total satisfaction levels toward their last experience and their level of agreement toward future loyalty behaviour from both groups was conducted, as displayed in Tables 4 and Figure 8.

Table 4. T-test analysis for comparison of each attribute's satisfaction, total satisfaction level and loyalty behaviour of Chinese domestic and foreign STAPs

	Foreign brand (N=72)	Chinese domestic brands (N=128)
Attributes	Mean	Mean
Product Price (PP) (The level of accommodation price and value for money)	6.04	5.95
Product Review (PR) (Feedback from other customers)	6.11	5.91
Product Variety (The number of options and variety of available accommodation in the platform)	6.15*	5.83
Information Quality (website aesthetic, quality of textual and pictorial information)	6.13	5.89
Customer service quality (CSQ)	5.99	5.80
Trust and privacy features (TP) (Privacy policies)	6.11	5.80
Payment methods (PM)	6.13*	6.02
Loyalty programmes (LP)	5.35	5.38
Platform brand (PB)	6.13	5.70
Total Satisfaction Level	6.08	5.88
Future Loyalty Behaviour	6.17*	5.78

Note: * $p < .05$.

As can be seen in Table 4, in terms of traveller satisfaction level toward all the attributes when using foreign STAPs, nearly every mean score was higher than 6.00. The exceptions were loyalty programmes ($M=5.35$) and customer service quality ($M=5.99$). In contrast, the attributes regarding traveller satisfaction of all Chinese domestic STAPs, scored lower than 6.0, with the exception of payment methods ($M= 6.02$). In conclusion, it can be seen that travellers felt more satisfaction about nearly every attribute of the foreign brand than the Chinese domestic brands, although loyalty programmes in Chinese domestic brands ($M=5.38$) scored higher than foreign brand loyalty programmes ($M=5.35$).

As can be seen in Figure 8, all attributes related to STAPs were displayed in four different quadrants in the IPA graph presenting the strengths and weaknesses of

Chinese domestic and foreign STAPs. The Y-axis represents the level of importance of the attribute while the X-axis scores the level of satisfaction or performance.

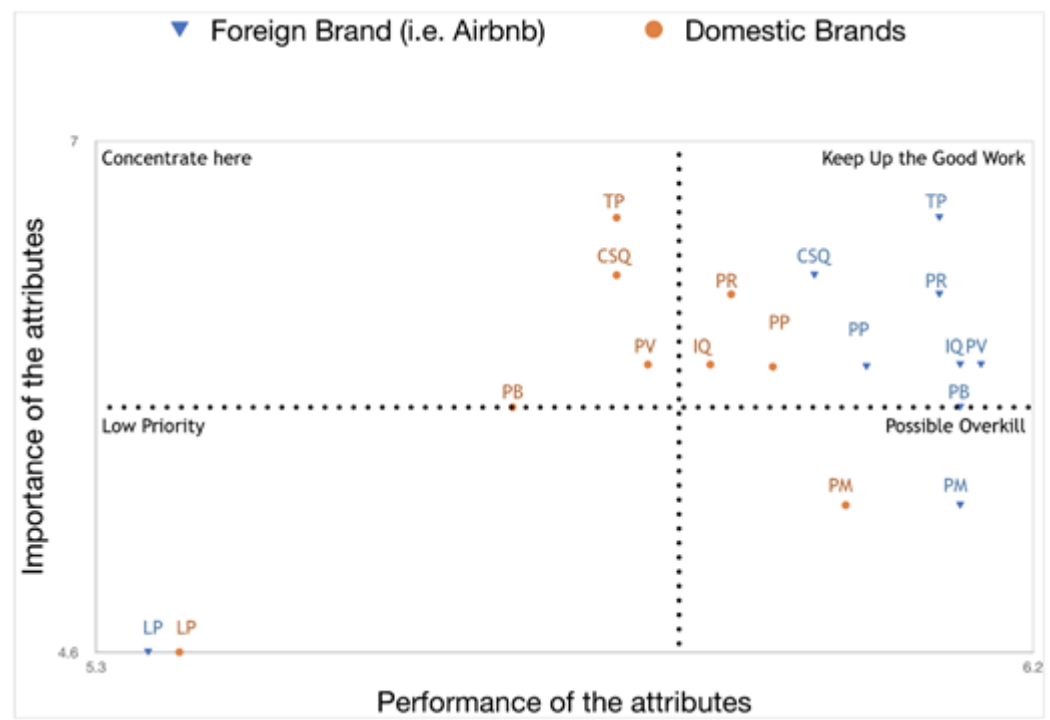


Figure 8: Comparison of satisfaction level to each attribute of Chinese domestic and foreign STAPs

