Chinese Preferences of Hotel Websites: the Differences among Different Regions

Shanshan Qi, Rob Law and Dimitrios Buhalis

Abstract—The fast technology and economic growth in China has attracted global attention in its tourism development. This study makes an effort on investigating China's online tourism market and the Chinese online travelers' perceptions of hotel websites. The findings are expected to better understand Chinese customers' online preference and identified the differences among online travelers from different regions in the country. Empirical findings showed online reservation information is the most important factor to Chinese customers, and tourists from different regions of China have perception difference on user-friendly factor. The findings benefit hoteliers from understanding their websites development and formulating more appropriate online strategies to meet the requirements of Chinese travelers.

Keywords—Chinese online travelers, Hotel websites, Regions of China, Website usefulness

I. INTRODUCTION

INFORMATION technology related topics have been popular in recent decades. The Internet, as a virtual medium, brings pre-travel experience to customers [1, 2]. In order to attract customers' attention, many tourism practitioners make their efforts on advertising their websites and providing comprehensive information on their web pages. However, [3] stated that people tend to browse the Internet for information instead for purchasing. Understand customers' perception of website is the key to online marketing.

In the context of China, with the fast technology and economic development in the country which attracts global attention in its tourism development. With the rise of personal incomes and living standards, many Chinese residents have been, and will likely be, choosing travel to spend their holidays. In 2011, China has become the largest domestic tourist market, and ranked as the third in the world for inbound and outbound tourism [4]. In terms of Internet usage in China, there are a total number of 564 million online users in year 2012. It means that 42% of the Chinese population uses the Internet and 19.8% of them purchased travel related products from the Internet [5]. Hence, it is crucial to understand Chinese travelers' perceptions and preference.

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This study makes an attempt to analyze Chinese online travelers' perceptions on hotel websites. Research objectives are:

- To establish a checklist for hotel websites, which reveals the importance of website contents
- Identify Chinese online travelers' requirements and needs on hotel websites

The findings of this research are expected to assist hoteliers improve their websites and formulate more appropriate e-tourism marketing strategies to meet the needs of Chinese travelers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of online travel market in China has attracted researchers' attention worldwide [6, 7]. In particular, China hotel website development [8], hotel websites design that is based on Chinese tourists' requirement is of paramount value [9, 10, 11]. Chinese travelers own their unique perceptions compare with the Western users [12, 13].

Most research on developing the online travel website measurements or frameworks has been limited to the Western context [14]. The applicability of these findings in the Chinese context is uncertain. [15, 16] Found that most Chinese users are dissatisfied with China-based travel websites. [8] Further demonstrated that the service quality and efficiency of Chinese travel-related websites need improvement. Hence, to face the current challenge on fulfill Chinese online travelers' requirements both international band China-based hotel websites need to get deeper understanding on Chinese online users' perception.

China has large number of cities and provinces, based on its economic development and consumer purchasing power, [17] divided this country into seven regional markets: South, East, North, Central, Southwest, Northwest, and Northeast. [17] also stated that these regions presents very different in their economic development, such as South and East presents China's "growth markets" and "emerging market" is China's North region. To perceive the consumers' perception from China's fastest developed regions, this study selected two city provinces: Beijing and Shanghai, and one Guangdong province from the "growth market" region.

Although many published studies selected China as the targeting market [18, 19], there is no standardized checklist to measure the performance of a hotel website base on Chinese consumers' perceptions. Very few of published studies focused on establishing a website performance framework by

perceiving Chinese customers' perceptions and further comparing the differences among tourists from different regions of China.

This study makes an effort to develop a hotel website framework based on Chinese online customers' perceptions. It also further compares the perception differences among travelers from different regions in China. The following sections introduce research methodology, findings, and contributions.

