

**FACTORS INFLUENCING UNITED STATES' TRAVELERS
ACCOMMODATION DECISION WHEN THEY ARE
TRAVELING ABROAD**



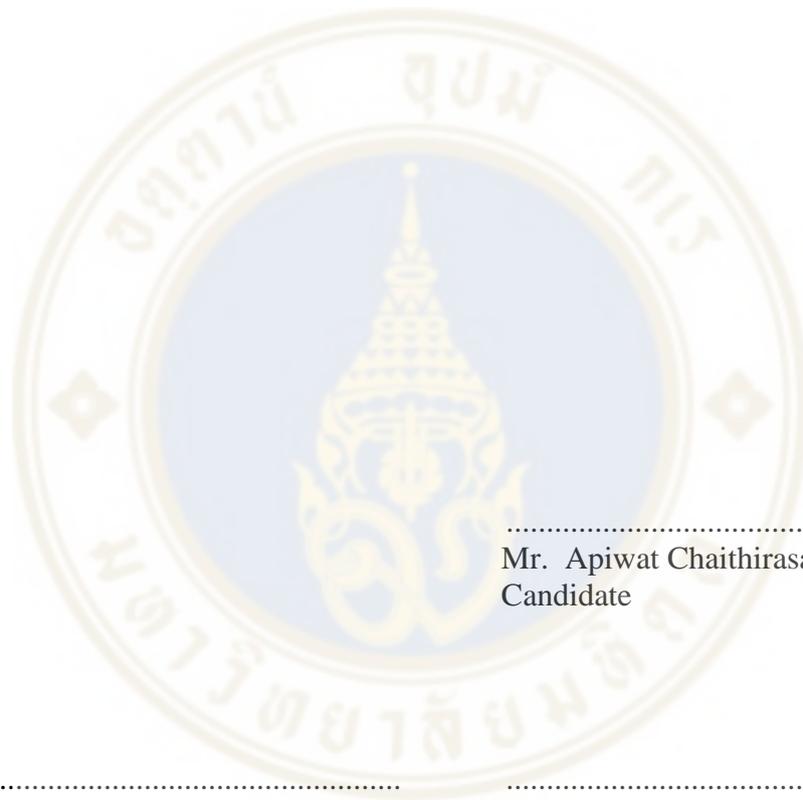
**A THEMATIC PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
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entitled
**FACTORS INFLUENCING UNITED STATES' TRAVELERS
ACCOMMODATION DECISION WHEN THEY ARE
TRAVELING ABROAD**

was submitted to the College of Management, Mahidol University
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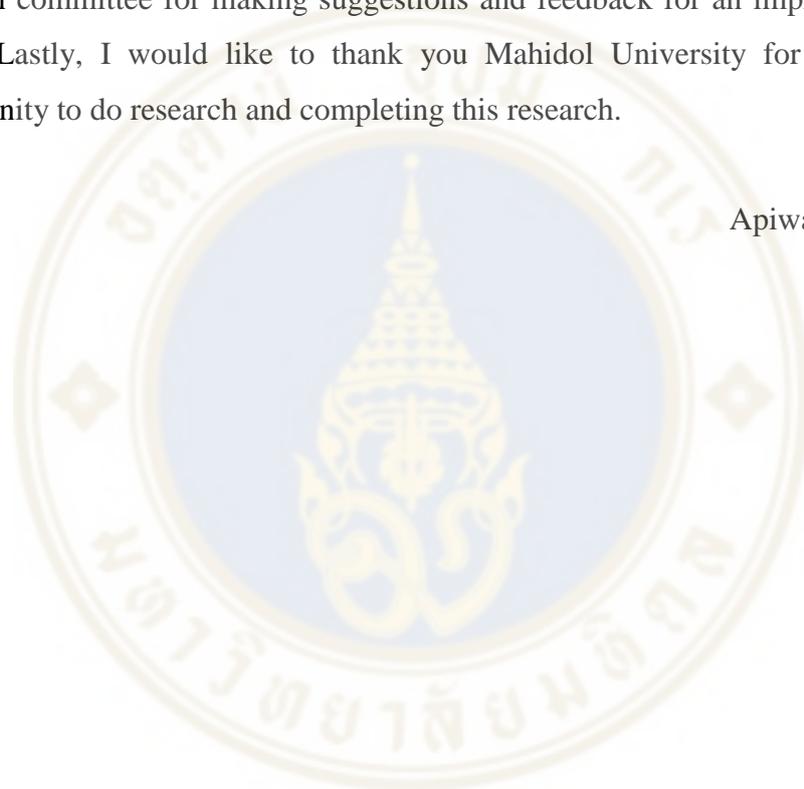
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to find the factors that influence consumer behavior in selecting accommodation when they travel outside of their country. The research will explore many factors such as location, price, types to fit with different types of travelers and how travelers' characteristics associate with their accommodation choice. The quantitative research will be in the form of internet questionnaire. This respondent will be travelers of any ages from the United States. The benefit of this research is to help accommodation business to adapt to the customers target needs.

