



Couples-Travelers' Hotel Satisfaction Attributes: Thai Perspectives

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Abstract.

Couples-travelers grow exponentially and tend to visit more exotic destinations. Yet, the existing literature has largely concentrated their investigation on the context of Western destinations. A better understanding of couples-travelers hotel satisfaction in the Southeast Asia context would help scholars to understand a holistic picture of couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction and assist hoteliers to prepare their hotels to welcome and serve such guests. This study extends the existing hospitality literature by investigating and identifying the attributes of couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction in Thailand. A total of 695 couples-travelers feedback on the TripAdvisor website were reviewed and content analyzed. Our study indicates that couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction is determined by 12 themes (10 common themes and two new emerging themes). Among these themes, staff attitude was found as the most important attribute while privacy was noted as the least important attribute to generate couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction.

Kata Kunci:

Wisatawan yang berpasangan, Kepuasan terhadap hotel, Thailand, TripAdvisor, dan analisis tematik.

Abstrak.

Wisatawan yang berpasangan tumbuh secara eksponensial dan cenderung mengunjungi destinasi yang lebih eksotis. Namun, literatur yang ada sebagian besar memusatkan penyelidikan mereka pada konteks destinasi di Barat. Pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang kepuasan hotel pasangan wisatawan dalam konteks Asia Tenggara akan membantu para peneliti untuk memahami gambaran holistik kepuasan hotel pasangan wisatawan dan membantu pelaku bisnis perhotelan mempersiapkan hotel mereka untuk menyambut dan melayani tamu tersebut. Studi ini memperluas literatur perhotelan yang ada dengan menyelidiki dan mengidentifikasi atribut kepuasan hotel pasangan wisatawan di Thailand. Sebanyak 695 umpan balik pasangan wisatawan di situs TripAdvisor ditinjau dan kontennya dianalisis. Studi kami menunjukkan bahwa kepuasan hotel pasangan wisatawan ditentukan oleh 12 tema (10 tema umum dan dua tema baru yang muncul). Di antara tema-tema tersebut, sikap staf ditemukan sebagai atribut yang paling penting sementara privasi dianggap sebagai atribut yang paling tidak penting untuk menghasilkan kepuasan hotel pasangan wisatawan.

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1. Introduction

Hotel is a unique place because it serves as a home away from home, and it is the place that allows their guests to have a good time and relax (Lubbadeh, 2021). To ensure such experience, hotels attempt to indulge their guests by offering world class facilities and services (Lubbadeh, 2021). However, J.D. Power report (2022) documented that these efforts alone are not a guarantee and may not be enough to satisfy hotel guests. In 2022 North America study, they found that despite significant hotel facility upgrades and improvements, overall hotel guest satisfaction rate dropped 8-

points. Daoust (2018) points out that this issue might be due to a hotel attracting an incorrect market segment, and accordingly, hotel guests feel disappointed and refuse to return.

Zopiatis and Pericleous (2021) assert that market segmentation is essential in hotel industry as it helps hoteliers to profile and understand their suitable target markets and therefore, they can develop personalized strategies to improve hotel guests overall positive experience and encourage their spending. Traditionally, hotels classify their market into backpackers and solo travelers, couples, friends, families, and business travelers (Wang et al, 2020). Among these markets, Trivago Business Blog (2016) argues that couples are considered as one of the most important target markets for hoteliers. Statistically, according to JTB 2021 report, the 2021 ratio of the couples-travelers' has increased 4.4 points to 33.1% (Travel Voice, 2021). Moreover, Rosenfeld (2022) predicts that this market is getting bigger and stronger in years to come as they have postponed their travel plans during the COVID-19 pandemic. In average, Kim (2021) estimates that excluding airfare tickets, a couples-travelers' spend a minimum of USD \$2600/week for a domestic trip or \$3400/week for an international trip. According to "What It Costs" site (2016), most couples are willing to pay between USD \$250-600/night for their accommodation. This figure shows that hoteliers cannot afford to lose them and thus, understanding what is in mind of this market will help hoteliers to reduce couples-travelers' hotel dissatisfactions and improve their willingness to stay in their hotel (Herjanto & Gaur, 2014a) and increase room occupancy rates (Hargreaves, 2015).

