RESEARCH ARTICLE

Generation X and Boutique Hotels: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Boutique hotels emerged in the late 1970s and since then the product has become more mainstream. The draw of boutique hotels is more personalized services. When marketing and providing services to a niche marketit is smart to be able to differentiate potential guests to best meet their needs. Thegenerational cohort theory states that a population may be divided into segments based on their generation. This research focuses on Generation X to find out what they are seeking in a boutique hotel product. Based upon how they chose their travel destination there were significant differences between culinary experience, attractions/activities, and cost/budget.

KeyWords: Boutique Hotels, Generation X, Culinary Traveler, Marketing.

1. Introduction

Boutique hotels offer a unique lodging experience. They are typically smaller, with fewer than 100 rooms. They offer a more intimate experience than larger hotels, with personalized service and attention to detail. - Boutique hotels are apt to have a distinct theme that sets them apart from other hotels. This could be a focus on history, culinary experiences, or a specific design.

The theme may be evident in the hotel's decor, amenities, and even staff uniforms. Boutique hotels are known for their stylish design and attention to detail. Everything from the hotel website to the amenities is carefully curated to align with the hotel's brand ethos. –Boutique staff's emphasis is on personalized service with a goal to offer exceptional guest experiences. (Agget2007; Hollander2022).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Boutique Hotels

While there is no universally accepted definition of the term "boutique hotel," it is generally understood to represent a unique, one-of-a-kind hospitality experience that places a high value on personalized attention, exceptional service, and distinctive design (Countryman and Jang 2006; McIntosh andSiggs 2005). A recurring theme that appears in the research on boutique hotels is the importance of delivering a memorable and immersive experience to guests (Lea 2002; McIntosh andSiggs2005; Van Hartesvelt 2006).

McIntosh and Siggsfound that boutique hotels don't necessarily have to be luxurious or expensive(2005). Many are affordable and prioritize personalized service over extravagant decor or luxurious amenities. They identified five key dimensions that distinguish boutique hotels from other offerings, including a unique character, personalized touch, homely feel, high-quality standards, and value-added location and cultural experiences provided by the hosts.

Essentially,boutiquehotelsareatypeofaccommodation that offers a unique setting and personalized service that caters to the lifestyle of their customers, often furnished in a particular theme. Boutique hotels originated in North America and the United Kingdom with an emphasis on unique environments (Olga2009).

The concept of boutique hotels emerged in the late 1970s to cater to travelers that wanted to get away from the standardized experience provided by large hotel chains. Today there is a market of travelers with mid to upper income levels seeking unique, personalized hospitality experiences (Aggett 2007; Rogerson 2010; Sarheim 2010).

The intimacy of these hotels is a key feature that sets them apart (Henderson 2011; Friedman 2014). Guests are seeking a more memorable stay than they would get from a standardized hotel(Phillips 2004; Loureiro and Kastenholz2011; Zaman et al. 2016).

2.2 Generational Cohort Theory

Generational Cohort Theorystates that a population may be divided into segments based on their generation. This theory finds that the same generation shares common social and political events as well as social, political, and economic factors that shape their values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. These factors create a distinctive generational identity that remains constant over time (Arli and Pekerti2016;Ingelhart 1977; Strauss and Howe 1997).

This concept describes how individuals who are born during the same time or generation share related experiences of some major external events during their late adolescent and early adulthood years(Meredith and Schewe 1994; Ryder 1965).These events can shape beliefs and behaviors and may lead to shared values and attitudes within a cohort. These can differ from those of other generations and impact their lifestyles and choices (Strauss and Howe 1991; Rogler 2002).

2.3 Generation X

Generation X is defined as consumers born between 1965 and 1976 (Alch 2000; Norum 2003; Phillips 2005). This generations' upbringing was marked by early technological advancements, significant social and political changes, and minimal adult supervision. Gen Xers tend to be highly independent and flexible, with parents often working long hours.

They value work-life balance, operating under a "work hard, play hard" mindset. Some of the common values for Gen Xers include self-sufficiency, independence, flexible work arrangements, informality, and technological creativity. (Odukoya 2022). This cohort has a desire for pleasure that stems from their experience growing up during times of financial instability. This is likely due to a lack of access to material goods during childhood and adolescence (Lyons et al. 2007; Schewe and Noble 2000).

2.4 Destination Selection

Researchers have found that tourism growth might be related to how service providers understand the social and demographic trends that influence a traveler's preference (Horneman et al. 2002).

