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# Hotel Guests' Satisfaction with Employees in Istanbul and Barcelona



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**Abstract** This chapter reports results of a comprehensive investigation on the antecedents of guests' satisfaction with employees of Istanbul hotels. The first phase of the study showed that at those hotels where participation mechanisms are available for greater numbers of employees, there are also higher levels of employee satisfaction, but trust in organization did not follow the same trend. Demand for participation seems to decrease trust in organization, because in this high power-distance setting, employees may find such contribution cumbersome. Suggestions for human resource managers are provided, to keep the levels of trust in organization at a level that would not negatively influence other organizationally important attitudes. In the second phase, Barcelona and Istanbul's comparability in terms of hotel guests' satisfaction with employees was tested with matched samples. The result suggests that data obtained from online ratings in separate destinations could be useful for preliminary comparisons. Reported findings could be valuable for both organizational improvement and knowledge development in service sector organizations.

## 1 Introduction

As destinations strive to compete with each other to attract visitors and tourists, the performance of its enterprises, including the hotel industry is of paramount importance (Tsai et al. 2009; Oses et al. 2016). Researchers have noted that there is a relationship between the competitiveness of a destination and that of its hospitality industries, which seems to go both ways (e.g. Kozak and Rimmington 1998; Tsai et al. 2009). Quality accommodation facilities and services are essential for an attractive destination (Kozak and Rimmington 1998), while the demand conditions and the increase in the number of visitors to the place also benefit the hotels at the destination (Go et al. 1994). Istanbul as a city destination has increased its attraction

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tremendously in the past years, going from 4,849,353 foreign visitor arrivals in 2005, up to 12,414,677 in 2015 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016), and thus deserved attention. In parallel to this almost three fold increase in foreign visitors over a decade, Istanbul currently holds a bed capacity of 186,302, with another roughly 47,000 new beds under construction (TÜROB 2016). However, in 2016 the tide has turned. Turkey has been subject to an international wave of terror and political crisis that resulted in about 37% decline in foreign tourism demand compared with the previous years (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2017). Such periods of turmoil is the most significant predictor of “travel anxiety” (Reisinger and Movando 2005), and this situation makes focusing on competitiveness even more pressing than before. Investigations originating elsewhere have attempted to analyze performance of hotel industry in relation to a number of factors, such as productivity (Barros and Alves 2004), competitiveness (Brown and Ragsdale 2002), brand image (Mattila and O’Neill 2003), yet a destination wide analysis, where employee attitudes’ and human resource management’s (HRM) influence on hotel guests’ satisfaction are measured separately, is lacking.

The purposes of the study reported in this chapter are twofold. First, the results of a comprehensive investigation on the antecedents of hotel guest’ satisfaction with employees of Istanbul hotels are provided. Secondly, to deepen the investigation on human resource factors’ impact on customer satisfaction, it was deemed necessary to gather and analyze information derived from a benchmark destination. To this aim, insights obtained from a systematic comparison between Barcelona and Istanbul on this variable are also reported in the chapter. Earlier, Spain and Turkey have been compared as destinations from the perspective of visitors (e.g. Kozak 2001), and Barcelona was chosen for this comparison as a city destination. Barcelona is exemplified as a destination that was able to combine economic development with a strong emphasis on cultural activities and a highly successful tourism policy (Alvarez and Yarcan 2010). Moreover, Minghetti and Montaguti (2010) provided that Barcelona and Istanbul cluster together as they bear similarities in several factors such as competitiveness of accommodation supply, significance of core resources and attractions, etc.

## 2 Literature Review

Importance of hospitality employees’ approaches and involvement during the service to guests is widely accepted, as tourism is a people’s industry where human touch is essential. The qualities of the workforce of a destination in general is therefore a vital parameter in competitiveness. As aforementioned, to date investigations of the antecedents of hotel guests’ satisfaction with employees’ job attitudes and work participation in a whole city destination was scant. The variables explored in this study that was designed to fill the void are presented in the following sections.

## 2.1 *Hotel Guests' Satisfaction*

Consumer satisfaction is believed to result in loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Tsai et al. 2009). In this sense, hotel guests' satisfaction and perceptions of service quality have been seen as essential in increasing the performance and competitiveness of hotels (Akbaba 2006; Mattila and O'Neill 2003). Studies of service quality as well as guest satisfaction are abundant in the tourism and hospitality literature, and several researchers have developed or adapted scales to measure these variables. However, an alternative measure of hotel guests' satisfaction is available from online ratings and it is rapidly gaining importance as "word-of-mouth" (Stringam and Gerdes 2010; Xiang et al. 2017). Online reviews constitute very valuable input for organizations, since customer feedback can be obtained at a relatively low cost (Papathanassis and Knolle 2011).