The four quadrants were divided by the average mean score of attribute importance (5.86) and attribute performance (5.89). As for the attributes of the foreign brand, most were located in the ‘Keep Up the Good Work’ quadrant. In other words, travellers had high satisfaction levels regarding trust and privacy features on the website, information quality (website aesthetic, quality of textual and pictorial information), product variety (the amount and variety of available accommodation in the platform), customer service quality, product brand image, product price (the level of accommodation price) and product review (feedback from other customers) when using the foreign brand of STAPs. Only payment method was located in the ‘Possible Overkill’ quadrant and only loyalty programmes was located in the ‘Low Priority’ quadrant. In other words, payment methods and loyalty programmes were less important to travellers and managers in foreign companies who do not need to consider these aspects in their strategic planning. Chinese domestic brands, similarly, had only payment method located in the ‘Possible Overkill’ quadrant and only loyalty programmes located in the ‘Low Priority’ quadrant. Product review, product price and information quality were all

located in the 'Keep Up the Good Work' quadrant. However, most attributes of Chinese domestic brands, such as customer service quality, product brand and product variety (the amount and variety of available accommodation in the platform), were located in the 'concentrate here' quadrant. This means those attributes were important, but travellers were not satisfied with those aspects of Chinese domestic brands. In that case, managers of Chinese domestic brands of STAP could invest more effort into improving customer service, product variety and product brand.

4.4 Group Comparison

4.4.1 Group comparison of foreign and Chinese domestic brands

Keselman, Othman, Wilcox and Fradette (2004) point out that an independent-sample t-test is a suitable analysis to investigate whether there is significant difference between the means of two different groups. As can be seen in Table 4, for the attributes, there were significant differences of the mean score of product variety ($p = 0.033$) and platform brands ($p = 0.013$) between Group One and Group Two. For the travellers' satisfaction level, responders from Group Two have higher satisfaction levels ($M = 6.08$) than the respondents from Group One ($M = 5.88$). There was no significant difference between the mean score of Group One and Group Two ($p = 0.220$). As for future loyalty behaviours, it can be seen that, compared with respondents from Group One ($M = 5.78$), respondents from Group Two have a greater tendency towards loyalty behaviour ($M = 6.17$). Additionally, there was a significant difference between the mean score of Group One and Group Two ($p = 0.003$).

4.4.2 Group comparison within different demographic situations

Stoline (1981) points out that one way the ANOVA test can be used is to investigate whether or not there is a significant difference between the mean score of more than two groups. Therefore, because demographic questions divided respondents into more than two different groups, this research used the one-way ANOVA test to investigate if there was any significant difference in the mean scores between different demographic groups (i.e. age groups, gender groups, education level groups, annual income groups, frequency of using STAP groups and the number of people respondents travel with groups).

Table 5. Group comparison in significant difference of traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour between different groups

	Total Level (Sig)	Satisfaction Loyalty behaviour (Sig)
Age Groups	.845	.309
Gender Groups	.054	.029*
Education Background Groups	.670	.255
Annual Income groups	.023*	.020*
Frequency of Using Groups	.168	.137
The number of people travel with Groups	.444	.690

Note: * $p < .05$.

As can be seen in Table 5, no significant differences are indicated in the mean score of the level of satisfaction and future loyalty behaviours among age groups, education background groups, frequency of using STAP groups and the number of people respondents travel with groups. In terms of gender groups, although there was no significant difference in the level of satisfaction between male and female groups ($p = .054$), there were significant differences in future loyalty behaviour ($p = .029$). As for annual income groups, there were significant differences in total satisfaction level and loyalty behaviour.

To be more precise, as can be seen in Table 6, the mean score of future loyalty behaviour level in female groups was significantly higher than the mean score of future loyalty behaviour level in male groups. Additionally, the mean scores of levels of satisfaction in Group 2 ($M = 6.14$), whose annual income was 50000 to 99999 RMB, and Group 1 ($M = 6.08$), whose annual income was less than 50000 RMB, were significantly higher than the mean score of level of satisfaction in Group 3 ($M = 5.62$), respondents whose annual income were between 100000 and 199999RMB, and the mean score of level of satisfaction in Group 5 ($M = 4.67$), respondents whose annual income was higher than 500000 RMB. Additionally, there was also a significant difference between the mean scores of satisfaction levels in Group 4 and Group 5. Similarly, in terms of the mean score of future loyalty behaviour, Group 2 and Group 1 had mean scores which were significantly higher than Group 3, Group 4 and Group 5.

