

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BUSINESS TRAVEL: IMPLICATIONS FOR HOTEL AND DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Abstract

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Purpose – The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of gender differences on the evaluation of hotels and destination attributes with regard to business travel.

Methodology/Design/Approach – This research employs a cross-sectional questionnaire survey and a sample of 318 business travellers. The analysis methods used are descriptive, such as a t-test, frequency distribution, cross tabulation and a chi-square analysis.

Findings – The findings reveal significant differences when evaluating the attributes of hotels and destinations. Certain hotel attributes are rated at a significantly higher level by women than by men. Female respondents attained higher mean scores for all the destination attributes. Previous studies have attained very little knowledge in terms of understanding how gender works as regards differentiating business travellers' behaviour.

Originality of the research – The results support the hypothesis that gender influences the evaluation of hotel services and destinations. These findings may have significant implications for service innovation and positioning strategies in the business travel industry.

Keywords gender differences, business travel, hotels, destination, tourist behaviour.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the major growing trends in the travel and tourism industry is currently that of women travelling alone and independently. Despite the fact that women's participation in tourism is now similar to that of men, the contemporary tourism space continues to be criticised for being highly masculinised and for favouring men's travel experiences (Yang et al., 2017).

The growing number of female business travellers has also led to an increase in research on this population, which has not only resulted in a clear profiling of the segment, but has also highlighted their motivations, preferences and expectations (Gomes & Montenegro, 2016).

The study of gender provides essential knowledge regarding the comprehension of tourist behaviour, such as motivations, participation in activities, satisfaction, attitudes and behaviour (Ngwira et al., 2020).

Several studies have found that gender is a genuine variable that is sufficiently strong to be considered a driver of market segmentation and successful marketing strategies because it is easy to identify and access, and is sufficiently substantial to be profitable (Juwaheer, 2011; Kwok et al., 2016; Mokhlis, 2012).

There is a clear need to consider gender differences in tourism studies and tourism marketing research in order to develop marketing strategies that could specifically address those differences (Hao & Har, 2014; Smith & Carmichael, 2007).

Although some studies have examined the role played by gender and generation in tourist behaviour (Beauregard, 2012; Jin et al., 2013; Karatepe, 2011; Suki, 2014), very limited knowledge with which to understand how gender and generation function in differentiating tourist behaviour has been attained. Gender and generational differentials in tourist behaviour have, therefore, been overlooked in tourism studies (Carr, 1999; Han et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2016).

Moreover, although scholars tend to agree that men and women rate differently as regards personality traits such as sensation-seeking, which are associated with adventure tourism activities and risk-taking, there is conflicting evidence regarding the manifestations of these effects in actual tourist behaviour and choices (Kim & Seo, 2019).

The area of sports and adventure activities is often viewed as a masculine domain, and research indicates that women may experience a variety of constraints when participating in these "masculine cultures", although these constraints can be both supportive and restrictive (Fendt & Wilson, 2012).

In summary, previous studies support the theory that men and woman differ in many respects. Tourists of different genders have different interests when travelling. Women consider travel to be a process of relaxation, and an important means of enjoying life and broadening their horizons. Men are conversely more interested in attractions and increasing friendships (Wang & Hao, 2018).

Various authors have extensively analysed the specific segment of female business travellers (Alamdari & Burrell, 2000; Brownell, 2011; Foster & Botterill, 1995; Juwaheer, 2011; Newth, 2009; Smith & Carmichael, 2007). The results of these studies indicate that the female travel market is heterogeneous, and that segmentation makes it possible to identify unique characteristics, attitudes and behaviour (Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2015). These differences are particularly relevant for the hotel industry, which is managed with objectives such as guest comfort, satisfaction and safety.

Tour operators and destination marketing organisations are consequently aware of the importance of the segment comprising the solo female traveller, and have consequently started to design tourism products that meet their needs and preferences (Yang & Tung, 2018).