Hu et al. (2019) noted that couples-travelers' are demanding and notoriously have a lesser tendency to revisit their hotel. Existing literature suggests that this issue occurs because couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction is complex and multidimensional (Xu, 2018) and differ with other type of travelers (Wang et al., 2020). These studies show that breakfast quality, staff attitude, and room cleanliness, hotel location (Xu, 2018), service quality (Porkryshevskaya & Antipov, 2017), room overall quality (Rhee & Yang, 2015), hotel policy (Bacik et al., 2020), value and sleep quality (Wang et al., 2020) are considered as main contributors to couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. These findings provide us with a good foundation of knowledge to satisfy couples-travelers', however; these studies are incomplete and offers three major caveats that urgently need to be addressed. First, these studies were conducted as comparison studies between couples-travelers' with other type of travelers. In other words, there is no study that specifically conducted that investigated the couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. According to Mahoney (2007), in general - the comparison study concentrates on single, or few causes only and therefore it may not provide answers if there are possibly more explanatory variables. Second, the extant study was conducted in a general hotel setting, and not specifically in the romantic hotel settings.

According to Ryan et al (2010), romantic hotels are different than the rest of hotels because it is not only providing an adult only hotel experience, but it designs and offers their amenities such as candlelit dinners, in-room spa treatments, private room etc. to fit with the occasion. Thus, investigating couples-travelers' satisfaction in the romantic hotel setting will provide more relevance information to help hoteliers in indulging their guests. Third, scholars also conducted and concentrated their study in the Western or global context and studies in the Asian context, specifically Thailand is absent. This situation is problematic because of two important reasons. First, Frank et al. (2013) argue that every culture is different and such differences determine couples-travelers' decision making process and the degree of their hotel satisfaction. Accordingly, adopting and generalizing the findings from Western context may produce misleading information that creates a disadvantage to hoteliers (Herjanto et al., 2016). Second, Bocco (2021) suggests that Thailand is one of the most favorite destinations for couples-travelers', therefore understanding this phenomenon from Thai's perspective will complement the extant literature and provide a full picture of couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction (Herjanto et al, 2023a). Based on the arguments above, Wang et al. (2020) conclude that these studies are incomplete and may experience a generalizability issue. Therefore, the present study aims to answer this call by extending the investigation of couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction in the

context of Thailand hotel environment. Particularly, the present study aims to answer the following research question:

RQ: What are the key attributes that generate couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction in Thailand?

2. Literature Review

Couples-travelers' refer to a pair of individuals who travel together and aim to maintain, renew, or seek better relationships between themselves. Traditionally, the concept of couples-travelers is closely associated with romantic travel as it provides a great opportunity to know each other more deeply and to reconfirm their relationship commitment (Yadav, 2022). Accordingly, dating couples, newlyweds (or honeymooner), wedding vow renewal couples or regular couples who would like to get away from daily routines could be considered as couples-travelers'. Smith (2017) suggests that couples-travelers' segment market is unique and offers multiple benefits to the travelers. This includes deepened friendships, strengthened mutual trusts, and develop a strong and better foundation of mutual respects (Antonia, 2017). In sum, this type of travel setting is important to maintain relationships and revitalize romance (U.S. Travel Association, 2013) and is considered as one of the key secrets to a happy marriage (Headwater Holiday, 2012). To maintain such a happy marriage, in average, happy couples are at least traveling together twice a year (McCoy, 2012) and willing to spend between USD \$250 - \$600/night for their accommodation (What It Costs site, 2016). This willingness allows the couples to reconnect with each-others feeling's and remind them of the purpose of life as a couple. To support this purpose and improve the couples-travelers' romantic hotel experience, romantic hotel introduces innovative initiatives such as affordable and personalize romantic packages, adding romantic attributes (i.e., flowers or a private spa) in the hotel rooms (Selph, 2022), adult-only environment (Ryan et al., 2010), seclusion and privacy (Staff, 2022). Because of such initiatives, romantic hotels are becoming more appealing and popular among this type of target market (Duffin, 2022) as they can fulfil and satisfy their romantic needs (Romantic Tourists, 2021).