Table 6. The mean score of levels of satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour level in different gender groups and annual income groups

	Levels of satisfaction	Future loyalty behaviour level
Female Group	6.07	6.03*
Male group	5.76	5.74*
Group One (Respondents whose annual income were less than 50000 RMB)	6.08 *	5.97 *
Group Two (Respondents whose annual income were between 50000 and 99999 RMB)	6.14 *	6.08 *
Group Three (Respondents whose annual income were between 100000 and 199999 RMB)	5.62*	5.75*
Group Four (Respondents whose annual income were between 200000 and 499999 RMB)	6.00 *	5.83*
Group Five (Respondents whose annual income were more than 500000 RMB)	4.76 *	4.47*

Note: * $p < .05$.

4.5 Correlation

Before hypothesis testing, correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationship between all the variables in this research, which included product price (the level of accommodation price), product review (feedback from other customers), product variety (the number and variety of available accommodations in the platform), information quality (website aesthetic, quality of textual and pictorial information), customer service quality in a platform, trust and privacy features on a website (privacy policies), payment methods, loyalty programmes, product brand, travellers satisfaction, traveller future loyalty behaviour, nationality, age, gender, education background, annual income, frequency of using STAPs and the number of people respondents travelled with, as can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Mean, standard deviation and correlation

	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Age	0.59	0.50													
2. Gender	0.63	0.49	0.12												
3. Frequency	2.62	2.06	-0.08	0.02											
4. PP	5.98	1.07	-0.07	0.09	0.07										
5. PR	5.98	1.11	0.01	0.14	0.05	.65**									
6. PV	5.95	1.03	0.01	0.04	-0.05	.51**	.63**								
7. IQ	5.98	1.04	-0.01	0.09	0.04	.61**	.68**	.72**							
8. CSQ	5.87	1.20	-0.05	0.12	0.07	.57**	.60**	.52**	.64**						
9. TP	5.92	1.12	-0.06	0.14	0.01	.46**	.60**	.59**	.66**	.72**					
10. PM	6.06	1.14	-0.06	0.07	-0.04	.39**	.43**	.56**	.57**	.46**	.58**				
11. LP	5.37	1.26	-.14*	-0.01	0.01	.45**	.44**	.53**	.57**	.60**	.57**	.53**			
12. PB	5.86	1.15	-0.05	0.07	-0.01	.41**	.47**	.59**	.56**	.57**	.70**	.585**	.60**		
13. TS	5.96	1.11	-0.03	0.14	0.02	.67**	.64**	.60**	.62**	.68**	.62**	.42**	.52**	.60**	
14. LB	5.92	0.91	0.01	.16*	-0.01	.51**	.55**	.61**	.58**	.58**	.58**	.52**	.48**	.55**	.64**

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

The mean scores of travellers' future loyalty behaviour were calculated using the average mean scores of all the future loyalty behaviour measurements (i.e. positive comments, recommending products to someone who seeks advice, encouraging friends and relatives to use the products, considering the products as first choice in the future and using products frequently in the next few years). Demographic variables were recorded by using different values, such as: gender (female = 0, male = 1), age (respondents 34+ = 0, 18-34 = 1), frequency of using STAP (1 time per year = 1, 2 times per year = 2, 3 times per year = 3, 4 times per year = 4, 5 times per year = 5, 6 times per year = 6, 7 times per year = 7, 8 times per year = 8, 9 times per year = 9, 10 times per year = 10).

As can be seen in Table 7, there were significant relationships between attribute variables and traveller satisfaction, and attribute variables and traveller future loyalty behaviour. Additionally, the relationships were all positive. To be more precise, among all the attribute variables, traveller satisfaction had the strongest relationship with customer service quality ($r=.681$), and among all the attribute variables, traveller future loyalty behaviours had the strongest relationship with product variety ($r=.603$). Additionally, traveller satisfaction also had a significant positive relationship with future loyalty behaviour ($r=.639$). There was no significant relationship between demographic variables and other variables.

As for the mean statistics, the mean scores of attribute variables ranged from 5.37 to 6.06. Payment method ($M = 6.06$, $S.D. = 1.14$) was ranked first, followed by product price (level of accommodation price), product review (feedback from other customers) and information quality (website aesthetic, quality of textual and pictorial information) whose mean score was 5.98. Loyalty programmes ranked last in performance attributes with a mean score of 5.37 ($S.D. = 1.26$).