By comprehending how women travellers rate the attributes of hotels and destinations, it may be possible to discover how these attributes can be customised and communicated in order to make these places more competitive within the market. We shall attempt to achieve the aforementioned objective by exploring the influence that gender differences have on the process of evaluating the quality of hotels and attributes of destination in the business travel segment.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Hotel attributes and gender

Business travellers stay at hotels in order to rest, recuperate, and prepare for the next working day or the next destination. Because a business trip can frequently be an exhausting journey, it is important for business travellers to be provided with comfortable accommodation and welcoming hospitality while they are away from home (Chen et al., 2018).

A central topic when researching hotel services is that of examining which specific attributes are considered most relevant and how the importance of certain attributes varies in different groups (Kim et al., 2018). According to Kwok et al. (2016), it is possible to state that women place more importance on quality because they consider and evaluate every single feature of the products and/or services they purchase in detail, while male customers evaluate the general dimensions.

Some previous studies have suggested that a person's gender affects their perception of service quality owing to factors such as socialisation, decoding ability, differences in information processing, traits, the importance placed on core or peripheral services, or the way in which the different dimensions of service quality are evaluated (Dittmar et al., 2004; Mattila et al., 2003; Mokhlis, 2012; Snipes et al., 2006). According to Buda et al. (2006), gender and education have statistically significant effects on service quality dimensions, especially those related to tangibility and assurance.

Men have been found to focus more on outcomes than do women, since they value efficiency more than personal interactions during service encounters (Mattila et al., 2003). Some researchers (Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1993; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001) have, therefore, found that female customers place more emphasis on relational service quality (the interaction with employees) than core service quality (a tangible dimension). When compared to males, female customers have been found to be specifically more influenced by relational information (e.g. the way in which they were treated by employees) than by cues regarding service efficiency and accuracy (Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1993). Men are, however, expected to give more priority to the core service (Yavas et al., 2015).

Literature shows that males grow up developing instrumental and task goal-oriented traits, while females are more likely to develop traits that are socially oriented and see themselves as connected to others (Sharma et al., 2012). In the context of service evaluation, it is consequently likely that females will be expected to be more influenced by interactions with sales staff and service employees. Males will conversely tend to focus more on comfort and utilitarian values, which are considered in terms of time, money and effort (Danaher, 1998; Sharma et al., 2012). Moreover, in the context of hospitality, Suki (2014) found that men and women respond to aspects of hotel services in a different manner when judging their satisfaction with them. Babakus et al. (2005) similarly examine gender effects as regards tourists' evaluations of the relational and core dimensions of hotel services. The findings of this study suggest that female guests place significantly more emphasis on both core and relational service experience dimensions than do their male counterparts, and that the difference is more outstanding in the case of the relational service experience dimension.

In a study of Mexican hotels, Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2010) observed that the dimension of functional service quality was greater for male guests, while the quality of relational service had a greater predictive power for female guests. A similar result was found by Sun and Qu (2011), who demonstrated that for women, relational service quality has a stronger total influence on word-of-mouth recommendations than does the core service. The results obtained for the male group, meanwhile, showed that core service quality has a stronger total effect on word of mouth recommendations than on relational service quality.

Marzuki et al. (2012) conducted a study focused on women travellers in Peggang (Malaysia) and found that they prefer staying at hotels that provide quality services and attributes and where the guests' comfort and safety are of top priority. The most relevant criteria in hotel selection were "Cleanliness of hotel", "Friendly services of hotel staff", along with "Bathrobes and towels in bathroom", "In room temperature control", "security personnel on 24 hour duty", "well-maintained furnishing", "front desk on 24 hour duty", "individual room sprinkler systems" and "individual room smoke detectors".

Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2015) segmented a sample of 540 females participating in girlfriend getaways (GGA). They prescribed that hotel and destination marketers should emphasize not only the safety and security attributes of the hotel, but also the quality of the amenities, such as room size, the availability of personalised products and personalised attention to service delivery.

With regard to the tangible attributes of the service, Kwok et al. (2016) demonstrated that women appear to be more focused on tangible cues when compared to men. Female tourists tend to seek modern equipment and attractive facilities when travelling. Finally, Li and Wei (2021) examine the effect of the hotel servicescape on customer citizenship behaviour, and found that males are more responsive to the physical cues of hotels than are females. Our first hypothesis is, therefore, the following:

H1. The tourist's gender significantly influences the evaluation of hotel service attributes.