KEY WORDS: Accommodation/ International/ Travelers/ Factors

26 pages

CONTENTS

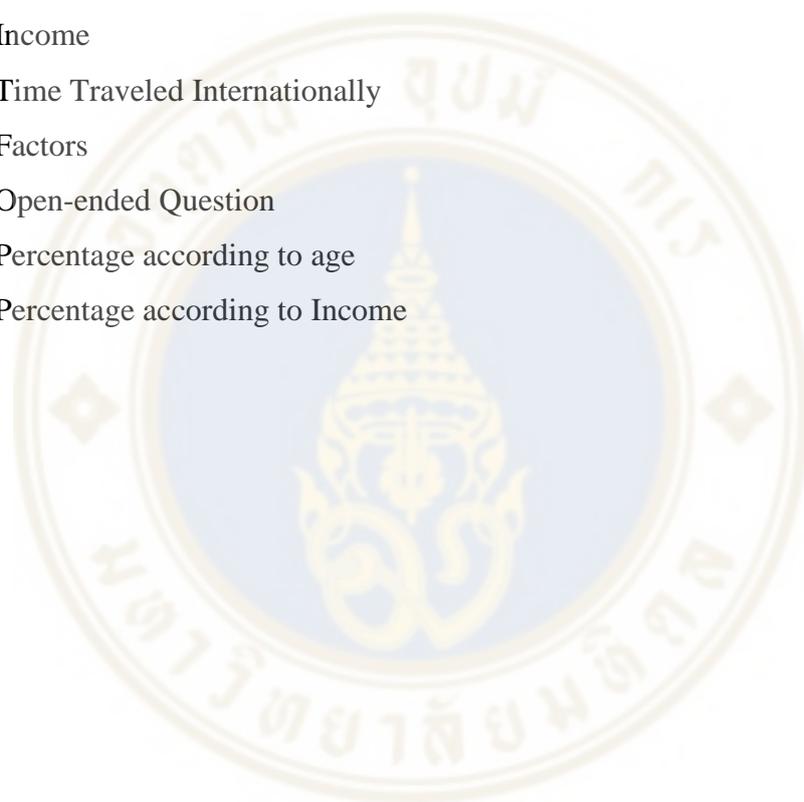
	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Problem Statement	1
1.2 Research Question	1
1.3 Research Objectives	2
1.4 Research Scope	2
1.5 Expected Benefit	2
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW	3
2.1 Accommodation	3
2.1.1 Hotel	3
2.1.2 Hostel	3
2.1.3 Resort	3
2.1.4 Bed and Breakfasts	3
2.2 Internet and the Sharing Economy	3
2.2.1 Emergence of new alternatives	3
2.2.2 Reviews	4
2.3 Factors	5
CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	8
3.1 Sample size	8
3.2 Research Design	8
3.3 Data Analysis	9

CONTENTS (cont.)

	Page
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS	10
4.1 Respondents' Demographics	10
4.2 Factors	12
CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS	18
5.1 DISCUSSION	18
5.2 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	19
REFERENCES	20
APPENDICES	23
Appendix A: Questionnaire	23
BIOGRAPHY	26

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
2.1	Rank according to Chu and Choi	6
4.1	Age	10
4.2	Gender	10
4.3	Income	11
4.4	Time Traveled Internationally	12
4.5	Factors	13
4.6	Open-ended Question	14
4.7	Percentage according to age	15
4.8	Percentage according to Income	16



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
4.1	Preferred Accommodation	12
4.2	Percentage according to Age	16
4.3	Percentage according to Income	17



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry is one of the world's largest industries. It creates a huge impact on economy for many countries. It contributes to approximately 10% of the world GDP. It is a sector that is continuously growing due to the affordability of overseas travel for a growing global middle class of consumers. Tourism is a huge industry, but one of the essential elements of this industry is accommodation sector. Accommodation is an essential part of international travel. It can be frustrating for international travelers to select accommodation due to vast selection and limited knowledge. Luckily, with the emergence of internet, travelers can select accommodation online, but due to this, the numbers of accommodation to select from are huge.

1.1. Problem Statement

Tourism industry is a huge industry that has a lot of sectors. There are many different types of travelers across the world. There are also many types of accommodation for the customers such as hotels, hostel, apartments, resort, and bed & breakfasts. Due to the competitiveness of this sector, the types of accommodation need to fit the specific customers need to outperform its competitors.