Herjanto et al. (2016) noted that the concept of hotel guests' satisfaction is regarded as the key dimension to the hotel business longevity and sustainability. More importantly, Herjanto and Gaur (2014b) pointed out that such high level of satisfaction generates a long-lasting positive memory in the minds of couples-travelers. Accordingly, this positive experience improves overall brand trust (Adiwijaya et al., 2021) that promotes further intention (Herjanto et al., 2020a; 2023b). Sezgen et al. (2019) suggest that satisfaction is a positive emotion that is aroused when individuals experience adding confirmation to their expectations. That is when couples-travelers view the benefits received during their stay in a romantic hotel confirm or exceed their expectation, they tend to experience a higher level of satisfaction. Accordingly, such experience develops a higher perceived value toward the hotel (Lee et al., 2003). In a different study, Hendarto et al. (2021) found that hotel brand image and different hotel attributes are directly responsible for developing hotel guests' perceived value. To name a few, breakfast quality, staff attitude, and room cleanliness, hotel location (Xu, 2018), service quality (Porkryshevskaya & Antipov, 2017), room overall quality (Rhee & Yang, 2015), hotel policy (Bacik et al., 2020), value and sleep quality (Wang et al., 2020) are considered as some of the more important attributes that affect couples-travelers' degree of hotel satisfaction. In general, Ban et al. (2020) suggest that these attributes can be classified into physical and non-physical attributes. To them, these two different groups of attributes are inseparable and work in tandem. Put it differently, the better these attributes fulfil couples-travelers' expectations, the more satisfied they will become (Wilkins, 2010).

To date, a specific couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction taxonomy has not existed and the closest taxonomy to picturize such satisfaction was developed based on comparison studies between couples-travelers and other type of travelers. For example, Rhee and Yang (2015) investigated 405

different types of international and domestic hotel guests (i.e., business, families, friend, solo and couples) and found that couples-travelers tend to emphasize room quality, value of the hotel, overall hotel cleanliness, sleep quality, location, and overall service as their main attributes to improve their hotel satisfaction. Among these attributes, their research noted that room quality and the value of the hotel are two of the most important attributes to such hotel guests. Furthermore, Radojevic et al. (2015) took a different approach by investigating private guest hotels (i.e., solo, friends, family, and couples) and noted that hotel stars classification, hotel (brand) chain memberships, size of the hotel, technology availability, room (i.e., air condition) and hotel (i.e., bar or lounge) facility, location and price are considered as key features to indulge their couples-travelers' guests. To couples-travelers, the size of the hotel and the membership of hotel brand chain are non-negotiable features to have. Marketing and hospitality scholars have continued to investigate this phenomenon and recently, they found that several attributes have evolved and are becoming important key features to satisfy couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. For example, scholars noted that in addition to common attributes above, they found that hoteliers' willingness to go the extra mile such as providing an upgrade (Francesco & Roberta, 2019) and hotel customer friendly policy (D'Acunto et al., 2021) are regarded as an important component to improve couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. Table 1 provides a brief comparison of couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction taxonomies.

3. Methodology

The present study is characterized as an exploratory study that applies a thematic analysis to categorize the themes responsible for couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. A thematic analysis approach is a suitable fit, and powerful analysis process that assists researchers to find and classify patterns or themes within the verbatim text data (Herjanto et al., 2020b; 2020c) through the thorough process of arranging, and unfolding data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a result, this process underlines the strength of data evidence (Olds & Hawkins, 2014). To maintain the accuracy and robustness within the thematic analysis process, this study follows Herjanto et al.'s (2020b) two general procedures. These procedures could be explained from the following method: Procedure 1: preliminary theme identification process. This step was conducted through reviewing existing related literature on couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction thoroughly and utilized this data as a foundation and tentative thematic map of couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction.