1.2. Destination attributes and gender

The decision to choose a destination consists of selecting a specific place and carrying out the various actions that this selection entails (Lin et al., 2014). In the case of business tourism, the companies that organise the business trip for business purposes usually arrange the destinations. Under these circumstances, the woman or man travelling on business has not been able to decide on the destination, as the organising company has imposed it on them.

Overall, there is some evidence in tourism and marketing literature to suggest that both gender and generation could function to explain differences in tourists' behaviour, including their perceptions of destination image (e.g. Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Kim et al., 2007; Li et al., 2013). Moreover, gender effects are relevant when deciding individuals' expectations of a destination (Wang et al., 2016).

With regard to this research topic, Juwaheer (2011) noted that gender differences also constitute a "differential potential", which is considered sufficient to explain whether a destination specifically draws attention to the characteristics that respectively attract male and female visitors. However, other studies, such as those of Lin et al. (2014) and Li and Yang (2015), have found that there are no gender differences as regards justifying destination decisions.

Gender differences in tourism behaviour have been found to be related to those factors that influence destination choice, since women pay closer attention to the issues of security, reliability and social benefits than do men (Rosmann, 2006; White & Yu, 2003).

Many destination image formation and selection models have considered the variable of gender as a significant consumer characteristic that affects the perception of a destination (Wang et al., 2016).

Beerli and Martín (2004) found a significant, although moderate, relationship between gender and the cognitive and affective components of destination image. Female tourists rated natural/cultural resources and general/tourist leisure infrastructure in the cognitive domain of the destination, along with the affective image, at a significantly higher level than did men.

When making decisions regarding destinations, people normally base their selection on both positive and negative past experiences in an attempt to ensure that any problems that occurred in the past are not repeated. In the case of having to choose between two destinations, individuals opt for that which generates the least conflict. The gender difference in this respect is because women may change their minds more frequently than men, in addition to the fact that the former have a greater degree of loyalty to any element that worked well for them on previous trips (Lin et al., 2014).

In this respect, Huang and Van der Veen (2019) stated that it is relevant to examine whether gender and generation might moderate the extent to which the perceived image of the destination affects a tourist's attitude and, therefore, intention to visit a particular place. Risk perception is higher for women than it is for men, and depends on the nature of the risks and the characteristics of the destination (Carballo et al., 2022). Furthermore, and regarding the risk associated with a destination, women tend to seek places that offer cultural activities, and bear in mind whether it is a place with a family atmosphere and has prestige. However, men consider other issues, such as the option of playing sports and the existence of places where they can relax and enjoy their trip (Omar et al., 2015). In other words, it could be said that men are much less risk-averse than are women. Furthermore, other studies have found that women are more attracted to a socialised environment (Gibson & Yiannakis, 2002; Newth, 2009).

Another previous study by Meng and Uysal (2008) demonstrated that female respondents placed significantly more relevance on 'Natural Settings' and 'Recreational Activities' than did the males. On the contrary, male respondents rated 'Resort and Related Activities' as being more important than did the females surveyed. Oliveira and Pereira (2008), who analysed the destination image of the island of Madeira, obtained similar findings. They discovered that males value different aspects (landscape, flora, gastronomy, cultural/heritage, fauna, natural and ecological parks, birdwatching) as being of significantly less importance than do their female counterparts, and value golf facilities more.

The literature reviewed above was employed as a basis on which to posit the following hypothesis:

H2. The tourist's gender significantly influences the perception of destination attributes.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Questionnaire design and data collection

The respondents were asked to refer to their last business trip at a hotel, after which we analysed their evaluations of the different characteristics of hotels and attributes of destinations. The survey instrument consisted of various sections. The first section measured several demographic and professional characteristics (e.g. age, gender, professional category, business sector) and trip characteristics (e.g., main purpose of visit, number of nights stayed and business trip organisation). In a second section, the participants were asked to indicate the performance level of 17 hotel attributes. The list was measured on a performance scale ranging from 1 (Very Bad) to 7 (Very Good). In this section, the participants were asked to indicate which specific services and facilities they used during their stays at hotels. These questions were coded in a dichotomous manner (Yes or No). In the third section, the participants used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very bad) to 7 (Very Good) to evaluate the performance level of nine destination attributes. The last section measured several questions related to intention to return to the destination and word of mouth recommendations.