1.2. Research Question

This study aims to analyze the factors that influence travelers decision regarding places to stay when they are traveling outside of their country? Further, what is the association between different types of travelers, traveler characteristics and their preferred accommodation choice?

1.3. Research Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to find the factors that influence consumer behavior in selecting accommodation when they travel outside of their country. The research will explore many factors such as location, price, types to fit with different types of travelers and how travelers' characteristics associate with their accommodation choice.

1.4. Research Scope

The quantitative research will be in the form of internet questionnaire with 150 respondent that have travelled outside of their country for pleasure. This respondent will be travelers of any ages from the United States. These respondents will be travelers that had made their own decision regarding their choice of accommodation when they travel outside of their country.

1.5. Expected Benefit

The benefit of this research is to help accommodation business to adapt to the customers' target needs. It will be used to identify which factors influence the accommodation selecting behaviors of travelers, in an age when it becomes normal for travelers to book their own accommodation online, and when new alternatives like AirBnB are available. With a huge competition in this sector, the result of this paper will help accommodation business develop more effective marketing strategies to focus on their target customers to be more competitive.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Accommodation

One of the biggest sectors in the travel and tourism industry is the accommodation sector. This sector provides lodging and other services to travelers. This accommodation comes in many forms such as hotels, hostel, apartments, resorts, and bed & breakfasts. These mentioned types of accommodation are the most common for travelers and will be focused on in this paper.

2.1.1. Hotel - One of the biggest and most well-known types of accommodation. A hotel provides short time accommodation. Apart from accommodation, hotels often provide other services like food and beverages services, support services (e.g., transportation, internet access), spas, and rooms for holding meetings. Hotels can be divided into many levels which range from inexpensive to high-end.

2.1.2. Hostel - A type of accommodation that aims for the budget travelers. They usually have bedroom and bathroom in a student dorm style with shared rooms.

2.1.3. Resort - A type of accommodation that is similar to a hotel. The different is that a resort is generally spread out. This create more privacy for the customers.

2.1.4. Bed and breakfasts - A private home which is rented to travelers

2.2. Internet and the Sharing Economy

2.2.1. Emergence of new alternatives

With the increased use of internet, people find a new way to create a business. Airbnb is a new internet platform which make sharing of private rooms, apartments and houses possible. Anyone can now easily start their business by renting out unused space. This type of accommodation offers more choices with lower prices for consumers. New types of businesses such as this heavily affected existing businesses like hotels and bed & breakfasts.

2.2.2. Reviews

Internet creates new ways for consumers to select accommodations. Although technology is used in almost every industry, the Travel and Tourism industry has changed more dramatically and became more adapted to the technology. With the internet, information sharing and searching became easier and more available. Anyone can freely share their experiences, rating, and knowledge of accommodations. This create a lot of impact on the industry. Customers Review is very important for travelers to look for information regarding specific accommodation. According to Needham (2018), travelers on average take more than a month to research their trip. They look for reviews, pictures prices and recommendation online prior to purchasing. This study suggest that TripAdvisor is the top website for travelers to go on prior to any booking. With 73% of U.S. travelers visit TripAdvisor to look for accommodation information before making decision, TripAdvisor is unquestionable influencing customers booking accommodation decision. Online review is very important in helping customers deciding on their accommodation choice. According to Newton (2012), more than 53% of travelers will not book a hotel that does not have any review on TripAdvisor. The reviews help people become more confident in their decisions.

According to Tsao et al. (2015) , positive reviews increase the reservation rate significantly and negative reviews decrease booking rates significantly. The study also suggests that when customers experience poor services, 48% will share their experience online. Negative reviews tend to spread fast and caught the eyes of potential

customers. Thus, it shows that quality of service is crucial to keep a positive view of the business. (Tsao et. al., 2015)

2.3. Factors

According to Lockyer (2005), there are four major factors that influence consumers when selecting hotel accommodation: location, price, facilities, and cleanliness. In addition, a necessary factor is a trigger point. A trigger point is a “must have” point from the consumer perspective. It is the reason why specific consumers travel. For example, when someone is visiting an ill family member at the hospital, regardless of the other factors, that person will pick accommodation which is close to the hospital. These four major factors are just the main factors with many factors supporting it.

According to Chu and Choi (1999), the study analyze hotel selection factors in the Hong Kong hotel industry. Chu and Choi (1999) picked six hotel selection factors: service quality, business facilities, value, room and front desk, food and recreation, and security. Service quality is the quality provided by staff. Business facilities is rooms or services to conduct business meeting. Value is value for money of room, food, and beverage. Value factor also include location, reputation, and comfortable ambience. Room and front desk deals with cleanliness and front-desk services. Food and recreation is quality of food and beverage. Security deals with reliable fire alarms and security personnel. The study separates the result into result for leisure travelers and business travelers. Value appears to be the most important among these two travelers.