4.6 Hypothesis Testing

As mentioned in sections 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8, this research aimed to test the hypothesis about the relationship between traveller satisfaction and traveller future loyalty behaviour toward STAPs. Therefore, a multiple regression analysis was used to verify the relationships between those variables, as displayed in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8. Multiple regression to test H1 (a-i) and H2 (a-i)

	Attribute variables and traveller satisfaction		Attribute variables and traveller future loyalty behaviour	
	Block One	Block Two	Block One	Block Two
Age	-0.093	0.023	-0.022	0.056
Gender	0.323**	0.093	0.293**	0.142*
Frequency of using per-year	0.006	-0.013	-0.003	-0.005
PP		0.327**		0.110
PR		0.113		0.054
PV		0.149*		0.216**
IQ		-0.019		-0.014
CSQ		0.225**		0.131**
TP		0.054		0.059
PM		-0.102		0.099
LP		0.005		0.005
PB		0.219**		0.075
R²	0.021	0.659	0.024	0.519
ΔR^2		0.638		0.495
ΔF		38.817**		21.348**
Df		12,187		12,187

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, pairwise, ΔR^2 = R-squared change, ΔF = F change

4.6.1 The effects of attributes on traveller satisfaction toward STAP

As can be seen in Table 8, this research used multiple regression analysis to test the predictive power of attributes PP, PR, PV, IQ, CSQ, TP, PM, LP and PB on travellers' overall satisfaction about their experience. There were two blocks. In the first block, traveller satisfaction was added to dependent and demographic variables, such as age, gender and frequency in using STAPs. These were included as predictors in this research, causing a 2.1% variance in traveller total satisfaction scores. Additionally, in block two, attribute variables were added into the research, leading to 65.9% of the variance in traveller total satisfaction scores, $\Delta F(12,187) = 38.817$. In other words, attribute variables caused an additional 63.8% of the variance in traveller satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = .638$).

In terms of attribute variables, only PP ($B = 0.327$, $SE = 0.063$, $t = 5.167$, $p < .001$), PV ($B = 0.208$, $SE = 0.065$, $t = 3.401$, $p = .001$), CSQ ($B = 0.225$, $SE = 0.065$, $t = 3.451$, $p = .001$) and PB ($B = 0.219$, $SE = 0.064$, $t = 3.415$, $p = .001$) had positive significant correlations with traveller satisfaction. Among them, PP had the highest beta value ($B = 0.327$). In other words, for every unit increase in PP, there was a 0.327 increase in traveller satisfaction. Therefore, the hypothetical relationships (H1a, H1e, and H1i) between attributes and traveller satisfaction levels were supported.

4.6.2 The effects of attributes on traveller loyalty behaviour toward STAP

As can be seen in Table 8, this research initially added travellers' future loyalty behaviour into dependent variables and demographic variables into independent variables in block one, followed by adding attribute variables in block two. The data in block one, demographic variables, indicated a 2.4% variance in traveller loyalty behaviour and attribute variables indicated a 51.9% variance in traveller total loyalty behaviour, $\Delta F(12, 187) = 21.348$, $\Delta R^2 = .495$. In terms of attribute variables, only CSQ ($B = 0.131$, $SE = 0.064$, $t = 2.067$, $p = .04$) and PV ($B = 0.216$, $SE = 0.073$, $t = 2.979$, $p = .003$) had positive significant correlations with travellers' future loyalty behaviour. Among them, PV had the highest beta value ($B = 0.216$). In other words, a one unit increase in PV, increases traveller loyalty behaviour by 0.216. Therefore, the hypothetical relationships between attributes and traveller loyalty behaviour (H2c and H2e) were supported.

4.6.3 The effect of traveller satisfaction on future loyalty behaviour toward STAP

As can be seen in Table 9, multiple regression analysis was used to test the relationship between traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour. This section used a similar procedure as sections 4.61 and 4.62. Initially, traveller loyalty behaviour was placed with dependent variables while demographic variables was placed with independent variables in block one. After that, in block two, traveller-total satisfaction with experience using STAPs was added into independent variables. According to the data in block one, demographic variables led to 2.4% of the variance in traveller future loyalty behaviour. Based on the data

in block two, total variables caused 41.3% of the variance in traveller future loyalty behaviour, $\Delta F(4, 195) = 129.463$. In other words, overall satisfaction caused a 38.9% variance in the loyalty behaviour of travellers ($\Delta R^2 = .389$). Additionally, traveller satisfaction ($B = 0.517$, $SE = 0.045$, $t = 11.378$, $p < .001$) tended to have a positive significant correlation with traveller future loyalty behaviour. In other words, a one unit increase in satisfaction levels, correlates with a 0.517 increase in loyalty behaviour. Therefore, the hypothetical relationship (H3) between traveller satisfaction levels and their future loyalty behaviour toward STAP was supported.