The sample was obtained by requesting different lists of national companies from Spanish business data bases. Information was gathered using a personal interview method, and the companies were contacted by e-mail. The survey was administrated to a sample of 318 business travellers in different Spanish companies and collected in February 2023. The respondents were interviewed face-to-face at their companies. The researchers travelled to each of the companies located throughout Spain, obtaining information from companies located in the north (Cantabria and the Basque Country), east (Alicante, Valencia and Barcelona), centre (Madrid, Castilla-La Mancha) and south (Cadiz, Seville and Malaga). Each researcher recorded the interviewees' responses by hand on the questionnaire designed, and the anonymity of those who responded was maintained at all times. A convenience sampling technique was adopted. The hotels evaluated include both national and international hotel chains, along with independent hotels.

2.2. Characteristics of sample

Of the 318 respondents, the largest group comprised department heads (27.7%), and this was followed by the groups containing business owners (23.9%) and executives (18.5%). There was a slightly higher proportion of men in the business owner, CEO and department head positions, while women more frequently held executive positions (see Table I). Fifty three percent of the respondents (n = 168) were male, while forty seven percent were female (n = 150) (see Table 1).

The descriptive analysis methods employed included the independent t-test, frequency distribution, cross tabulation and chi-square analysis.

Table 1: **Position within the company and gender**

Position within the company	Sample %	Males %	Females %
Business owner	23.9	25.6	22.0
CEO	7.9	9.5	6.0
Senior manager	5.0	5.4	4.7
Department head	27.7	29.2	26.0
Executive	18.5	14.3	23.3
Others	17.0	16.0	18.0

With regard to the business sector, 25.8% of the respondents worked in commerce companies, 19.5% in technology, 12.9% in medicine or healthcare and 10.7% in education. There were higher percentages of males at commerce, technology and building companies, while females were more common in medicine, education and banking (see Table 2).

Table 2: **Business sector and gender**

Business sector	Sample %	Males %	Females %
Commerce	25.8	29.2	22.0
Building	5.0	8.3	1.3
Medicine and healthcare	12.9	9.5	16.7
Education	10.7	5.4	16.7
Public sector	6.0	8.9	2.7
Culture	1.9	0.0	4.0
Technology	19.5	23.2	15.3
Banking and finance	7.5	5.4	10.0

Business sector	Sample %	Males %	Females %
Tourism	3.8	2.4	5.3
Law	0.9	1.2	0.7
Metalworking	1.6	3.0	0.0
Clothes and Fashion	1.9	0.0	4.0
Others	2.5	3.5	1.3

Several relevant differences were obtained as regards the motivation behind the business trip (see Table 3). The male group specifically attained higher percentages for training events (24.4%) and commercial business (22.6%), while the female group was represented to a greater extent at fair exhibitions (28.7%) and incentive travels (5.3%).

With regard to length of stay, males tend to spend 2-3 days (48.8%), while females' stays are slightly shorter. One exception is the category 'more than 5 days', which is significantly higher for the female group (11.3%).

Women are better organised when preparing and booking the business trip. The majority of the members of the female group organise the business trips themselves (54.7%), while this figure is lower for the male group (44.0%). Moreover, men tend to leave the organisation of the trip to others, such as manager assistants (36.9%), while the percentage of women who do this is smaller (22.0%).