Table 2.1 Rank from top to bottom the important of each factors according to Chu and Choi (1999)

	Leisure Travelers	Business Travelers
Very important	Value	Value
Medium important	Security Service Quality Room and front desk	Room and front desk Service quality Security
Low important	Food and recreation Business facilities	Business facilities Food and recreation

The study conducted by Chan and Wong (2005) suggests different factors influencing hotel selection in Hong Kong. The study shows different factors beside price that affecting each different types of customers' decisions in choosing hotels. The top factor influencing general customers' decision is location followed by hotel service. The study suggest that leisure travelers are more influenced by the recommendation of travel agents.

Gunasekaran and Anandkumar (2012) studied factors of influence in choosing alternative accommodation in Pondicherry, India. The study discussed why travelers choose alternative accommodation such as commercial homes, bed and breakfast, and guest houses, instead of traditional hotel. The study identified four important factors: homely atmosphere, value for money, local touch, and guest-host relationship. The key factor influencing traveler choice in this study is homely atmosphere. Alternative accommodations are different from traditional hotels. The customer's target considers many different factors in choosing accommodation between alternative accommodations and hotels. Value for money factor in this study does not only deal with pricing of the accommodation. Value for money is the money that

customers paid for the staying experience for the cost. The perception of value for money is different from traditional hotelier.

Emir et al. (2016) studied factors influencing customers' decision to book hotel accommodation online. Today, people are most likely book their accommodation online. There are five factors identified in the study. The first factor is perceived interactivity. This factor is interactivity between hotel websites and customers. Second factor is price and promotion. Third factor is safety and privacy. Forth factor is information quality which is quality of content on the website. Fifth factor is Electronic-Word of Mouth. These five factors influence customers' perceived value of the hotel. This perceived value is what decided on which hotel customers book online.

There are many similar study already conducted, but it is not the same as this study. Each study has different scopes and limitation. Previous studies are usually limited to certain city or certain group of travelers. This study is about U.S. travelers' decision making when they traveling abroad. This study can help hotels or any accommodation providers improve their services by knowing what the customers are looking for when they travel abroad.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to explore factors that influence travelers' selection of accommodation while traveling abroad. This study will use an online questionnaire to collect data. This questionnaire will help us understand the criteria that travelers used while selecting accommodation. The research method of collecting data will be through an online questionnaire. Due to the topic of this paper, quantitative method is used because the results can be generalized and it is not representative of one group.

3.1 Sample size

The sample size will be 200 respondents from the United States that have travelled outside of their country for pleasure. This respondent will be travelers of any ages from the United States. These respondents will be travelers that had made their own decision regarding their choice of accommodation when they travel outside of their country.

3.2 Research Design

The questionnaire is separated into 4 parts: introduction, screening question, general questions, specific question to this study, and open-ended question.

Introduction: This part in the questionnaire will explain the objective and the scope of the study. The survey explains that this study is for travel for leisure purposes only.

Screening question: This question will be a screening question. The respondent that answer no to this question will be disqualified to further take the questionnaire. This part will have two questions.

General question: This part of the questionnaire will ask simple demographic questions and general travel information from the respondents.

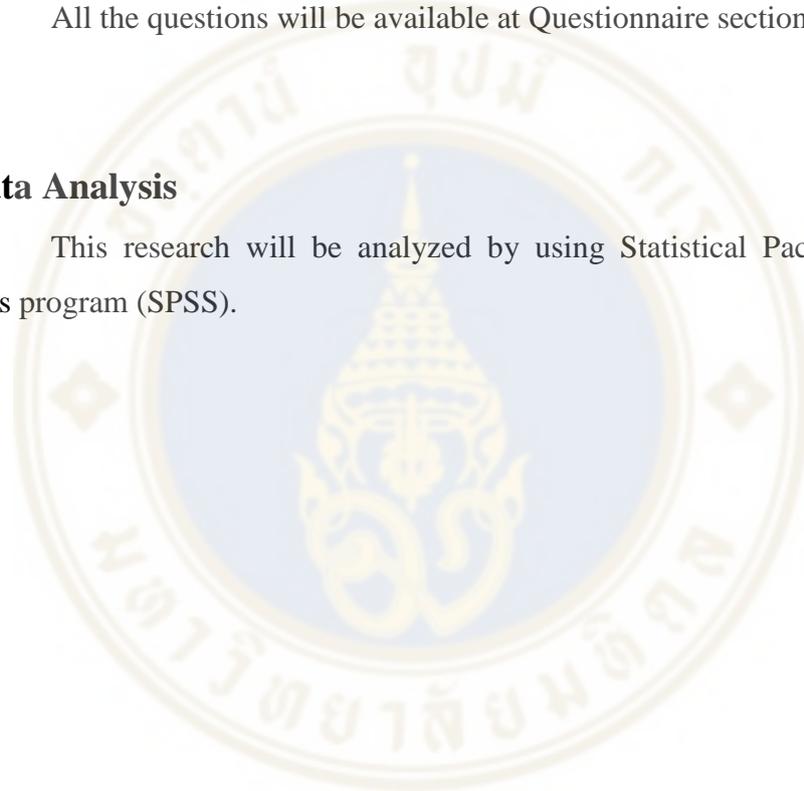
Specific question: This part will ask the opinion of factors influencing their travel accommodation decision making. The respondent will be ask to rate 15 variables on a Likert scales, from 0 to 5 with 0 being not important to 5 being extremely important.