In the process of collecting this literature review, the authors utilized different but related keywords such as "couples/newlywed/honeymoon traveler x hotel/romantic hotel satisfaction" on Google Scholars platform. Google Scholars is considered suitable because it allows researchers to collect information from a wide database range (Falagas et al., 2008) and is covered more completely through academic journals (Jusco, 2008). In other words, Google Scholars includes different disciplines and therefore reduces biases in the journal selection process (Noruzi, 2005). This searching process resulted in 111 published manuscripts. As recommended by Herjanto and Franklin (2019), to maintain the relevancy and quality of this research, only peer review manuscripts that published in academic journals are included and progress to further screening. Consequently, less than 39 published articles are progressed and included in the review.

Procedure 2: confirming and finalizing research themes. In this process, the authors collected the sample from TripAdvisor's Top Ten Travelers Choice Most Romantic Hotels - 2022. As this study specifically attempts to explore couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction in Thailand context, the authors included only positive feedback (very good or excellent) that is published in English language between November 2021 and October 2022. This time frame is selected as Thailand opened its border for tourism from November 2021 (Associate Press, 2021). The very good and excellent feedback category represents a degree of hotels' ability in providing suitable hotel services or products that satisfy couples-travelers' hotel guests. A total 695 positive couples-travelers' hotel guests' online

comments were used, and content analyzed. To maintain the validity and accuracy of theme development, two of the authors read the comments multiple times and coded these comments separately and independently. Accordingly, from this coding process, 12 themes emerged. As suggested by Holsti (1969), intercoder reliability test was conducted and the results show that the common attributes such as location, cleanliness, overall service, value, and room quality were 98%, physical facility was 99%, staff was 97%, and hotel activity was 96%. In addition, the COVID -19 related dimension was 99%, transportation was 100% and stewardship was 98%. These intercoder reliability results are considered robust and acceptable as they met Holsti's 85% minimum threshold.

Table 1. Couples-travelers' Hotel Satisfaction Taxonomies

Rhee & Yang (2015)	Radojevic et al. (2015)	Porkryshevskaya & Antipov (2017)	Xu (2018)	Francesco & Roberta (2019)	Wang et al (2020)	D'Acunto et al. (2021)
Room quality	Hotel stars classification	Location	Location	Check-in and out process	Rooms	Hotel facilities
Value of the hotel	Hotel (brand) chain memberships	Staff	Room quality	Cleanliness	Value	Breakfast
Cleanliness	Size of the hotel	Cleanliness	Staff	Comfort	Location	Room facilities
Sleep quality	Technology availability	Food	Good view	Internet	Sleep	Privacy
Location	Room facility (i.e., air condition)	Tranquility		Tranquility	Cleanliness	
Overall service	Hotel facility (i.e., bar or lounge)	Internet		Restaurant	Service	
	Location	Hotel facilities (i.e., pool, gym, bus, and parking)		Sport facilities		
	Price			Hotel upgrade		
				Value		
				Staff attitude and competence		
				Location		
				General satisfaction		

4. Findings and Discussions

In total, 695 genuine related couples-travelers' feedback were analyzed and coded. The results show that there are 12 different hotel attributes responsible for couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. These attributes were further recorded and classified into three key dimensions: hotel physical dimension, supporting non-physical dimension and staff dimension. Hotel physical dimension includes six themes (dining, room, hotel facilities, location, interior/exterior design, and transportation), supporting non-physical dimensions include three common themes: cleanliness, value/price, privacy, and two new emerging themes: recreational activities, and safety/health, and finally, staff dimension consists of one theme: staff attitude and stewardship. Among these dimensions, the findings show that hotel physical dimension is the most important one with 366 (52.7%) guest comments, and it follows by staff dimension with 250 (35.9%) guest comments and supporting non-physical dimension with 79 (11.4%) comments. Figure 1 exhibits the final themes of couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction.