Table 3: Travel patterns and gender

Business travel motivation			
Item	Sample %	Males %	Females %
Congress	16.4	17.3	15.3
Convention	4.4	3.0	6.0
Conference	5.0	6.0	4.0
Training events	22.3	24.4	20.0
Trade fair and exhibitions	23.9	19.6	28.7
Incentive travel	3.5	1.8	5.3
Commercial business/contacts	18.2	22.6	13.3
Others	6.3	5.3	7.4
Length of stay			
Item	Sample %	Males %	Females %
1 day with overnight stay	21.7	22.0	21.4
2-3 days	46.2	48.8	43.3
4-5 days	24.8	25.6	24.0
More than 5 days	7.3	3.6	11.3
Trip organiser			
Item	Sample %	Males %	Females %
On his/her own	49.1	44.0	54.7
Travel manager	12.9	10.7	15.3
Implant agency	5.0	4.2	6.0
Manager assistant	29.9	36.9	22.0
Other	3.1	4.2	2.0

2.3. Hotel attributes and gender

The objective of the first research question was to examine possible differences between male and female business travellers' perceptions of the attributes of hotel services.

In order to address this question, the effects of each categorical independent variable were examined by employing descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Since there was an unequal number of subjects for each gender, homogeneity of variance was required for the analysis of variance to be valid.

The results of the t-tests employed to compare the means indicated that women value certain hotel attributes to a significantly higher level than do men (see Table 4). Women specifically place more value on cleanness (5.82), employees' qualifications (5.45), decoration and furniture (5.01), sports facilities (4.73), WI-FI connection (5.95) and value for money (5.77). These results coincide with those obtained in the study carried out by Juwaheer (2011), who established that female guests placed more emphasis on the dimension of 'staff communication skills' and 'extra room amenities' than did male guests.

Another critical factor that stands out in our findings and that is also recognised in hospitality literature is atmosphere. According to Babakus et al. (2015) atmosphere can be instrumental in different ways: attracting attention (via interior and exterior signage), delivering a message about the hotel, and creating a particular mood (e.g. via music, lighting and soft colours).

Moreover, the female customer pays particular attention to the employees' qualifications. Their relationship orientation is strong, and women rely more on recommendations from friends. It can simultaneously be argued that imagination and social benefits are particularly important for women. Overall, women are more pragmatic, and status means less to them than to men (Sabina & Nicolae, 2013).

Table 4: Gender and evaluation of hotel attributes (scale of 1 to 7)

Hotel attributes	Males' mean scores	Females' mean scores	t-test	Sig.
Reception service	5.41	5.68	-1.712	0.088
Cleanness	5.50	5.82	-2.119	0.035*
Customer information	5.01	5.23	-1.235	0.218
Employees' qualifications	4.99	5.45	-2.575	0.010**
Restaurant service	5.04	5.25	-1.142	0.254
Decoration and furniture	4.55	5.01	-2.501	0.013**
Meeting rooms	4.76	4.95	-1.116	0.265
Sports facilities	4.31	4.73	-2.405	0.017**
Room space	5.36	5.56	-1.229	0.220
Room exterior views	4.89	5.20	-1.678	0.094
Bed comfort	5.39	5.32	0.385	0.701
Bathroom facilities	4.61	4.76	-0.656	0.512
Wi-Fi connection	5.45	5.95	-2.996	0.003**
Hotel safety	4.60	4.92	-1.658	0.098
TV facilities	4.27	4.46	-0.880	0.380
Amenities	5.01	5.26	-1.385	0.167
Value for money	5.39	5.77	-2.247	0.025*

** significant at $p < 0.01$; * significant at $p < 0.05$

It is important to highlight the fact that there are notable differences in the type of services used during stays at hotels (see Table 5). A higher percentage of women than men require a WIFI connection (81.3%), room service (48.7%), tourism information (30.0%) and spas (15.3%), while men make a more intensive use of the restaurant (66.1%), cafeteria (57.1%) and minibar (47.0%).

Although these results may not seem unexpected, they support the notion that women travellers prefer to stay at hotels that make their guests' comfort a major priority as regards the services and quality attributes offered. Men, meanwhile, evaluate attributes related to convenience and catering services more highly. Hypothesis 1 is, therefore, supported.