Generational theory studies show there is a correlation between a generation and their travel preference (Huang and Lu 2017).Studies of generational theory show a correlation between generation identity and travel preference.Responding to traveler age can help the tourism industry provide a more satisfying and appropriate travel experience for different market segments. (Cohen et al. 2014)

This can be addressed by interpreting the factors that influence tourist behavior, more effective marketing strategies, maintainable destination management, and the improvement of tourism products and services that match tourist expectations and needs(Octaviany and Mardiyana 2024).

3. Methodology

3.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the attraction of boutique hotels to Generation X and help boutique hoteliers to better serve and attract this consumer. By narrowing the segment, the boutique hotelier will be better able to create a product and experience that they are better able to create a marketable product and experience. This research hopes to produce patterns that will assist in creating a more personalized and sought-after product.

The sample included 269 participants who were recruited using Qualtrics online survey platform. The survey included a qualifying question that the participants were familiar with boutique hotels and were in the Generation X age range.

3.2 Data Analysis

To narrow the focus of the research the sample was asked:"I tend to choose a travel destination primarily based on Cost/Budget, Attractions/ Activities, and Culinary Experiences: Food and Beverage Offerings".

Thirty-six percent of the sample chose Cost/Budget, 39% chose Attractions/Activities and 25% chose Culinary Experiences: Food and Beverage offerings. Discriminant analysis was utilized to determine if there were significant differences between the three groups. The Box's M test was 1608.472 with a significance of <.001 indicating statistically significant differences between the groups.

3.3 Research Findings

The findings were separated into four tables based on the degree of significance based on the differences between the three groups. It is clear patterns were found differentiating the three groups. Just by looking at the means the standout group are the respondents attracted primarily to a destination based on culinary experiences. They are more in agreement with what makes boutique hotels unique and specific information that may be helpful to boutique hoteliers.

The first table shows the most significant differences between the three groups. People seeking culinary experiences are more likely to prefer staying at branded hotels. They believe that boutique hotels are more luxurious than average-priced hotels and are interested in more tech-friendly options like the use of phones to operate the television, lights, and temperature in their room. They appreciate hotels that support a community and enjoy planned activities like mixology classes, wine tastings, and beer tastings.

Table 1. *The first table shows the most significant differences between the three groups*

	Attractions	Cost/Budget	Culinary Experience	Sig.
I prefer to stay at branded hotels when you travel.	3.62	3.79	4.50	<.001
I think boutique hotels are more luxurious than an average mid-priced hotel.	3.84	4.08	4.60	<.001
I would like to use my phone to operate the television, lights, and temperature in a hotel room.	2.93	3.16	4.30	<.001
I would be more likely to stay at a hotel that supports a community (donates food to people in need, gives money to local schools)	3.77	3.97	4.70	<.001
I enjoy planned activities like mixology classes, wine tastings, beer tastings.	3.18	3.48	4.55	<.001

Strongly Agree=5 Strongly Disagree=1

The second table also shows significant relationships between the groups. The culinary experience group prefers a hotel with a restaurant on the property and would like to frequent local businesses instead of chains. They would enjoy access to retro games and consider themselves foodies. They want to stay in a hotel that reflects the local culture and seek authentic experiences when they travel.

Table 2. *The second table also shows significant relationships between the groups*

	Attractions	Cost/Budget	Culinary Experience	
I prefer a hotel to have a restaurant on property.	4.03	4.16	4.80	.002
I prefer local businesses instead of chains when I travel.	3.71	3.85	4.50	.002
I would enjoy a hotel that has "retro" games in the lobby (Clue, Hungry Hippo, Connect Four)	3.37	3.73	4.25	.004
I consider myself a "foodie".	3.81	3.73	4.65	.004
I like it when hotels are tailored to their location (mold their decor to the community which they operate)	4.04	4.24	4.70	.005
I am interested in authentic experiences when I travel.	4.18	4.12	4.75	.006

Strongly Agree=5 Strongly Disagree=1

The third table shows more significant relationships between groups. The culinary group prefers digital check-in and seeks a well-maintained property. They appreciate a hotel with a distinct personality that has green practices as well as a refillable water bottle in the room. Another tech-friendly amenity was brought up in the form of a Smart TV in the room.