4.1. Hotel Physical Dimension

Hotel physical dimension refers to the physical hotel buildings, piece of equipment or hotel services that hotels offer to satisfy their guests (Wang, 2021). In our study, this translates to location, interior/exterior design, room, hotel facilities, dining, and transportation. Among these attributes, the study found that dining experience is regarded as the most important attribute with 94 (25.7%) positive feedbacks.

According to Panchapakesan et al. (2021), positive hotel dining experience means that hotel restaurants can offer a delightful experience through their food quality, ambiance, and excellent service. The ability to offer such experience is viewed as hotels ability to reduce couples-travelers' sense of perceived risks (Jin et al., 2015). Kim and Agrusa (2005) suggest that the statement above points out that couples-travelers are sensitive to the quality of their hotel attributes in fulfilling their romantic fantasies. It is reasonable because, couples-travelers view their romantic trip as an important trip as it can help them deepened friendships, strengthened mutual trusts, and develop a strong and better foundation of mutual respect (Antonia, 2017), strengthen relationships and revitalize romance (U.S. Travel Association, 2013) and more importantly, it is considered as one of the key secrets to a happy marriage (Headwater Holiday, 2012). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that hotels failure to offer a positive dining experience may increase their perceived risks and ultimately affect their romantic trip experience. In sum, Hemmington and King (2000) conclude that a positive dining experience may support and strengthen the overall hotel experience. These following comments show the importance of dining experience to couples-travelers':

Food quality - "I highly recommend dining at the Elements restaurant which has an excellent selection of degustation menus. Creative and delicious food served with flare".

Ambiance – "This restaurant is well worth it's Michelin Star. Fine dining in a very luxurious and not to formal setting".

Excellent services – "All staff is well trained and has great eye for detail. Also, the sommelier has great ambition and really understands how to make your night even more special".

The second most important attribute in this category is room comfort with 86 (23.5%) positive feedbacks. In the hospitality industry, room comfort includes room condition, humidity, noise level, lighting (Permana et al., 2022) and amenities (Aprillea et al., 2018). Scholars suggest that hotel bedrooms serve multiple functions. First, it serves as a personal space that offers a high level of comfort for resting and recharging oneself from their busy activities (Herjanto et al., 2016). Second, it serves as a sanctuary that help reconstructing guests' intimate sphere (Ineson et al., 2019). To Anferova (2020), the room comfort attributes are responsible for guests' overall experience and emotional state. That is, the more comfortable the room is, the more satisfied the couples-travelers' are. On the other hand, hotel failures to offer room comfort (i.e., the size of the room is too small, no or low quality of amenities and etc.) increases guests' cognitive dissonance (Herjanto & Gaur, 2014a). To illustrate:

"The room is spacious and fashion. Hardware is very new and great amenities partner with Hanna. Bed is comfortable and we can have good sleep with it".

"The rooms are very spacious with comfy beds and good aircon. The views of Bangkok are also a great bonus. Bathrooms also amazing with The White Company products which was a great touch".

The next important attribute is hotel facilities with 84 (22.9%) favorable feedback. Herjanto et al. (2020b) list the pool, lobby, business room, fitness and sauna facility, rooftop terrace and hotel garden as some of the important elements of hotel facilities. Yang et al. (2009) argue that hotel facilities are essential because it will create a higher level of trust and relationships between hotel and guests. It is

because, hotel facilities tend to be the first hotel environment that couples-travelers' encounter (Herjanto et al., 2020b). Stated differently, hotel facilities improve the tangibility of hotel services (Saeed et al., 2021). According to classic service quality theory, guest hotel satisfaction is determined by five important dimensions, and tangibility as one of these dimensions is considered as one of the most important attributes to generate guests' hotel satisfaction in the hotel industry (Gebremichael & Singh, 2019; Govindarajo & Cheng, 2020). Therefore, hotel failure to offer or maintain their hotel facilities generate unfavorable hotel image, negative WOM and promotes switching behavior (Herjanto & Gaur, 2014b). For example:

*"Excellent facilities... Gym was clean and equipment was well prepared and organized".
"The swimming pool is magnificent. The temperature is just right".*