Table 5: Gender and services used at the hotel

Services	Males %		Females %		χ^2	Sig.
	Yes	No	Yes	No		
Room service	17.3	82.7	48.7	51.3	35.873	0.000***
Laundry	5.4	94.6	4.7	95.3	0.079	0.779
Minibar	47.0	53.0	27.3	72.7	13.077	0.000***
Cafeteria	57.1	42.9	37.3	62.7	12.463	0.000***
Restaurant	66.1	33.9	50.0	50.0	8.430	0.000***
Tourism information	22.0	78.0	30.0	70.0	2.634	0.105*
Sports facilities	9.5	90.5	10.7	89.3	0.114	0.735
Spa	7.1	92.9	15.3	84.7	5.427	0.020**
Parking area	29.8	70.2	23.3	76.7	1.672	0.196
Wi-Fi connection	66.1	33.9	81.3	18.7	9.865	0.007**

*** significant at $p < 0.001$; ** significant at $p < 0.01$; * significant at $p < 0.05$

2.4. Destination attributes and gender

The results of the t-test indicated that the female respondents attained higher mean scores for all the destination attributes than did the male respondents (see Table 6). This finding revealed that there were significant gender differences as regards perceptions of destination attributes.

The men's scores were very low for all the destination attributes and were below the intermediate position on the scale (4).

Women, however, had notably higher scores, exceeding 4 points for all the characteristics of the destination, apart from leisure activities. These scores were intermediate for the destination characteristics, and Hypothesis 2 is, therefore, supported.

Table 6: Gender and evaluation of destination (scale 1 to 7)

Destination attributes	Males' mean scores	Females' mean scores	t-test	Sig.
Weather	2.69	4.09	-4.668	0.000***
Natural surroundings	2.64	4.01	-4.726	0.000***
Public safety	2.72	4.15	-4.887	0.000***
Historical/cultural patrimony	2.92	4.11	-4.139	0.000***
Gastronomy	3.04	4.12	-3.529	0.000***
Shopping	2.96	4.32	-4.405	0.000***
Leisure activities	2.23	3.64	-5.399	0.000***
Urban environment	2.44	4.07	-5.728	0.000***
Value for money	3.06	4.45	-4.351	0.000***

*** significant at $p < 0.001$;

Furthermore, these results coincide with those obtained in a previous study carried out by Meng and Uysal (2008), who stated that women rate most of the destination's attributes more highly. The study by Smith and Carmichael (2007) similarly found that mixing business and pleasure was the most likely means to persuade women to extend their stay, by offering inexpensive "add on" packages designed to meet their needs.

Similar results were obtained in an earlier study by McNamara and Prideaux (2010) in Australia, which showed that the segment of independent solo female travellers has a relatively high level of satisfaction, stays longer than most visitors and is likely to travel beyond the main destination.

Further evidence is provided by Vespestad and Mehmetoglu (2015), who demonstrated a clear disparity between genders as regards the evaluation of destination characteristics. Women, therefore, rated vacation characteristics such as mental relaxation, escape, physical activity and learning about places and cultures more highly. These results also indicate that women are more likely to participate in culturally-oriented activities.

After assessing the differences in the evaluation of the destination, it is interesting to analyse whether there are differences between genders as regards the intention to return to the destination and recommend it to others. These analyses are carried out as a further complement to the main objectives in order to obtain a more complete understanding of the differences between genders with regard to the destinations. Intention to return to the destination and recommending it to third parties (word of mouth) were analysed by employing cross tabulation and a chi-square analysis (see Table 7). According to the results obtained, there are no significant differences as regards intention to return to the destination. There was only a slightly higher intention in the female group, given that 42.0% of them stated that there was a great probability that they would return to the destination, when compared to the male group (33.9%).

There were, however, significant differences with regard to recommending the destination to others. The women's intention to recommend the destination visited was significantly greater (59.3%) than that of the men (44.0%). This result coincides with a previous study carried out by Wang et al. (2016), which established that the influence of word of mouth (WOM) on cognitive destination image was stronger for females than for males. Recommendation systems such as Amazon or collectivist projects such as Wikipedia similarly reflect this relational orientation (Rosmann, 2006).