Table 9. Multiple regression to test H3

	Block One	Block Two
Age	-0.022	0.026
Gender	0.293*	0.125
Frequency of use	-0.003	-0.006
Traveller satisfaction		0.517**
R²	0.024	0.413
ΔR^2		0.389
ΔF		129.463**
Df		4,195
Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, pairwise, ΔR^2 = R-squared change, ΔF = F change		

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter focuses on discussing the significance of the key findings related to short-term accommodation platforms (STAPs). Initially, the key findings of this research are presented and compared with previous research. Following that, the implications of this research and its practical implications are introduced along with a discussion of the research limitations and possible directions for future study. Finally, a conclusion is provided.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

Based on the results shown in section 4.3.1 Importance- performance analysis (IPA) for all respondents, all the attributes (i.e. product price, product review, product variety, information quality, customer service quality, trust and privacy features, payment methods, loyalty programmes and brand image of the platform) have some bearing on travellers' selection of STAPs in China. The results shown in section 4.3.1 IPA for all respondents indicate that among those attributes, product review (feedback from other consumers), customer service quality and trust and privacy features are most important deciding attributes for travellers when selecting a platform. Therefore, research purpose one has been achieved. Based on the results in section 4.3.2 IPA, Chinese travellers are more satisfied with foreign brands than with Chinese domestic brands, especially regarding loyalty programmes. Therefore, research purpose two has been achieved.

This research also used multiple regression analysis to investigate the relationships between attributes, traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour toward STAPs. The outcome indicates that accommodation price, customer service quality and brand image of the platform all have a positive impact on traveller satisfaction of STAPs. Additionally, product variety and customer service quality have positive effects on the travellers' future loyalty behaviour to STAPs. This research also verified that traveller satisfaction has a positive effect on traveller loyalty behaviour toward STAP. Therefore, research purpose three has been achieved.

Apart from the above key findings, there are other interesting findings in this research. For example, referring to section 4.3.2 Findings, Chinese travellers are more satisfied with foreign brand payment methods than domestic brands. In addition, the results in 4.4.1, indicate that travellers are more likely to have loyalty behaviour toward foreign STAPs, although they have higher satisfaction levels toward the loyalty programmes in Chinese domestic brands. Additionally, section 4.4.2 indicates that female travellers are more likely to cultivate loyalty behaviour toward STAPs than male travellers. Also, travellers with an annual income of less than 100,000 RMB have higher satisfaction levels and greater future loyalty behaviours toward STAPs than those on higher incomes.

5.3 Research Implications

The first theoretical implication of this research is to build a relative framework about travellers' selection of STAPs. Although there is a large volume of previous research investigating or establishing a model about travellers' selection of hotel booking channels (Lockyer, 2005; Kim, Ma, & Kim, 2006; Leenheer, Van Heerde, Bijmolt, & Smidts, 2007; Beldad, Jong, & Steehouder, 2010; Xue & Zhou, 2010; Kim & Eastin, 2011; Liu & Zhang, 2014), there is no existing research into the reasoning behind travellers' choices when selecting STAPs. To some extent, this research fills that research gap.

Although this research indicates that all the attributes are important for travellers' selection of STAPs, the importance level of each attribute influencing this is different from the importance level of each attribute influencing travellers' selection of online hotel bookings. Liu and Zhang (2014) point out that product price and product review are most important for travellers when selecting hotel booking channels. However, this research indicates that customer service quality and trust and privacy features are most important for travellers selecting STAPs. In other words, price and review are important for selecting online hotel booking channels, but trust and service are important for selecting STAPs. Therefore, this means, for travellers, although the attributes in criteria of selection of online hotel booking channels and STAPs are similar, the importance level of each attribute is quite different.

The second theoretical implication of this research is providing information about the relationships between attributes of traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour in the field of STAPs. In terms of the effect of attributes on traveller satisfaction, based on the results of this research, it can be seen that only accommodation price, accommodation variety, service quality and brand image of the platform have positive effects on traveller satisfaction with STAPs. This is consistent with previous research about the effect of accommodation price, accommodation variety, service quality and brand image on traveller satisfaction with online hotel booking channels (e.g. Lee & Wu, 2011; Louis & Lombart, 2010; Yeh & Sung, 2013). However, at the same time, it means other attributes have no effect on traveller satisfaction. This is not consistent with previous research about effects of accommodation review, accommodation variety, information quality and loyalty behaviour on traveller satisfaction toward online hotel booking channels (e.g. Bie, Wang & Wang, 2017; Kim, Ma & Kim, 2006; Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus & Cobanoglu, 2013; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Wang, Minor & Wei, 2011; Ye, Law, Gu & Chen, 2011). Therefore, for STAPs, traveller satisfaction is only influenced by accommodation price, accommodation variety, service quality and brand image.

In terms of the effect of STAP attributes on travellers' future loyalty behaviour, only product variety and customer service quality have positive effects and product variety has an even greater effect on consumers' future loyalty behaviour to the platform. This result is consistent with previous research about the effect of service quality and accommodation variety on travellers' future loyalty behaviour toward online hotel booking channels (e.g. Lee & Wu, 2011). However, at the same time, it means other STAP attributes do not have positive effects on travellers' future loyalty behaviour. The result is not consistent with the previous research which investigated the effect of accommodation price, accommodation review, information quality, trust and privacy, loyalty behaviour and brand image on travellers' loyalty behaviour to online hotel booking channels. Therefore, in the field of STAPs, travellers' loyalty behaviour is only influenced by accommodation variety and service.