Table 3. *The third table shows more significant relationships between groups*

	Attractions	Cost/Budget	Culinary Experience	
I prefer to use a digital check in option in order to by pass the front desk.	3.81	3.83	4.50	.012
I notice if a hotel is older (worn carpet, chipped paint) and it will affect my decision on whether to return.	3.86	4.20	4.55	.014
I want to see signs of cleanliness in hotels (staff actively cleaning in public areas, empty trash cans)	4.34	4.71	4.75	.017

I prefer to stay at a hotel that has green practices (recycling containers in rooms, reusing towels, electric vehicle charging stations)	3.54	3.79	4.25	.020
I prefer a hotel with a distinct personality.	4.12	4.06	4.60	.032
I prefer a Smart TV in my hotel room with easy access to my streaming accounts (Netflix, Hulu, etc).	3.98	4.18	4.60	.045
I would prefer a complimentary refillable water bottle than bottled water in my hotel room.	3.53	3.83	4.20	.045

Strongly Agree=5 Strongly Disagree=1

The fourth table shows the least amount of significant differences between the three groups. The culinary experience group is more likely to prefer refillable amenities and feel that boutique hotels offer a more exclusive experience. They prefer a text alternative in connecting with guest services. They are more likely to stay at a hotel where the employees are treated well by the company. They are more interested in hotels that offer unique amenities than hotels that are smaller and offer more personalized service.

Table 4. *The fourth table shows the least amount of significant differences between the three groups*

	Attractions	Cost/Budget	Culinary Experience	
I prefer refillable shampoo, conditioner, and soap containers instead of individual items in my hotel room.	3.22	3.51	3.95	.058
I feel boutique hotels offer a more exclusive experience.	4.16	4.12	4.60	.064
If I need to contact guest service I would rather text instead of calling a guest service representative.	3.19	3.36	3.90	.087
I would be more likely to stay at a hotel where I know the employees are treated well (scholarship programs, family leave, and health insurance provided for employees).	4.19	4.32	4.45	.403
I would enjoy a hotel that had unique amenities in the room (pop rocks, cracker jacks, ring pops)	3.75	3.83	4.10	.479
I would stay a smaller hotel in order to get more personalized service.	3.83	4.02	4.05	.540

Strongly Agree=5 Strongly Disagree=1

4. Discussion

Interesting to note that although the group seeking culinary experiences is more in agreement with all questions about boutique hotels and their offerings the overall sample is at least neutral in their overall responses. Most brands have boutique offerings such as Marriotts' autograph collection, Hilton's curio collection, Starwood's mastercraft collection and Wyndham's esplendor collection.

The fact that the culinary group is seeking branded hotels is great news for these brands seeing they have a group of Generation Xers they can focus upon. They are not necessarily attracted to independent hotel chains but could be drawn to the convenience and security of staying at a brand.

They expected a more luxurious experience than a mid-priced hotel, so hoteliers need to keep this in mind with their design and offerings. Although this generation did not grow up with technology, they now appreciate such conveniences as operating different devices with their phone. This group is more philanthropic-minded, so the hotel needs to participate and make known their activity within these programs.

The draw of beverage classes is a win-win. It is a more personalized option that can be offered at a hotel and can be a very profitable amenity. It is a great benefit to have guests stay on property while having them pay the prices with the largest profit margin of alcohol.

Another way to draw this market to the hotel is by promoting their restaurant. Again, a benefit financially for hoteliers is to keep as much as guest's spending on property as possible.

Although this group favors brand hotels they are more interested in local businesses instead of chains and are seeking an authentic experience when they travel. A smart plan would be to maintain relationships with local businesses so guest services will be able to provide recommendations for a variety of offerings including authentic experiences.

All groups are mostly neutral on refillable amenities which is good news because it was a bit controversial when the change was implemented. They feel that boutique hotels are more exclusive which means that the hotel needs to be presented as such in both marketing material and the product. The groups are neutral in text instead of calling guest services.

This could imply that both options should be readily available. They state they would be more likely to stay at hotel where I know the employees are treated well. The hotel should include this in its marketing material. Marketing is not just selling the product it is promoting the experience.

If guests know that the employees are respected, they will feel better giving their money to the hotel. Some boutique hotels have included some novelty items as amenities. All groups tend to be neutral or agree to this offering so it may be interesting to test this in guest rooms and find out if it suits their property.

Personalized service is important across all groups, and they would stay at a smaller hotel to receive it. There is a market of people that are not looking for a mega-resort and boutique hotels should make certain that their personalized services exceed their guest expectations.

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