With the advancement of technology, some visitors started to share their hotel stay experiences with other internet users through posting at travel communities such as TripAdvisor, blogs like [www.travelblog.org](http://www.travelblog.org) or online travel sites like [Booking.com](http://Booking.com).

For most visitors, price is no more the only critical factor but non-price information is also regarded as valuable (Noone and McGuire 2016). In their reviews, visitors can provide content together with numerical ratings for various hotel attributes. Along with ratings these positive and negative content that are posted on credible sources also add value to the review (Fang et al. 2016). Visitors can rate hotels on their physical attributes (e.g. location, comfort, cleanliness) accompanied by their service quality (e.g., internet services, staff, value for money) (Alvarez and Hatipoglu 2014). Based on these ratings, higher ranked hotels improve their reputation, appear on best hotels lists (Casalo et al. 2015) and show online on the top of the lists for review of future visitors. Thus, empirical evidence supports that online reputation is closely linked with hotel performance (Xie and Zhang 2014; Phillips et al. 2016). Higher rankings and positive reviews tend to affect willingness to book a room, while negative comments can deter visitors from booking (Sparks and Browning 2011).

Today, almost all hotel managers are in search for ways to improve their online ratings, which are used as a measure of guest satisfaction also in academic work (e.g., Bulchand-Gidumal et al. 2011; Li et al. 2013). In their work, Stringam and Gerdes (2010) listed friendly front-office staff, efficient check-in and check-out, and restaurant and bar availability as the influential factors that provide insights to hotel guests' satisfaction. Therefore, guests' satisfaction with hotel employees could be deemed a good indicator of overall guest satisfaction. Recent research by Xiang et al. (2017, p. 58) examining whether or not these factors drive online ratings showed that "topics related to basic hotel services (i.e., front desk, staff, etc.) and core product (the guest room and bathroom) were salient in reviews associated with lower ratings". Based on this and aforementioned findings, it could be suggested that the above listed factors hint at the importance of employees' interaction with hotel guests also in online ratings.

## 2.2 *Employee Participation and Job Attitudes*

Employee participation has gained prominence in recent years as a result of the growing interest in the use of high performance work systems (HPWS) and to experiment with methods for increased information sharing and involvement of employees in workplace decision-making (Boxall and Macky 2009; Wilkinson et al. 2013). Participation of employees in decision-making processes is found to be an important factor in achieving a high-involvement and high-commitment management (Boxall and Macky 2009). In the HPWS literature it is often assumed that “valuing employee contributions might lead to improved employee attitudes and behaviors, loyalty, commitment and more cooperative relations” (Wilkinson and Fay 2011, p. 67). Participation could be characterized by allowing employees to contribute decisions on how their work is organized and carried through programs such as quality circles and project teams; voicing their opinions through attitude surveys or during meetings with management; put their suggestions to letter boxes and having access to company’s incentive plans.

In service organizations giving power to employees is important because customer/guest is often physically there and affected by service failures. When employees are empowered they can recover service failures, respond to guest needs and delight them by exceeding their expectations (Bowen and Lawler 1995; Inelmen 2009). He et al. (2010) have shown that empowered employees in a hospitality organization are more satisfied with their work and when they perceive higher quality service, their job satisfaction is also higher. Given the importance of the service quality for hospitality enterprises, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that employee participation with its critical role for job satisfaction, in turn can have a hefty effect on guest satisfaction. Dundon et al. (2004) suggested three ways in which employee participation can have a positive impact: it could lead to improved general performance, and it could improve managerial systems by tapping into employees’ ideas, knowledge, and experience and promoting greater diffusion of information. Finally, valuing employee contributions could lead to improved employee attitudes, behaviors and more cooperative relations.

Among the potentially important job attitudes, another key variable is trust in organization, as it plays an important role in shaping a lot of positive and desired organizational outcome behaviors. Trust in managers and/or organization may lead to cooperative behavior, reduce conflict, and very often become a strong predictor for organizationally valuable variables (Wong et al. 2006). Trust in organization has several definitions, but Shockley-Zalabak and colleagues’ (2000) definition of positive expectations individuals have about the intent and behaviors of multiple organizational members based on organizational roles, relationships, experiences, and interdependencies, was used here as a working definition. In earlier studies, Inelmen et al. (2010) and Hatipoglu and Inelmen (2017) found that trust in the organization is one of the main drivers of organizational citizenship behavior and the tendency to use voice opportunities as a form of participation among employees working in Istanbul hotels.