The results suggest that hotel location is the next important attributes to improve couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction with 74 (20.2%) positive feedback comments. A hotel location is defined as a physical site where the hotel is located (Yang et al., 2018). Our findings show that couples-travelers consider hotel strategically located if such hotel is (a) constructed near a beautiful landscape (i.e., beautiful beach, rice field, top of mountains etc.) and or (b) built near local amenities (i.e., local restaurants, convenience stores or entertainment center etc.). In general, hotel guests tend to conduct their own activities around the vicinity of their hotel (Shoval et al., 2011). It is because they can save time (Xue & Cox, 2009) and conveniently (Zhang & Fu, 2020) travel between their hotel and such destination. Failure to offer such a convenience is viewed as a disadvantage as hotel guests are required to arrange or coordinate their transportation to reach such destination. Based on this argument, Yang et al. (2018) conclude that hotel location is more likely to affect couples-travelers' enjoyment and experience. To illustrate:

*"Great location hotel, accessible to all that Nimman Road has to offer... Wholeheartedly recommend you if you are looking to treat yourself while in Chiang Mai!"
"Perfect! Hotel is just opposite to beach around two- or three-minutes' walk!"*

The fifth attributes that accounts for couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction is hotel interior with a 25 (0.07%) positive feedback. According to Serhat Adem (2020), hotel design refers to aesthetic and functionality of hotel architecture or design in satisfying their guests. To this author, the modernity, innovation, atmosphere, and architecture shape determine the level of hotel design aesthetic and functionality. Accordingly, the degree of such aesthetic and functionality of such design influences the degree of hotel guests' perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and behavioral intention toward the hotel (Baek & Ok, 2017). As a result, Lee (2020) and Nanu et al. (2020) conclude that hotel design is responsible for hotel guests' well-being. Despite this argument, we found that the effect of hotel design on couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction is very minimal. This phenomenon can be explained that (1), couples-travelers' made their reservation through online booking and therefore, they have an ability to view their hotel and select their hotel according to their preferences. (2), as suggested by What It Costs site (2016), couples-travelers are happy and willing to pay as much as \$250-600/night for their accommodation. According to Rossi (2017), depending on where they go, this budget will certainly get you a quite luxurious hotel room. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that this type of hotel will provide a reasonable hotel design. Consequently, the couples-travelers' are not surprised with hotel design and take this design for granted. To illustrate:

*"Superb experience. The design of this hotel is classy and luxurious."
"The hotel is impressive with elegant and immaculate public areas."*

The least important attribute in this category is transportation with 3 (0.003%) positive feedback comments. Kucukusta (2017) and Rhee and Yang (2015) found that hotel transportation is considered as one of the most important attributes in hotel industries. Scholars suggest that hotel

transportation offers convenience (Rhee & Yang, 2015) and accessibility (Kivuka, 2013). In contrast, our findings suggest something of in contrast. In other words, our participants perceive transportation as not important as other attributes. This opposite result may occur due to several reasons. First, this finding may be closely related to hotel location. As discussed by Shoval et al. (2011) above, hotel guests are more likely to spend their time around the vicinity of their hotel. Second, public transportation (i.e., UBER, LYFT, or GRAB) is becoming more available, affordable, and accessible by everyone through their apps on the mobile phone. Third, most of couples' gateway package (i.e., honeymoon) fee includes ground transportation (Honeymoon always, 2022). Fourth, metropolitan city, such as Abu Dhabi (Tolley, 2021) and Myrtle Beach in South Carolina (WMBF, 2020) and major tourist attractions, such as the Grand Canyon (National Park Service, 2022) and Walt Disney (Josh, 2022) offer free shuttle. Accordingly, these reasons above make couples-travelers' do not see the need of hotel shuttles. To illustrate:

"A short taxi or TukTuk ride can take you to the old city and other attractions".
"You can get to nearby attractions by TukTuk or shuttle".