This research also verified that there is a positive relationship between traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour toward STAPs. This result is consistent with previous research (e.g. Chen & Chen, 2010; Kassim & Abdullah, 2010; Zhang & Mao, 2012).

5.4 Practical implications

This research also has practical implications for managers of STAPs. Initially, a model of travellers' selection of STAPs was established, which provided information about Chinese travellers' selection criterion for managers. In order to attract more travellers to select their platform, managers of all companies involved in STAPs in China should focus on how to improve attributes (i.e. PP, PR, PV, IQ, CSQ, TP, LP, PM and PB) because, from the travellers' perspective, they may consider those attributes before selection. However, among all the attributes, product review (feedback from other consumers), customer service quality and trust and privacy features are proven to be the most important deciding attributes for travellers selecting a platform. In other words, if the managers of STAPs have limited resources and cannot improve all the attributes in the short-term, they should primarily focus on PR, CSQ and TP. Doran (2002) points out that it is a good idea to encourage customers to share their feedback by setting a reward system. Additionally, Kadiresan, Selamat, Selladurai, Ramendran SPR and Mohamed (2015) point out that, in order to improve service quality, staff training is a good process because it helps employees become confident and improves their work performance. Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus and Cobanoglu (2013) point out that, in order to build trust between online service providers and customers, websites should establish more commitment or privacy policies and notices.

Secondly, this research used IPA to compare customer satisfaction levels of each attribute with respect to both Chinese domestic and foreign STAPs, which provides managers information about the weakness of domestic and foreign STAPs. The result indicates that Chinese travellers have relative lower satisfaction levels toward each attribute in Chinese domestic STAPs than foreign STAPs, excepting loyalty programmes. Managers of Chinese domestic brand companies should primarily pay more attention to improving customer service quality (CSQ), enhancing the trust and privacy features (TP) and increasing accommodation

options in their platform (PV) because travellers' satisfaction toward those three attributes is extremely low. As for managers of foreign STAPs, they should consider how to establish better loyalty programmes because it has a relatively low satisfaction level. Lee, Capella, Taylor, Luo and Gabler (2014) point out that customers prefer simple and convenient loyalty programmes, such as rewarding a traveller based on number of stays instead of points, because it may be easier for consumers to understand and monitor.

Thirdly, this research shows that accommodation price, accommodation variety, customer service quality and brand image of the platform have positive effects on the traveller satisfaction levels regarding STAPs. Therefore, it is evident that by adopting reasonable prices, having more accommodation options, improving customer service and establishing a better brand image of their platforms, managers of STAPs will generally improve customer satisfaction levels. As an example, in order to build a good brand image, companies should have more corporate social responsibility and produce more benefits for communities (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010)

Also, this research shows that the loyalty programmes in STAPs may not significantly influence travellers' future loyalty behaviour. For STAPs, only product variety and customer service quality have positive effects on traveller future loyalty behaviour to STAP. It follows then, that managers, in the long term, wanting to enhance traveller future loyalty behaviour, should consider how to provide high quality service in their platforms and have more options and variety in the range of accommodation offered in different locations. Koh and King (2017) point out that it is much more difficult to encourage households to share their houses or apartments in some areas because of the housing shortage, therefore, managers should mainly focus on improving customer service quality to improve travellers' future loyalty behaviour. Choi and Joung (2017) claim that, in order to improve customer service quality, apart from staff training, an effective reward system can maintain employees' good performance and promote their customer-oriented behaviour.

This research also shows female travellers and travellers with an annual income of less than 100,000 RMB, are more likely to cultivate loyalty behaviour toward STAPs. Considering advertising and social contributions may be seen as the best way to retain female customers (Frank, Enkawa, & Schvaneveldt, 2013), managers of STAPs should consider investment in advertising in order to attract female employees. Additionally, in order to attract relative low-income customers, managers may be better to provide more accommodation at relative low prices (Wei, Cheung & Law, 2010).

Additionally, managers should also consider how to attract travellers with high annual income and how to raise satisfaction levels. It might be wise to request more detailed feedback from high income earners as a means to identify their requirements and accommodation expectations in order to cater for them.

5.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Study

This research is not free from limitations. Firstly, although the respondents were a random sample, distributing the questionnaire through the social media channels WeChat and Weibo in China limits the generalisability of the results. Secondly, the sample size of respondents is relatively small. One of the purposes of this research was to provide a descriptive analysis of both foreign and Chinese domestic brands in China based on Chinese respondents' data. However, this research only collected data from 200 respondents which may not represent the wider population. Thirdly, the results in this research may be limited to young travellers considering nearly 60 percent of respondents are under 34 years old (N=200).