Other than the HRM practices of an organization, the attitudes and behaviors of its employees are essential influences on its performance. The labor intensive nature of the hospitality industry forces managers at all levels to focus on the attitudes and behaviors of employees in these enterprises. Fittingly, recent discussions on sustainable competitiveness have placed sizable importance on human capital being a major source of advantage for the industry's organizations (e.g., Lee et al. 2010; Tsai et al. 2009). In fact, there is a growing demand for skilled employees at all positions in hotels, yet at the same time the industry suffers from an unacceptably high level of staff turnover (Davidson et al. 2010; Kuruüzüm et al. 2008). Thus, all efforts to retain those employees with organizationally valuable job attitudes as well as willingness to contribute decisions, and to improve performance of human capital can serve on the way to competitiveness of destinations. Based on the insights derived from the above literature review, the study reported in this chapter first investigated a set of antecedents of hotel guests' satisfaction. Moreover, this investigation was complemented with an assessment of guest satisfaction levels of hotels in Barcelona and Istanbul, as to provide a comparison basis on this variable. The following sections describe the realization of these studies that constituted the empirical basis of the chapter.

### 3 Methodology

The present investigation consists of two parts. First study deals with, whether increased employee participation coupled with trust in organization and job satisfaction leads to improved hotel guests' satisfaction. This phase is accomplished by employing primary data that was collected at the scale of Istanbul as a city destination (Study 1). Second study provides a comparison for delineating a possible benchmark destination for Istanbul. With this intention, data collected from online ratings of guests' satisfaction with employees are compared for two randomly selected and matched samples from Barcelona and Istanbul hotels (Study 2).

**Study 1** The unit of analysis in this investigation is hotels that are chosen using a quota sampling technique based on star categories from the largest hoteliers association in Istanbul (Hotel Association of Turkey-TÜROB). In Turkey, hotel stars are awarded by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as one, two, three, four, five star and special class/boutique hotels and are based on a point system. The list of the Hotel Association of Turkey included a total of 247 hotels from Istanbul at the time of data collection. The sample for this study consisted of 35 hotels selected randomly from this sampling frame with enough substitutes; in a few cases where selected hotels declined, randomly selected hotel from the same star category list was approached as a substitute. To match their size in the list, of those six were five-star, 17 were four-star, seven were three-star and five were boutique hotels.

Star categories are practical enough for visitors to make quick comparisons among categories. And they are also widely used by researchers to make comparisons between destinations or different category hotels. For example, Orfila-Sintes et al. (2005) and Oses et al. (2016) have used star categories to make comparisons between destinations, and the present study also employed the same strategy.

### ***3.1 Hotel Guests' Satisfaction with Employees***

Monitoring and managing hotels' performance of a destination is important for improving destination competitiveness. However, when there is lack of consistent financial data, pricing information or occupancy rates it becomes difficult to observe hotel competitiveness. To overcome this hurdle for Istanbul, our research used publicly available information that is obtainable from an online travel site. To measure hotel guests' satisfaction for each hotel, the Booking.com web site was selected as the source for user-generated scores. Online travel sites use their own detailed rating system, and yet Booking.com had the widest coverage for Istanbul. This travel site allows individuals to evaluate hotels on the dimensions of cleanliness, comfort, location, facilities, value for money as well as satisfaction with employees over 10 points. In 2013, "satisfaction with staff ratings" for the selected 35 hotels were obtained from the website, right after the data collection with surveys for the other variables that are described below.

### ***3.2 Employee Participation Practices***

As a part of the primary data collection process a set of questions were directed to 35 human resource (HR) managers to collect information about the non-managerial employees' participation level to decision making practices. Research assistants delivered surveys to the hotels in self-sealed envelopes and collected them a week later during March–June 2013. The missing questions were identified and filled through follow-up telephone calls by the researchers. In his seminal study, Huselid (1995, p. 646) had identified 13 practices for HPWS in his study that evaluated the connection between HRM practices and business results. Cho et al. (2006) have used the twelve items from this list for measuring the impact of HRM on lodging and restaurant companies' performances in the US. To represent as comprehensive a construct as possible four items from the HPWS were adapted to measure employee participation practices of the hotels (Table 1: first two mechanisms are to measure the flow of information from bottom to top, the third from top to bottom and the last one is related to sharing of the rewards). The HR managers indicated

**Table 1** HRM practices investigated in the survey

HRM practices items	Questions
Labor-Management Participation Program	What is the proportion of the workforce who participates in Quality of Work life (QWL) programs, Quality Circles (QC), and/or labor management participation teams?
Attitude Surveys	What is the proportion of the workforce who is administered attitude surveys on a regular basis?
Information Sharing	What is the proportion of the workforce who is included in a formal information-sharing program (e.g. newsletter)?
Incentive Plans	What is the proportion of the workforce who has access to company incentive plans, profit-sharing plans, and/or gain-sharing plans?

their degree of implementation on the workforce on a five point scale ('1' = 0–20% of total employees; '5' = 81–100% of total employees).