4.2. Hotel Non-physical Dimension

Based on Hasyim et al.'s (2021) general concept of physical and non-physical facilities, non-physical dimension can be translated as intangible facilities to support hotel efforts in satisfying their guests. In this study, this dimension includes three traditional attributes such as cleanliness, value/price, and privacy and two emerging attributes such as recreational activities, and safety/health. Among these attributes, the study found that cleanliness and value/price are found to be the two most important attributes with 33 (0.42%) and 30 (0.38%) positive feedbacks, respectively. In addition, we found two new emerging attributes such as recreational activities, and safety/health.

A traditional attributes of hotel cleanliness has been consistently and proven as one of the most important determinants in hotel selection decision making process (Herjanto et al., 2023) and because of that, hotel cleanliness becomes a basic amenity that hotel guest expect from their hotel (Torres & Kline, 2006). Failure to offer a standard cleanliness will reduce hotel guests' comfort (Marzuki et al., 2012), it is because a dirty hotel increases hotel guests' risk perception and accordingly it influences their attitudes (Choi, 2019) and behavioral intention (Herjanto et al, 2023b). Chan & Lee (2017) suggest that hotel cleanliness is not limited to internal hotel environment, but it includes surrounding external environment. Despite this finding, our study found that couples-travelers' are more concern with their internal hotel cleanliness. One possible explanation of this findings is that couples-travelers' tend to spend more and enjoy their time together at hotel poolside, hotel on-site attractions such as themed restaurants, spa services etc. (Hotel Mogel, 2011), and therefore, they do not really care about the surroundings of their hotel. To illustrate:

"This hotel is exceptional and one of the cleanest I have ever stayed in."
"The XXX hotel and rooms were extremely well maintained, clean and beautiful."

The second most important traditional attribute is value/price. Scholars argue price is an important factor to maintain hotel attractiveness because it increases hotel guests' perceived quality (Ye et al., 2012) and accordingly, it improves their willingness to pay (Soler et al., 2019a). In general, Soler et al. (2019a) notice that the degree of hotel guests' willingness to pay is complex as it is determined by various factors such as the type of hotels, star category, services offered and location. In the context of romantic hotels, however, Soler et al. (2019b) point out that hotel location is the most important one. This finding is reasonable because hotel location not only determines the accessibility and convenience (Letailleur, 2021), but more importantly, it maximizes the enjoyment and relaxation (Superpages.com, 2022). Despite this understanding, Mateechaipong (2020) argue that in the era of

post pandemic COVID-19, romantic hotel guests become more price-sensitive. In other words, such couples tend to seek more value for their money when they are honeymooning or traveling. To Fakfare et al. (2020), the ability to experience romantic trips within a budget, enhances couples-travelers' contentment and fantasy. To illustrate:

*"Overall, it was worth the money we spent (for a better room) and we would stay there again."
"This is a five-star hotel that is reasonably priced all things considered."*

Interestingly, our study found that privacy is the least traditional attribute that is responsible for couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. To Fakfare and Lee (2019), privacy reflects no disruption and private time and place, to establish themselves. That is, the more privacy the hotel can offer, the more romantic the hotel is perceived (Fakfare et al., 2020). Despite these findings, our study indicates that only two (0.03%) couples-travelers identified privacy as important. This shows that privacy is not their main concerns when they select their romantic hotels. One possible explanation of this phenomenon can be borrowed from Greyling et al.' (2021) study on benefits of lockdown. These authors suggest that lockdown has put people into a high level of uncertainty that further lowered the degree of people's happiness. They suggest that post-lockdown reversed this unpleasant situation and drives people to interact with a stranger more often. According to Staples (2021), interactions with strangers provide an excitement as they experienced unexpected things and had an opportunity to listen to new perspectives on things that are beyond their own experiences. Based on this argument, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that couples-travelers' may take advantage of their romantic trip to broaden their social and intellectual horizons while they are also enjoying their romantic moments. To illustrate:

*"The room and the facilities here really give us the cozy and privacy feeling."
"During the stay at the XXX Bangkok, my wife and I enjoyed ... and privacy."*