For future studies, researchers should investigate based on a larger sample size and by using different data collection methods, in order to generate a balance in the age range of respondents thereby improving the generalisability of the results. Additionally, this research only investigated Chinese travellers' selection, satisfaction levels and future loyalty behaviour toward STAPs in China. In other words, the results are limited to Chinese travellers. Future studies could be expanded to investigate travellers' selection, satisfaction levels and future loyalty

behaviour which includes respondents from other countries and verify the feasibility of the theoretical model for foreign respondents.

5.6 Conclusion

This research established a model explaining the selection of STAPs, provided a descriptive analysis for comparing foreign and Chinese domestic brands by using IPA, and investigated relationships between the attributes of traveller satisfaction and traveller future loyalty behaviour. A deductive approach was utilised in this research. The data was collected by using an online anonymous questionnaire and analysed by frequency descriptive analysis, IPA, independent sample t-test analysis, ANOVA, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. The results of this research show that all the attributes are important in traveller selection of STAPs and, among those attributes, accommodation reviews (feedback from other consumers), customer service quality and trust and privacy features are the most important. Chinese travellers have higher satisfaction levels towards nearly every attribute in foreign brands than in Chinese domestic brands. Additionally, customer service quality, trust and privacy features and accommodation variety are obvious weaknesses of Chinese domestic brands. Accommodation price is the most important factor influencing traveller satisfaction of the platform and product variety is the most important factor influencing traveller future loyalty behaviour. The results of this research have theoretical implications, such as creating a new selection model and verifying the relationships between attributes, traveller satisfaction and their future loyalty behaviour in the field of STAPs. The practical implications were shown to be improving managers' knowledge of attributes important to attracting traveller selection, how to build competitive Chinese brand advantage, and how to improve traveller satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour. Considering the limitations of the research, namely the small size and imbalance of respondents, future studies should use a larger sample size to address the issue of imbalance of respondents' numbers and improve the generalisability of the results. Also, future studies should focus on investigating travellers' selection, satisfaction levels and future loyalty behaviour and verify the feasibility of the theoretical model by including respondents from other countries.

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APPENDIX:

1. Questionnaire

Attributes influencing travellers' selection toward short-term accommodation platform and the effects of the attribute attributes on travellers' satisfaction and future loyalty behaviour

Dear Participants,

Welcome. My name is Damian and I am a master student at Auckland University of Technology. This anonymous questionnaire is about **your previous selection experiences regarding short-term accommodation platforms in China**. A short-term accommodation platform is a web-platform which provides peer-to-peer services, enabling people to lease or rent short-term lodgings easily and conveniently. These sites include: Airbnb, Tujia, Xiaozhu, Mayi.com. By completing the survey, you are giving consent to participate in the research project. This questionnaire will take you around **15 minutes** to complete. All the data collected will be used for **academic research only** and your personal information is unidentifiable. Thank you for your time.

- ☐ I want to read Participant Information Sheet for more detailed information about this survey
 - ☐ I am ready to provide my respondents for this survey
 - ☐ I want to leave this survey
-

Please select Yes or No to answer the following questions.

Q1 Have you lived in China?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Q2 Are you at least 18 years of age?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Q3 Have you ever used short-term accommodation platforms when booking accommodation for travel to other cities in China?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Your online survey will be **stopped**, if you answer '**No**' to any of the above questions. If you answered '**Yes**' to all the above questions you will be able to **continue this survey**.

Q4 Which short-term accommodation platform is your **favourite platform**?

- ☐ Airbnb
- ☐ Belvedor
- ☐ Mayi.com
- ☐ Tujia
- ☐ Xiaozhu
- ☐ Youtx.com
- ☐ Others _____

Q5 Please assess the level of importance of the following attributes when you select a short-term accommodation platform in China.

7= Very important 6= Important 5= Slightly Important 4= Neither Important or Unimportant

3= Slightly Unimportant 2= Unimportant 1= Very Unimportant

	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Product price (The level of accommodation price and value for money)							
Product review (Feedback from other customers)							
Product variety (The amount and variety of available accommodation in the platform)							
Textual and pictorial information quality (Website aesthetic, quality of textual and pictorial information)							
Customer service quality in a platform							
Trust and privacy features on a website (Privacy policies)							
Payment methods							
Loyalty programs in a platform							
Platform Brand							

Q6 Please rank the following attributes from 1 to 9, in order of importance when you select a short-term accommodation platform in China? (9 is most important to you and 1 is least important to you)

_____ Product price (The level of accommodation price and value for money)

_____ Product review (Feedback from other customers)

_____ Product variety (The amount and variety of available accommodation in the platform)

_____ Textual and pictorial information quality (Website aesthetic, quality of textual and pictorial information)

_____ Customer service quality in a platform

_____ Trust and privacy features on a website (Privacy policies)

_____ The payment methods

_____ Loyalty programs in a platform

_____ Brand of a platform

Q7 Which short-term accommodation platform did **you use last time**?