Open-ended question: This is a one question part. It will ask “What factor plays a decisive role in selecting a choice of accommodation?”. It will be an open-ended question and the respondents will be able to answer it however they want.

All the questions will be available at Questionnaire section of this paper.

3.3 Data Analysis

This research will be analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences program (SPSS).



CHAPTER IV FINDINGS

4.1 Respondents' Demographics

The questionnaire was distributed through an online survey. It was posted in many United States travel forum websites. The total number of respondents is 226 people. The total number of respondents after excluding respondents that did not pass the screen question is 150 people.

Table 4.1 Age

		Age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	> 60	25	16.7	16.7	16.7
	18-29	26	17.3	17.3	34.0
	30-44	32	21.3	21.3	55.3
	45-60	67	44.7	44.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.2 Gender

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	73	48.7	48.7	48.7
	Male	77	51.3	51.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.3 Income

		INCOME			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	\$0-\$9999	5	3.3	3.3	3.3
	\$10000-\$24999	13	8.7	8.7	12.0
	\$25000-49999	27	18.0	18.0	30.0
	\$50000-\$74999	32	21.3	21.3	51.3
	\$75000-\$99999	24	16.0	16.0	67.3
	\$100000-124999	13	8.7	8.7	76.0
	\$125000-\$149999	7	4.7	4.7	80.7
	\$150000-174999	3	2.0	2.0	82.7
	\$175000-199999	7	4.7	4.7	87.3
	\$200000+	8	5.3	5.3	92.7
	Prefer Not To Answer	11	7.3	7.3	100.0
Total		150	100.0	100.0	

The demographic characteristics of respondents are shown in figures above. In summary, 17.3% are between 18-29, 21.3% are between 30-44, 44.7% are between 45-60, and 16.7% are above 60 years old. Male consists of 51.3% of the sample and female consists of 48.7%. Of all 150 people, 31% travelled internationally 10 or more times. While asked what types of accommodation respondents select when they travelled, most respondents picked hotels as their choice of accommodation.



Figure 4.1 Preferred Accommodation

Table 4.4 Times Traveled Internationally

How Many Time Travelled Internationally		
	Frequency	Percent
0	2	1.3
1	14	9.3
2	21	14.0
3	19	12.7
4	11	7.3
5	10	6.7
6	5	3.3
7	9	6.0
8	6	4.0
9	7	4.7
10+	48	31.0
Total	150	100.0

4.2 Factors

Table 4.5 Factors

Factors affecting the hotel selection of US travelers travel internationally. Value is based on a 6 point scale where 0 = not important at all to 5 = extremely important

	N Statistic	Range Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Deviation Statistic	Variance Statistic
InteractionWithLocal	150	5	0	5	3.19	.101	1.234	1.522
Personalized_Host	150	5	0	5	3.52	.094	1.151	1.325
Flexibility	150	5	0	5	3.55	.099	1.207	1.458
Rank	150	5	0	5	3.69	.093	1.141	1.301
PictureonWebsite	150	5	0	5	3.80	.091	1.111	1.235
NegativeReview	150	5	0	5	3.93	.095	1.165	1.357
Location_Environment	150	4	1	5	3.97	.081	.996	.993
EnglishSpeakingStaff	150	5	0	5	3.99	.092	1.126	1.268
Facilities	150	5	0	5	4.05	.081	.992	.984
OwnExperience	150	5	0	5	4.09	.085	1.042	1.086
Reviews	150	5	0	5	4.11	.079	.963	.928
PositiveReview	150	5	0	5	4.16	.080	.984	.968
Location	150	5	0	5	4.17	.078	.954	.909
Price	150	5	0	5	4.20	.081	.997	.993
Security	150	5	0	5	4.32	.083	1.019	1.038
Value_for_money	150	3	2	5	4.35	.068	.827	.684
Cleanliness	150	3	2	5	4.44	.062	.764	.584