Table 7: Gender, intention to return and recommendation (scale 1 to 7)

Post travel behaviour	Males %			Females %			χ^2	Sig.
	Low	Med.	High	Low	Med.	High		
Intention to return to the destination	33.3	32.7	33.9	31.3	26.7	42.0	7.992	0.295
Recommend the destination	31.5	24.4	44.0	25.3	15.3	59.3	2.444	0.019**

** significant at $p < 0.01$

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of gender differences in the evaluation of hotel and destination attributes.

With regard to evaluating hotels, it was found that the two groups perceive hotel attributes differently. Female customers place more value on cleanness, employees' qualifications, decoration and furniture, sports facilities and value for money. These specific female preferences are highlighted in previous research by Harrys (2016), who suggested that many women business travellers are aware of and sensitive to the challenges that they may confront when travelling for work, while there is still much scope for managers to provide more support and resources in order to help women mitigate these risks and experience safer travel.

It was consequently possible to confirm the more general prediction that men and women would differ in terms of the impact of relationship quality on their evaluations of the service. The present study shows that women think more about the relational aspect of perceived service quality. Some previous studies have similarly stated that personal interaction processes with service providers strongly influence female purchasing behaviour (Homburg & Giering, 2001; Mathies & Burford, 2011; Sun & Qu, 2011; Melnyk et al., 2009). Delivering good relational service quality is, therefore, critical as regards increasing female tourists' satisfaction. The performance and interpersonal skills of frontline employees are essential if this desirable relationship with customers is to be achieved (Sun & Qu, 2011).

Another result indicates that women value price more highly when compared to men. Gender identity has been identified as an important antecedent to price sensitivity (Puccinelli et al., 2013). Regarding this research topic, Rahmani and Kordrostami (2018) suggest that if men are more likely than women to use price to judge quality, they will be less price sensitive. More specifically, in the context of the hotel industry, Beldona and Narnasivayarn (2006) showed that females tended to perceive more unfairness in the hotel service industry when compared with men. Johann and Ghose (2109) similarly explored package holiday travellers' perceptions and found that perceptions of the price/quality relationship of hotels were significantly greater for females when compared with the male group.

Women and men are significantly different as regards their preference for hotel services and facilities. The results obtained indicate that men are more interested in the restaurant, cafeteria and minibar, while women prefer services such as room service, tourism information, spas and a WIFI connection. Very similar results have been found in previous studies, such as those by Sammons et al. (1999) or Reisinger and Mavondo (2004).

Dining alone is one of the aspects that certain women who frequently travel alone dislike most. They feel observed by other diners and are unable to relax and enjoy their meal. These gender distinctions are associated with the geography of women's fears of travel, which proposes that women, rather than men, develop mind maps that constrain public movement (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2012; Wilson & Little, 2008).

Our results also revealed that women value all the destination attributes analysed to a significantly greater extent. Although there is little research in literature concerning this research topic, our results reflect the findings of previous studies such as those by Huang and Van der Venn (2019), Meng and Uysal (2008) or Oliveira and Pereira (2008). These results are in accordance with the study by Sánchez-Franco and Alonso-Dos-Santos (2021), which stated that women's reviews concentrate principally on a stimulating and surprising environment, and they consequently appreciate the rewarding experiences of the destination selected.

Another result obtained indicates that there is no difference between genders as regards the intention to return to the destination, although women's intention to recommend is greater than that of men. This result is consistent with that of Wang et al. (2017), who concluded that the impacts of perceived destination quality on word-of-mouth recommendations are stronger for female than for male tourists.

General psychological literature suggests that women tend to be more emotional and empathic than men (Barrett et al., 1998; Mestre et al., 2009). This difference provides some key explanations as to why the affective or cognitive image of the destination that is associated with more emotional values would reinforce the attitude and intention to visit in women when compared to men.

There is no doubt that women business travellers prefer to use suppliers who make special arrangements for their needs, but this approach must be applied effectively. This signifies that, while women travellers should not be treated in a different way, hoteliers must consider that they have certain requirements. This is a question of customisation rather than giving preferential treatment.