TABLE I
DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

	Beijing	Shanghai	Guangdong	Others	Total
Gender(334)					
Male	47.9%	52.4%	54.8%	47.1%	171 (51.4%)
Female	52.1%	47.6%	45.2%	52.9%	162 (48.6%)
Age(334)					
18-24	12.7%	14.3%	26.1%	22.9%	62 (18.5%)
25-24	58.5%	82.5%	73.9%	68.6%	233 (69.6%)
35-44	14.4%	3.2%	0%	8.6%	23 (6.9%)
45-54	12.7%	0%	0%	0%	15 (4.5%)
54 and over	1.7%	0%	0%	0%	2 (0.6%)
Education (334)					
Completed secondary/high school	10.3%	1.6%	4.3%	8.6%	21 (6.3%)
Completed diploma/college/university degree	69.2%	66.7%	82.6%	77.1%	248 (74.3%)
Completed postgraduate degree	17.1%	30.2%	10.4%	11.4%	56 (16.8%)
Others	3.4%	1.6%	2.6%	2.9%	9 (2.7%)
Monthly Personal Income(334)					
RMB 500 or less	1.7%	1.6%	1.7%	2.9%	6 (1.8%)
RMB501-1000	0%	0%	3.5%	0%	4 (1.2%)
RMB 1001-1500	3.4%	1.6%	5.2%	2.9%	12 (3.6%)
RMB1501-2000	4.2%	3.2%	5.2%	8.6%	16 (4.8%)
RMB 2001-2500	13.6%	7.9%	3.5%	5.7%	27 (8.1%)
RMB 2501-3000	4.2%	0.0%	6.1%	2.9%	13 (3.9%)
RMB 3001-3500	10.2%	7.9%	4.3%	11.4%	26 (7.8%)
RMB 3501-4000	5.1%	3.2%	4.3%	5.7%	16 (4.8%)
RMB 4001-4500	18.5%	3.2%	4.3%	2.9%	19 (5.7%)
RMB 4501-5000	5.1%	6.3%	3.5%	5.7%	17 (5.1%)
RMB 5001-5500	9.3%)	3.2%	6.1%	8.6%	23 (6.9%)
RMB 5001-6000	2.5%)	7.9%	2.6%	8.6%	14 (4.2%)
RMB 6001-6500	3.4%)	3.2%	2.6%	0%	9 (2.7%)
RMB 6501-7000	1.7%	6.3%	2.6%	0%	9 (2.7%)
RMB 7501-8000	10.2%	11.1%	1.7%	5.7%	23 (6.9%)
RMB 8001 or above	14.4%	19.0%	23.5%	5.7%	69 (17.6%)
prefer not answer	2.5%	14.3%	19.1%	22.9%	42 (12.5%)
Online hours Per Week(334)					
less than 5 hours	12.1%	14.8%	14.8%	36.4%	39 (14.89%)
11 to 20 hours	23.3%	19.7%	19.7%	9.1%	53 (20.23%)
21 to 30 hours	33.6%	23%	23%	36.4%	78 (29.77%)
More than 30 hours	331.0%	42.6%	42.6%	18.2%	92 (35.11%)
Online Experience (334)					
less than 1 year	6.9%	3.2%	9.6%)	18.2%	28 (8.5%)
1-3 years	21.6%	7.9%	10.4%	9.1%	45 (13.6%)
More than 3 years	71.6%	88.9%	80.0%	72.7%	258 (77.9%)

Note: Significant at p<0.05*

III. METHODOLOGY

Reference [20] proposed a website usefulness framework which further categorized as website should comprised both design and content functions. The attributes of website usefulness were collected from the previous literature related to website content and structure [18, 21, 22]. A quantitative approach was employed to develop the hotel website framework for Chinese online users. The survey was conducted in Mainland China at 5-star hotels' entrance in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong. Choose 5-star hotel customers as

target respondents because they may have higher requirement compare with economic hotel visitors.

To ensure Chinese online users can understand the content of the questionnaire which was originally written in English and then translated into Chinese, translation was completed by a researcher who had postgraduate degree in Tourism Management field using a back-translation process.

The questionnaire starts with a screening question to separate online travelers from off-line travelers. It is followed by a list of website usefulness attributes, the respondents were asked to rate the importance (1= least important, 5 = most important) based on their online information searching experience. The respondents' demographic profiles were collected at the end. A total number of 335 questionnaires were successfully collected.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Respondents' Demographic Profile

Demographic result (Table I) showed that Chinese online travelers have a smaller percentage of female users and most respondents were aged from 25 to 34 years old. In terms of educational background, most respondents were Bachelor degree holders. The number of respondents was well distributed in income levels and weekly hours of using the Internet. Most of the Chinese online travelers have had used the Internet for more than three years.

The customer profile reflected differences in regions. Costumers from Beijing were well distributed in their income levels and have more respondents in age group of 18 to 24. The majority respondents from Guangdong and Shanghai have larger numbers of high income respondents. Additionally, Guangdong and Shanghai had a larger group of respondents who had more Internet use experience as compared to the respondent s from Beijing and other regions of China. The customer profile reflected differences in regions. Costumers from Beijing were well distributed in their income levels and have more respondents in age group of 18 to 24. The majority respondents from Guangdong and Shanghai have larger numbers of high income respondents. Additionally, Guangdong and Shanghai had a larger group of respondents who had more Internet use experience as compared to the respondent s from Beijing and other regions of China.