The top five highest rating are cleanliness, value for money, security, price, and location with the average rating of 4.44, 4.35, 4.32, 4.20, and 4.17 respectively. These factors are all very important factors that affect the accommodation choice of US international travelers. These five factors also support the previous study by Chu and Choi (2000). The next important factor is reviews. In this internet age, information about accommodations are very easily shared and pass around. The average of the importance of previous guest reviews, positive reviews, and negative reviews are 4.11, 4.16, and 3.93 respectively. This high mean rating shows the importance of reviews nowadays. Travelers usually look for reviews before making any decision on booking an accommodation abroad. The lowest five are pictures on the website, rank of accommodation, flexibility of stay, personalized hospitality, and interaction with the locals with 3.80, 3.69, 3.55, 3.52, 3.19 rating respectively. Personalized hospitality and interaction with locals are mentioned to be important in Gunasekaran and Anandkumar

(2012), but from the survey, there is no correlation between people that think these two factors are important and accommodations other than hotel.

For the open-ended question of “What factor plays a decisive role in your choice of accommodation when travel outside of the country?”, the answers are analyzed with the most common words in the answers.

Table 4.6 Open-ended Question

Word	Frequency	Percentage of answers
Price	36	24%
Location	27	18%
Safety	14	9.33%
Security	14	9.33%
Reviews	13	8.67%
Value	5	3.33%
Cost	4	2.67%
Quality	4	2.67%

These results support previous studies like Assaf et al. (2015) and Li et al. (2000). Price is the first factor travelers are looking for when picking accommodation. The next is location. Location is very important because it has to be close to travel destination place. Safety and security are also very important to international travelers.

Factors affecting accommodation type

The question in the questionnaire asked for the type of accommodation US international travelers picked the most and why. People that picked hotels usually say that it is because booking a hotel is convenient and easier than other accommodation types. Hotels are more professional and secure. The price of the hotels is relatively cheap. With many services, it is more comfortable. Hotels give travelers more piece of mind. There are only 4 people that picked hostels and 3 left no reason to why they picked it, but one say for experience. Travelers that picked resort typically say the same as

hotels, but add that they want luxury when they are on vacation. Travelers that picked bed and breakfast type accommodation say that it is friendly and less crowded, easy to go in-and-out. Travelers that picked Airbnb say that they picked it because of value for money. Airbnb provides privacy and a feeling of being at home. Most of the people who picked Airbnb say that price and location are the reasons why they picked it.

After the analysis, the study found some correlation between demographic groups and type of accommodation. Respondents less than 45 years of age are more likely to pick Airbnb and hostels. While people that are older than 45 years old are likely to use hotels and resorts. This may be because hotels and resort are considered to be a more established and trustworthy than other types of accommodation. Many of the respondents also comment that this is why they pick hotels and resort. Respondents with income less than \$75000 are more likely to use Airbnb than respondents with higher income. Percentage of respondents with income less than \$75000 who chose Airbnb is 22% while only 10% of respondents with income more than \$75000 pick Airbnb. Income more than \$75,000 are more likely to use resorts. Percentage of respondents with income more than \$75000 who chose resort is 26% while percentage of respondents with income more than \$75000 pick resort is 19%. The main reason they give is that resorts are more premium and luxury.

Table 4.7 Percentage according to age

	Less than 45 years old	More than 45 years old	Sum
Hotels	39 / 93 = 42%	61 / 118 = 51 %	100
Hostels	4 / 93 = 4%	0 / 118 = 0%	4
Apartment	10 / 93 = 11%	7 / 118 = 6%	17
Resort	16 / 93 = 17%	31 / 118 = 26%	47
Bed and Breakfast	9 / 93 = 10%	12 / 118 = 10%	21
Airbnb	15 / 93 = 16%	7 / 118 = 6%	22
Sum	93	118	211