Some areas that hotels could improve are well-lit car parks monitored by CCTV, healthy food options or discrete dining, auto-checking appliances, co-working space and team-building spaces or on-site fitness and wellness suites and facilities. Further improvements are proposed by Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2015), who suggest improving the personal touch by, for example, better managing the sensory aspect of the hotel experience (smell, taste and touch) in order to engage all the customer's senses. Other means of differentiation include offering healthy food options on menus and visible 24-hour security staff.

Another recommendation is focused on hyper-personalisation, which refers to the processing of data on guest preferences at a customised level in order to provide guests with the most personalised hotel experience they could wish for. Hotels could attain this objective by contacting their hotel guests using different means of communication in order to inquire about any specific requirements and needs, such as dining preferences, transport and transfer services, room service requests, specific room preferences, and so forth. Hotels are increasingly using chatbots, CRM solutions and pre-check-in surveys to collect this information.

Our findings also indicate that women value the destination more favourably than do men. This suggests that travel companies, hotels and tourism attractions may find it easier to engage women who travel for business and pleasure when compared to men, who may be more sceptical about mixing business with leisure. This kind of bleisure (business+leisure) traveller demands products and services that can be easily incorporated into their itineraries and mobile apps in order to ensure that they are in constant communication with their companies.

It is consequently vital to initiate co-creation processes among all the stakeholders at destinations such that the different enterprises and services complement each other, with the objective of increasing the attractiveness of the touristic experience. This should be a valuable proposition for hotels in particular, which could attract women bleisure travellers by offering short-stay leisure packages. Hotels could develop agreements with local tourism and leisure businesses, such as tour guides, cocktail party bars, shopping routes, cultural or sport events and attractions.

Limitations and areas of future research

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations. First, a convenience sample is employed, which should be taken into account. As the participants in the survey were Spanish travellers, the conclusions are limited to one country, and the effects resulting from nationalities and cultural differences should, therefore, be considered in future research. Although the list of attributes measured is appropriate, it is possible that other items should be considered in order to attain a more comprehensive view of the characteristics and behaviour analysed. In particular, there is a need to investigate how the COVID-19 crisis has affected the evaluation of the different characteristics of hotels attained in recent studies. Customers' perceptions of risks and their behaviour may, therefore, have changed, as health, safety and value for money have become primary priorities when considering the choice of accommodation during the pandemic (Li et al., 2021; Pappas and Glyptou, 2021). In this research area, Guo et al. (2022) found that hotels with shorter operating days, higher quality amenities and a better-positioned brand image have more effectively managed the crisis. In addition, the use of new technologies to reduce face-to-face interactions can effectively reduce the perceived risk during service delivery (Shin & Kang, 2020). Other relevant factors affecting customer satisfaction and the perception of quality in hotels are closely linked to hygiene in its different dimensions (customer-use space, staff and workspaces), as demonstrated by Yu et al. (2021).

The use of qualitative research is recommended in order to obtain a more detailed list of the factors that determine the evaluation of hotels and destinations. Further research should consider an intersectionality approach in order to explore whether and how other factors in combination with gender, such as age, education level, nationality, professional level, income or professional goals, may influence travel patterns. More specifically, studies could be carried out to examine the possible relationship between

tourist activities and the life course stage, as suggested in previous studies such as those of Berdychevsky et al. (2013) or Lin and Lehto (2006). It would also be necessary to test whether gender differences in travel may additionally be conditioned by household structure, as suggested by authors such as Fan (2017).

Intersectionality theoretically has the potential to expand understanding on leisure for and about women by going beyond essentialism or simplifying explanations (Henderson & Gibson 2013). Inspecting the perceptions of different market segments as regards the quality of hotels and destination attributes may assist marketers to address the specific preferences of each group.

Finally, as Figueroa-Domecq and Segovia-Pérez (2020) point out, a gender perspective must analytically include those social factors that influence the differences between men and women, which could explain different behaviour and opportunities in tourism. This approach could lead to new research opportunities in the following areas: gender-specific tourism marketing; the evaluation of each gender's specific motivations and expectations, the technological gap and its influence on the organisation of tourist trips, and the role played by women in the organisation of travel.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there is no potential conflict of interest.

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