### 3.3 Job Attitudes

Five questions were directed to non-managerial employees, to measure general job satisfaction with perceptions about pleasure derived from work, as used by Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2005). Moreover, Robinson and Rousseau's Trust in Organization Scale (1994) was employed in order to measure employees perspective about their employers' good intentions and trustworthiness. Using bed capacity as an indicator of size, for each hotel a quota of non-managerial employees was calculated. Questionnaires were administered to employees who agreed to contribute, until the predetermined numbers of employees have been reached. For each hotel, then an average job satisfaction and an average trust to organization score were calculated and employed in all further analyses in Study 1. In other words, the unit of analysis in this investigation is the hotels that totalled to 35.

**Study 2** With the intend of providing a comparable set of hotels of Study 1, in 2015 a matched sampling procedure was followed for Study 2. To employ as a sampling frame for the planned matching, a list of hotels in Barcelona was employed from the web site of Barcelona Hotels ([www.barcelonahotels.es/hoteles-barcelona-alojamiento.html](http://www.barcelonahotels.es/hoteles-barcelona-alojamiento.html)), as it provided the largest choice. An overall check on Internet for star and boutique category and room number sizes was conducted by an assistant resident in Spain. By employing random numbers option of SPSS, for each category matching Istanbul numbers, a sample of hotels for Barcelona were selected, and ordered according to room sizes. Hotel guests' satisfaction ratings with employees for the randomly selected hotels were obtained for the 35 hotels. This data from 70 hotels is used for the statistical comparison among the two destinations.

## 4 Results

The data set employed in this investigation originated from 35 hotels that were identified through a rigorous quota sampling procedure, to achieve a representative sample for Istanbul. The Study 1's descriptives and the Pearson correlations among the study variables are shown in Table 2 for Istanbul only. The correlations between the independent variables were low to moderate, with the single exception of job satisfaction and trust in organization being relatively strong. Considering that the two measures were obtained from the same group, this result is not surprising. However, in the regression analysis the VIFs were lower than generally accepted cut-off of four in all cases, and thus there is no reason to expect heteroscedasticity. For the same analysis, Durbin-Watson score of 2.476 showed no indication of serial correlation among the residuals. Upon this procedure, the data for the study variables collected separately from each target group to overcome the potential single source bias (Avolio et al. 1991; Podsakoff et al. 2003). To be exact, the job attitude scores were obtained from employees who contributed to the Study 1, participation in decision making of their employees were rated by 35 hotels' human resource managers, and finally hotel guests' satisfaction with employees were obtained from the Booking.com web site, calculated separately for each hotel.

In the regression, star-category was entered as a control variable and it was found to have no significant impact on the prediction for hotel guests' satisfaction with employees. With the other independent variables added, the R<sup>2</sup> has reached to 0.277, and the result was significant ( $F [4, 34] = 2.88, p < 0.05$ ). It might be of some value to remind that the R<sup>2</sup> obtained here through the analysis of data collected from three independent sources. The overall validity can be deemed to be considerably high, due to the advantage of overcoming single-source bias. Average employee job satisfaction's contribution to prediction was highly significant (Beta = 0.798,  $p < 0.01$ ). Average employee trust in organization emerged as a potent predictor, although the effect in this case was negative (Beta = -0.638,  $p < 0.05$ ). Finally, the hotels' practices on employee participation in decision making had also an effect in the model, but the influence is modest (Beta = 0.302,  $p < 0.10$ ) in predicting guests' satisfaction with hotels' employees (Table 3).