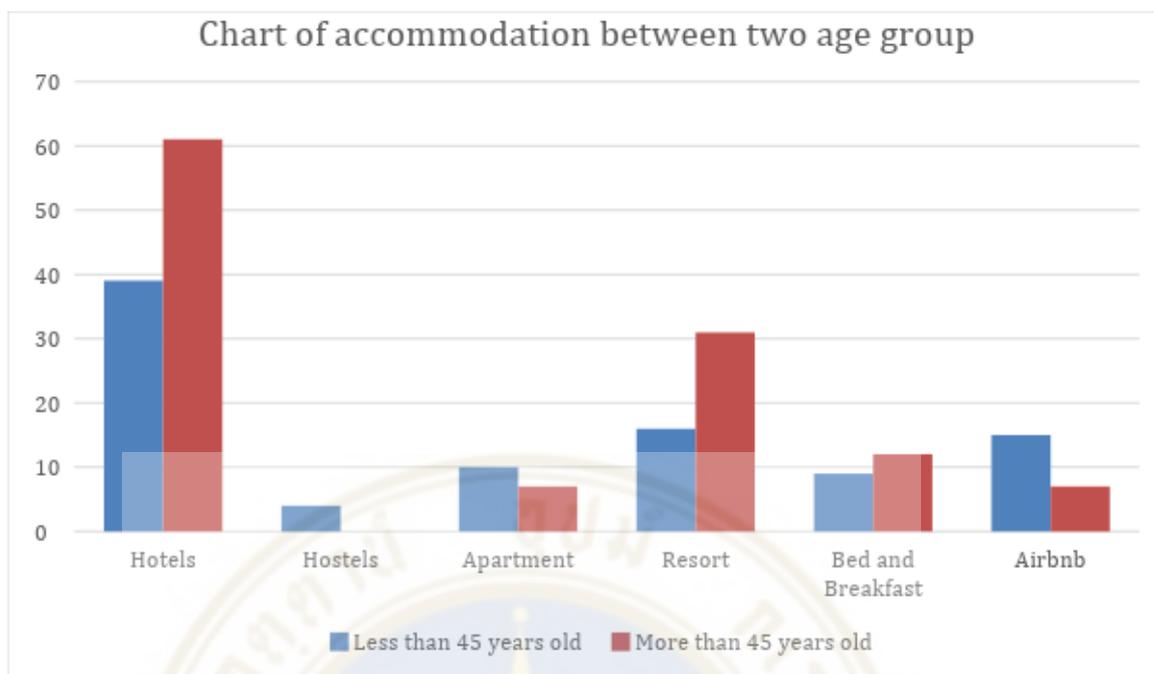


Figure 4.2 Percentage according to age

Table 4.8 Percentage according to age

	Income of less than 75000 usd	Income of more than 75000 usd	Sum
Hotels	$52 / 110 = 47\%$	$40 / 86 = 47\%$	47
Hostels	$3 / 110 = 3\%$	$1 / 86 = 1\%$	4
Apartment	$12 / 110 = 11\%$	$5 / 86 = 6\%$	17
Resort	$21 / 110 = 19\%$	$22 / 86 = 26\%$	43
Bed and Breakfast	$10 / 110 = 9\%$	$9 / 86 = 10\%$	19
Airbnb	$12 / 110 = 22\%$	$9 / 86 = 10\%$	21
Sum	110	86	211