B. Factor Analysis

A hotel website usefulness framework is established by adopting an Exploratory Factor Analysis, and Table II displays the EFA output. To identify factors from selected website usefulness attributes, the perceived importance of 46 attributes were factor-analyzed using principal component analysis with orthogonal VARIMAX rotation. The results of the exploratory factor analysis explained 51.35% of the variance in the data and suggested a six-factor solution consisting of 32 website attributes with eigenvalues greater than 1.

Research findings suggest that the website usefulness framework includes six factors "Reservation Information", "Basic content", "Transportation information", "User-friendliness", "Language" and "Layout and appearance". These factors were drawn on the basis of 334 Chinese online travelers' perception. The Alpha coefficients of the six factors were 0.876, 0.781, 0.777, 0.703, 0.726 and 0.710. They are above the minimum value of 0.50 which are considered acceptable for basic research.

Table III showed the perception of respondents on the usefulness factors and their perception difference among different regions. Respondents generally viewed the usefulness factors as important. The perceived importance of hotel website usefulness factors ranged from 3.58 to 4.18. "Reservation Information" was perceived as the most important factor. The factors "Transportation information" (3.58) and "User-friendly" (3.58) were received as the least important factors.

TABLE II
FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS WITH ROTATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF HOTEL WEBSITE USEFULNESS PERCEIVED FROM MAINLAND CHINESE ONLINE CONSUMERS

Factors[1]	Factor loading	EV[2]	Pct of variance[3]	Communalities
Reservation Information (N=7)(α = 0.710)		7.06	12.28%	
1.Online reservation system	0.603			0.391
2.Price ranges of different products/services	0.635			0.424
3.Room rate	0.485			0.360
4.Check in and checkout time	0.519			0.354
5.Payment options	0.484			0.384
6.Security payment systems	0.668			0.474
7.View or cancel reservations	0.619			0.468
Basic content (N=8)(α = 0.726)		2.75	8.92%	
1.Promotion of products (e.g. Special offers)	0.472			0.358
2.Restaurants in hotel	0.636			0.445
3.Hotel facilities	0.616			0.474
4.Guest room facilities	0.565			0.416
5.Hotel descriptions	0.639			0.447
6.Online forum	0.419			0.294
7.Information credibility	0.421			0.370
8.Download/print function (e.g. virtual tour or text)	0.464			0.367
Transportation information (N=3) (α = 0.703)		1.95	8.70%	
1.Transportation	0.785			0.657
2.Airport information	0.821			0.712
3.Weather report	0.665			0.487
User-friendliness (N=5) (α = 0.777)		1.7	8.29%	
1.Website learnability (easy to learn how to use the website)	0.638			0.517
2.Download speed of website items (e.g. Web pages, multimedia)	0.728			0.617
3.Internal link that does not work	0.688			0.509
4.Opening new browser windows	0.760			0.646
5.Scrolling front pages	0.530			0.448
Language (N=3) (α = 0.781)		1.55	6.60%	
1.Spelling and Grammatical errors	0.694			0.639
2.Headings that make no sense out of context	0.764			0.699
3.Internet Jargon/popular buzzwords	0.790			0.687
Layout and appearance (N=3) (α = 0.876)		1.41	6.56%	
1.Overall visual appearance of interface (e.g. looks professional,)	0.760			0.653
2.Web page design uses aesthetic / artistic theory	0.706			0.615
3.Sign or Logo of website is unique	0.752			0.619
4.Clarity of text colors	0.779			0.672
5.Font size of text	0.754			0.653
6.Website has its own characteristics	0.727			0.571

132 website attributes captured in three factors
2EV: Eigenvalue
351.35% of cumulative variance explained
4α=Cronbach's alph

The most important attributes are in reservation information factor. Attributes "Transportation", "Airport information", "Weather report", "Guest room facilities", "Hotel descriptions", "Download/print function (e.g. virtual tour or text)" and "Promotion of products (e.g. Special offers)" are relatively more important compare with other attributes.

Respondents from different regions of Chinese displayed significant perception difference on the importance of factor "User-friendly". Respondents from Guangdong province gave this factor the highest score of 3.77, and people from Shanghai gave the lowest score to this factor with a value of 3.40. Respondents showed significant different perceptions on attributes "Internal link that does not work", "Online forum" and "Room rate". Compare with respondents from other regions Beijing residents rate these attributes as important. On the other hand Shanghai respondents perceive relatively lower importance to these attributes. They rate "Internal link that does not work" as the lowest score among all the usefulness attributes.

V. IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has established a hotel website framework which concludes the basic content that is required by Chinese online travelers. The preference of Chinese customers was concluded and the differences among different regions were also compared.

A. Theoretical Contribution

The new established framework is perceived base on Chinese users' perception, which includes six basic factors with thirty-three related attributes. This framework can be

TABLE III
PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF WEBSITE USEFULNESS FACTORS

Website Usefulness Factors	Beijing			Guangdong			Shanghai			Other regions			F	Sig.	Overall Mean
	N	Mean	S.t.d.	N	Mean	S.t.d.	N	Mean	S.t.d.	N	Mean	S.t.d.			
1. Reservation Information	118	4.24	0.65	115	4.2	0.58	63	4.25	0.49	35	4.03	0.66	1.06	0.38	4.18
1.Online reservation system	118	4.33	1.00	115	4.10	1.19	63	4.44	0.71	35	3.89	1.25	2.35	0.05	4.23
2.Price ranges of different products/services	118	4.26	0.86	115	4.22	0.97	63	4.29	0.66	35	4.31	0.80	0.21	0.93	4.25
3.Room rate	118	4.68	0.61	115	4.72	0.57	63	4.59	0.56	35	4.57	0.70	2.98	0.02*	4.65
4.Check in and checkout time	118	4.16	0.86	115	3.97	1.01	63	4.08	0.81	35	3.94	0.84	0.79	0.53	4.06
5.Payment options	118	4.02	1.12	115	4.21	0.91	63	3.98	0.79	35	3.89	1.18	1.36	0.25	4.06
6.Security payment systems	118	4.44	1.00	115	4.59	0.90	63	4.51	0.82	35	4.17	0.95	2.42	0.05	4.47
7.View or cancel reservations	118	4.25	0.91	115	4.19	1.00	63	4.22	0.89	35	4.00	0.91	0.61	0.65	4.20
2. Basic content	118	3.69	0.57	115	3.66	0.55	63	3.67	0.56	35	3.66	0.63	0.33	0.86	3.67
1.Promotion of products (e.g. Special offers)	118	3.44	1.08	115	3.10	1.07	63	3.38	0.87	35	3.46	1.15	2.09	0.08	4.20
2.Restaurants in hotel	118	3.22	1.02	115	3.23	1.05	63	3.41	0.99	35	3.23	0.94	0.98	0.42	3.32
3.Hotel facilities	118	4.05	0.81	115	4.04	0.86	63	4.02	0.75	35	3.91	0.98	0.30	0.88	3.25
4.Guest room facilities	118	4.00	0.88	115	4.12	0.83	63	4.03	0.76	35	3.91	1.12	0.61	0.65	4.02
5.Hotel descriptions	118	3.75	1.00	115	3.84	0.89	63	3.73	0.83	35	3.71	0.93	0.33	0.86	4.04
6.Online forum	118	3.40	0.93	115	3.22	1.01	63	3.10	0.87	35	3.57	1.01	2.05	0.09*	3.77
7. Information credibility	118	4.19	0.91	115	4.22	0.99	63	4.17	0.85	35	3.97	0.98	0.99	0.41	3.29
8.Download/print function (e.g. virtual tour or text)	118	3.47	1.02	115	3.51	1.04	63	3.56	0.80	35	3.51	0.98	0.16	0.96	4.16
3. Transportation information	118	3.64	0.67	115	3.77	0.58	63	3.40	0.68	35	3.50	0.42	1.14	0.34	3.50
1.Transportation	118	4.48	0.61	115	4.59	0.61	63	4.49	0.69	35	4.63	0.49	0.74	0.57	4.54
2.Airport information	118	4.34	0.78	115	4.51	0.71	63	4.19	0.86	35	4.29	0.57	2.14	0.08	4.36
3.Weather report	118	4.12	0.93	115	4.22	0.92	63	4.10	0.89	35	4.17	0.75	0.29	0.89	4.15
4. User-friendly	118	3.64	0.71	115	3.77	0.71	63	3.40	0.69	35	3.50	0.82	3.10	0.02*	3.58
1. Website learnability (easy to learn how to use the website)	118	3.98	0.87	115	3.94	1.02	63	3.79	0.99	35	3.86	0.91	0.94	0.44	3.91
2. Download speed of website items (e.g. Web pages, multimedia)	118	3.87	0.90	115	3.97	0.98	63	3.71	1.01	35	3.71	0.96	0.95	0.44	3.86
3. Internal link that does not work	118	3.36	1.04	115	3.67	0.94	63	2.94	1.16	35	3.20	1.23	5.79	0.00*	3.36
4. Opening new browser windows	118	3.48	0.98	115	3.63	1.06	63	3.29	0.89	35	3.46	1.22	1.20	0.31	3.49
5. Scrolling front pages	118	3.47	0.95	115	3.67	0.93	63	3.27	1.03	35	3.29	1.23	2.36	0.05	3.49