**Table 2** Descriptives and correlations among the study variables

	Av. (S.D.)	1	2	3
1. Guests' satisfaction with hotels' employees	7.88 (0.9)	–		
2. Average employee job satisfaction	3.92 (0.3)	0.31*		
3. Average employee trust in organization	3.72 (0.3)	0.06	0.76**	
4. Participation in decision making	1.96 (1.1)	0.18	-0.12	0.07

Note Correlations statistically significant at \*0.10 and at \*\*0.001 levels

**Table 3** The regression of guests' satisfaction with hotels' employees on the study variables

Independent variables	Beta	t-test	Sig.
Hotel's star category	-0.134	-0.845	n.s.
Average employee job satisfaction	0.774	3.110	0.004
Average employee trust in organization	-0.578	-2.302	0.028
Participation in decision making	0.314	1.943	0.061
R2 of the Model		0.277*	

\*Statistically significant at 0.05 level

In Study 2, the secondary data collected in 2015 for the randomly selected 35 hotels in Barcelona for the first time and 35 hotels in Istanbul collected anew were compared with paired samples *t*-test. The test results revealed that on paired samples correlations, the matched samples were moderately but positively correlated and this correlation was deemed significant ( $r = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ). This finding suggested that these data sets from Istanbul and Barcelona can be used for further comparisons. On hotel guests' satisfaction with employees, Barcelona hotels received an average score (MB = 8.48, S.D. = 0.43) that was higher than the average of Istanbul hotels (MI = 7.81, S.D. = 0.81), and paired samples *t*-test analysis has showed a statistically significant difference ( $t = 4.98$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In other words, the guests who stayed in and gave their ratings for the Barcelona hotels have given substantially better scores on satisfaction with employees, compared with those guests who stayed in and rated the Istanbul hotels during the same period. The repercussions of these results obtained from Study 1 and 2 are discussed in the final part of this chapter.

## 5 Conclusion

High quality service and guest satisfaction with the rendered services is a strong competitive advantage for hospitality organizations, and the destination that these organizations are an integral part of. Job attitudes of the people who render those services are very important on the hotel guests' perceptions and resulting satisfaction (Xiang et al. 2017). Empowered employees can be expected to display on the spot "innovative and spontaneous activity" (Raub and Robert 2013, p. 144) and improve service quality. In the literature a close connection is found between employee participation and work attitudes (Wilkinson and Fay 2011). Employees' job satisfaction has been a construct that was noted quite early as a key employee attitude for business stability. Although later, trust in organization has also identified in the literature to be one of the most potent predictors of organizationally important outcomes (Hatipoglu and Inelmen 2017). Thus, these two variables were selected purposefully in this study to test the effect of employee participation, at the backdrop of these powerful job attitudes.

Two broad benefits of employee participation are proposed in the literature: better information flow resulting in better decisions, and job satisfaction consequently leading to better performance. On the down side, employee participation can lead to erosion of power structures, inconsistent decisions, and conflicts between different individuals, and possibly distract employees' in-role performance (Kesting et al. 2015). It was also suggested that these counterproductive tendencies shape the limits of employee participation. The present results provided support to the Raub and Robert's (2013) finding that employee participation would be more successful in countries with lower power distance and their suggestion to use of selective implementation and adaptation. In fact, employee participation had a positive impact on guests' satisfaction with hotels' employees, but in this high power distance context (Kabasakal and Bodur 2002) trust in organization was hampered at the same time. *Vis-à-vis* the fact that job satisfaction was highly correlated with trust in organization in this sample, it should not be considered a negligible matter.

In more concrete terms, this research found that increased levels of employee participation coupled with increased levels of positive job attitudes and lower levels of trust in organization predict guest satisfaction with employees of Istanbul hotels. The results showed that at those hotels where participation mechanisms are available for greater numbers of employees, there are also higher levels of employee satisfaction, but trust in organization did not follow the same trend. Consistent with the expectations, the greater the embeddedness of the participation mechanisms in the percentage of workforce, the better it is. Thus it could be concluded that when organizations provide employees with opportunities to participate in decision making and voice their opinions, the control mechanisms partially transfer from management to employees. On the one side, this practice may have contributed to the employees' general satisfaction. However, it also seems to have a decreasing effect on the trust in organization, because at least some of the employees may have found the task of participation difficult and/or cumbersome and thus feel less well to get attuned with this. Allowing non-managerial tourism employees to contribute to decisions on how their work is organized and carried through programs such as quality circles and project teams, voicing their opinions through attitude surveys or during meetings with management, possibly be perceived as shifting the burden on them. Hospitality managers in high power distance contexts can be advised to use a balanced amount of employee participation, to keep the levels of trust in organization at a level that would not negatively influence other organizationally important attitudes.

In the hospitality literature, the positive relationship between activities of employee participation and business outcomes had been shown in HPWS (Murphy and Olsen 2009), service quality and employee perceived quality (He et al. 2010); job satisfaction (Holland et al. 2011); organizational citizenship behavior and job performance (Kim et al. 2013). Therefore, hospitality managers can be advised to be careful with employee participation, to keep the levels of trust in organization at a level that would not negatively influence other organizationally important attitudes. Although research, mostly originating from Western countries, suggest that