☐ Airbnb

☐ Belvedor

☐ Mayi.com

☐ Tujia

☐ Xiaozhu

☐ Youtx.com

☐ Others _____

Q8 with reference to your last experience of using a short-term accommodation platform in China, please assess the level of satisfaction you experienced regarding the following attributes

7= Extremely satisfied 6= Moderately satisfied 5= Slightly satisfied 4= Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 3= Slightly dissatisfied 2= Moderately dissatisfied 1= Extremely dissatisfied

	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Product price (The level of accommodation price and value for money)							
Product review (Feedback from other customers)							
Product variety (The amount and variety of available accommodation in the platform)							
Textual and pictorial information quality (Website aesthetic, quality of textual and pictorial information)							
Customer service quality in a platform							
Trust and privacy features on a website (Privacy policies)							
Payment methods							
Loyalty programs in a platform							
Platform Brand							

Q9 Are you satisfied with your last experience of using short-term accommodation platform?

	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
(Total satisfaction regarding your last experience of using short-term accommodation platform)							

Q10 Please assess your level of agreement to the following statements about your potential loyalty behavior toward the short-term accommodation platform you used last time.

7= Strongly Agree 6= Agree 5= Slightly Agree 4= Neither Agree or Disagree 3= Slightly Disagree 2= Disagree 1= Strongly Disagree

	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
I will say positive things about the platform I used last time to other people.							
I will recommend the platform I used last time to someone who seeks my advice.							
I will encourage my friends and relatives to use the platform I used last time.							
I will consider the platform I used last time as my first choice when future booking accommodation.							
I will use the platform I used last time frequently in the next few years.							

Please answer the following questions

Q11 Are you a Chinese citizen?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Q12 Which year were you born?

▼ 1920 ... 2000

Q13 What is your **gender**?

☐ Male

☐ Female

Q14 What is **the highest degree or level of school qualification** you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

☐ Less than high school

☐ High school graduate

☐ Bachelor's degree

☐ Master's degree

☐ Doctorate degree

☐ Other _____

Q15 What is your **annual income**?

☐ Less than 50000 RMB

☐ 50000 - 99999 RMB

☐ 100000 - 199999 RMB

☐ 200000RMB - 499999RMB

☐ More than 500000 RMB

Q16 **How many times a year** do you book accommodation with a short-term accommodation platform when you travel in China? (e.g. 2)

▼ 1 ... 10

Q17 **How many people** do you travel with when booking accommodation on a short-term accommodation platform?

- ☐ Only myself
- ☐ Fewer than three other people
- ☐ More than 3 other people

2. Invitation Message

Greetings.

You are invited to participate in research about short-term accommodation platforms hosting private accommodation providers. This research provides you with the opportunity to express your opinion about online booking websites and how to improve customer experiences. This research is part of a university study and participation is entirely voluntary and anonymous. No contact details will be collected or supplied to any third party.

If you would like to participate, please click on the following link to access the short questionnaire:

3. Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

You are invited to participate in research about short-term accommodation platforms hosting private accommodation providers in China.

Project Title

Factors influencing travelers' selection of short-term accommodation platforms hosting private accommodation providers in China.

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the information that is important to you when using a short-term accommodation provider and your satisfaction with the accommodation platforms that you use. This research is being undertaken as a part of a university master's qualification for the researcher.

What are the benefits?

Your opinions and experiences are important to this study as you will add to our understanding of what is important to users of short-term accommodation providers and potentially improve the customer experience of these sites.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your contact details will not be collected therefore your privacy and anonymity is protected within this research. This survey is conducted through an online anonymous questionnaire.

Participation in the online survey is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw at any stage during completion of the questionnaire.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

To be eligible to participate in this research you must be over 18 years of age and have experience using a short-term accommodation platform of private accommodation providers in China.

Please note, for the purpose of this research only 200 participants will be able to contribute their opinion. Once 200 questionnaires have been completed the research link will close.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

After reading this information sheet all you need to do to agree to participate is click on the continue button and complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire is expected to take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

A summary of the research findings will be available on the website of New Zealand Tourism Research Institute: <http://www.nztri.org>. You are more than welcome to visit the website and view the findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this research should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Warren Goodsir, warren.goodsir@aut.ac.nz

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTC, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Damian (Da) Fang, damianfang10@yahoo.com

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Warren Goodsir, warren.goodsir@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTC Reference number *type the reference number*.

Date Information Sheet Produced: 12/2/2017