Website usefulness factors	Beijing			Guangdong			Shanghai			Other regions			F	Sig.	Overall Mean
	N	Mean	S.t.d.	N	Mean	S.t.d.	N	Mean	S.t.d.	N	Mean	S.t.d.			
5. Language	118	3.71	0.82	115	3.82	0.93	63	3.54	0.94	35	3.61	0.97	1.15	0.33	3.67
1.Spelling and Grammatical errors	118	3.78	0.97	115	3.93	0.98	63	3.60	1.14	35	3.63	1.11	1.55	0.19	3.78
2.Headings that make no sense out of context	118	3.85	1.00	115	4.06	1.20	63	3.75	1.11	35	3.74	1.29	1.13	0.34	3.89

3.Internet Jargon/popular buzzwords	118	3.53	0.98	115	3.47	1.22	63	3.29	1.10	35	3.49	1.04	0.68	0.61	3.45
6. Layout and appearance	**118**	**3.74**	**0.68**	**115**	**3.87**	**0.80**	**63**	**3.74**	**0.76**	**35**	**3.97**	**0.79**	**1.74**	**1.40**	**3.83**
1. Overall visual appearance of interface (e.g. looks professional,)	118	3.92	0.82	115	4.11	0.93	63	3.92	1.00	35	4.11	1.02	1.60	0.17	4.00
2. Web page design uses aesthetic / artistic theory	118	3.52	0.83	115	3.75	0.97	63	3.56	0.98	35	3.66	1.06	1.14	0.34	3.61
3. Sign or Logo of website is unique	118	3.47	0.94	115	3.71	1.07	63	3.65	0.99	35	3.80	1.05	1.62	0.17	3.61
4. Clarity of text colors	118	4.00	0.90	115	4.02	1.04	63	3.90	0.96	35	4.17	0.89	1.04	0.39	4.00
5. Font size of text	118	3.90	0.83	115	3.81	0.94	63	3.79	1.02	35	4.00	0.77	0.89	0.47	3.85
23. Website has its own characteristics	118	3.66	1.04	115	3.87	1.07	63	3.67	0.88	35	4.11	0.90	2.40	0.05	3.77

Note:* Significant at p<0.05

adopted by future studies on evaluating China-based hotel websites or the Chinese version of international hotel websites.

The research findings discovered differences among respondents from different regions. It further proved that respondents from different region of China own different perceptions on using hotel websites. It ring a bell to the future study investigates China online market may need to consider difference among respondents from different regions.

B. Piratical Contribution

The research finding found that "Reservation Information" was perceived the highest importance from Chinese respondents. It reveals that more Chinese online users begin to use hotel websites as one of their booking channels, and the hoteliers may thus consider providing a Chinese version on their reservation page. Transportation information and User-friendliness were perceived lowest importance from respondents. As the demographic data showed, 77.9% of Chinese respondents were experienced online users with more than three years Internet using experience, implying they are familiar with website content and will not pay much attention on how to explore on one website. Hence, to better serve Chinese users, hoteliers may consider providing more information on their front page but with a simple layout and a Chinese version in their website seems important.

Respondents from different regions showed significant difference perceptions in the "User-friendliness" factor. It may be caused by the less online using experience people may have higher requirement on a website's ease-of-use. It strongly hints to both China and international hoteliers that most of the Chinese online users may not have much Internet using experience as compared to the respondents from Shanghai and Guangdong. Therefore, a simple and easy-to-use website is still needed for serving people from other regions of China.

Despite its useful findings, this study is limited by the scope of its sample size, the findings cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, the findings provide a new direction relating to Chinese consumers' requirements for hotel websites. To further understand Chinese online consumers, future studies may consider collecting larger sample size and adopt structure equation model to determine the internal relationship between consumer online satisfaction and their regions.

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