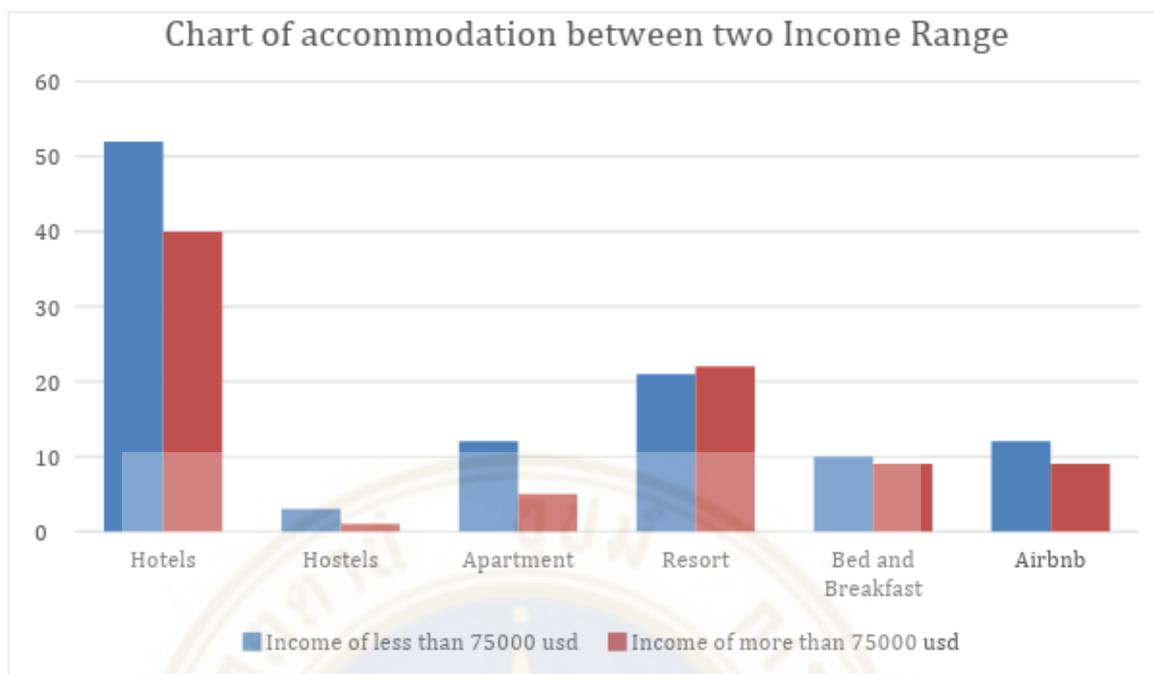


Figure 4.3 Percentage according to age

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Discussion

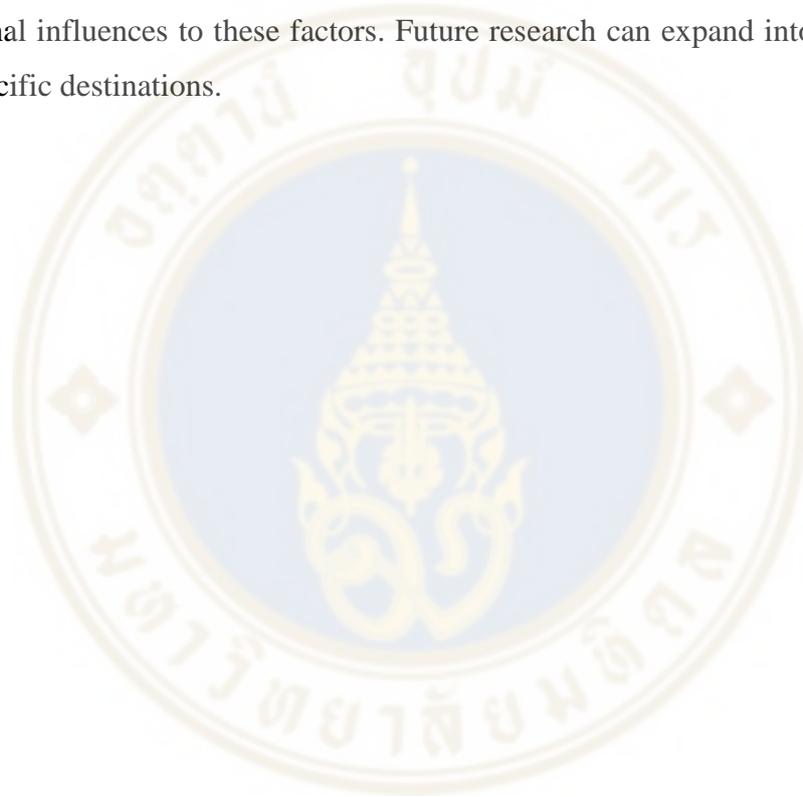
To be successful in this highly competitive market, accommodation owners need to focus on factors that bring customers to their accommodation. The objective of this study is to find factors that influence US travelers' decision regarding places to stay when they are traveling outside of their country. The study is conducted to understand international travelers' mindset when they pick accommodations. The study focused on US travelers who travelled abroad and made their own choice of accommodation. Travelers rank many factors according to what affect their accommodation choice: accommodation, location, price, cleanliness, facilities, security, flexibility stay, local environment, personalized hospitality interaction with locals, value for money, rank of accommodation (1 star hotel to 5 star hotel), positive, reviews, negative reviews, reviews by previous guests, and own experience.

The study found that the first five factors that influence travelers in terms of importance are cleanliness, value for money, security, price, and location. A different open-ended question asked what plays a decisive role when picking accommodation. The first five factors to this open question are price, location, safety, security, and reviews. There are many correlations found between demographic and accommodation types. People with income less than \$75000 are more likely to use Airbnb and people with income higher than \$75000 are more likely to use resort. People with more than 45 years of age are more likely to use hotels than younger people.

The result of this study is beneficial to accommodation owners so that they can find ways to attract more international customers. The result of this study supports many theories and factors identified in earlier studies. The difference is that in this more recent study the review factor is one of the decisive factors when travelers pick an accommodation.

5.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research

One of the limitations of this research is the relatively low number of respondents. There were only 226 respondents and only 151 respondents pass the qualification test. Future research can have more respondents so that the correlation can be clearer and more precise. The research only focuses on the surface of the factors due to time limitation. Future research can focus on the specific details of each factor. Another limitation is that the respondents are only from the United States. The target of this research does not specify the destination of each traveler. Each destination can have additional influences to these factors. Future research can expand into other countries and specific destinations.



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