There are two new emerging attributes. The first and most dominant new emerging attribute is health/safety attribute. This attribute receives 10 (0.13%) positive feedback. This is reasonable because the COVID-19 pandemic is not completely over and eradicated and to date, it affected more than 640 million people and nearly 7 million people deaths globally (Worldometer, 2022). Accordingly, Poole and Herjanto (2021) and Herjanto et al. (2023) suggested, in the COVID-19 pandemic era, guests are more health/safety cautious and expect the tourism and hospitality industry management to seriously follow the health protocols and recommendations and are sensitive to their guests' health conditions. Failure to seriously follow the recommended protocols is considered irresponsible behavior (Poole & Herjanto, 2021). In contrast, the ability to follow such regulations and communicate how they are seriously involved in COVID-19 mitigation improves guests' comfort, trust, and willingness to pay (Jeong, et al., 2021). To illustrate:

*"The hotel is clean with sanitary products readily available to use, up to date with the current covid procedure."
"All [COVID-19] hygienic measurements are met, and one feels really safe here."*

The second and last new emerging attribute is recreational activity attribute with 4 (0.05%) positive feedback. Recreational activity refers to individual involvement and participation in hotel activity programs during their free time based on their personal interests and preferences (Howley, 2001). Scholars suggest that hotel recreational activity is important as it reduces hotel guests' boredom and accordingly, it beneficial for their health as it facilitates refreshment of mind and body (Wati et al., 2022). As a result, Lee (2010) argues that recreational activities are attractive and perceived as hotel guests' mood enhancer. To state differently, the availability of recreational activity improves hotel guests' overall memorable experience (Wati et al., 2022). For example,

"Free classes offered by hotel is a must - do! Will definitely come again to take another one!"

“The YYY staff provide kayaks, paddle boards complimentary class for the guests.”

4.3. Hotel Physical Dimension

Our study found that staff dimension is the second most important attribute to satisfy couples-travelers’ hotel satisfaction. Nearly 40% or 250 couples-travelers claimed that staff dimension is accountable for their overall positive experience. Herjanto et al. (2020b) suggest that staff dimension consists of two important and unseparated components, such as (1) staff attitude and (2) staff stewardship. In general, Oden and Owolabi (2021) define staff attitude as hotel staff displayed behavior in responding to their guests. This includes staff efficiency, friendliness (Herjanto et al., 2020b) and kindness (Herjanto et al., 2016). According to Herjanto and Gaur (2015), hotel guests translate such attitudes as a high level of hospitality that is additionally responsible for an overall positive memorable experience. As a result, Kuo et al. (2012) views staff attitude as a key component in strengthening interaction and building outcome quality. In a different study, Herjanto et al. (2020b) suggest that hotel staff stewardship reflects to their willingness to go above and beyond or conduct an extra mile service to exceed hotel guests’ basic expectation. According to Donaldson and Davis’ (1989) classic stewardship theory, such attitude reflects their willingness to be aligned with their hotel guests and more importantly, this attitude demonstrates a high level of responsibility and willingness to independently strengthen hotel-guests relationship by ensuring hotel guests’ hotel satisfaction. This attitude includes personalized service and intimate relationship (Herjanto et al., 2016). According to o Herjanto et al. (2020b), the combination of these two staff components guarantees the position of the hotel in hotel guests’ mind and consequently, this dimension became one of the key criteria to select their hotel. To illustrate:

Attitude:

“Very helpful and accommodating. I forgot an item in my room and Mr.Chang took us back into the room and allowed me to retrieve my belongings. Mr.Chang was friendly, warm and made my girlfriend and I feel comfortable the entire time”.

“The staff is very friendly, helpful and always welcoming you with a smile”.

Stewardships:

“Baw (the staff) learned our names on Day 1 and made sure to say bello to us every day, he remembered our anniversary and also gave us tips for things to do and see”.

“Surprisingly we get the card from GM Patrick to greet us and gave us some welcome fruit and snack, this is unexpected and appreciated as I’m not inner circle member and this is my first at XXX”.

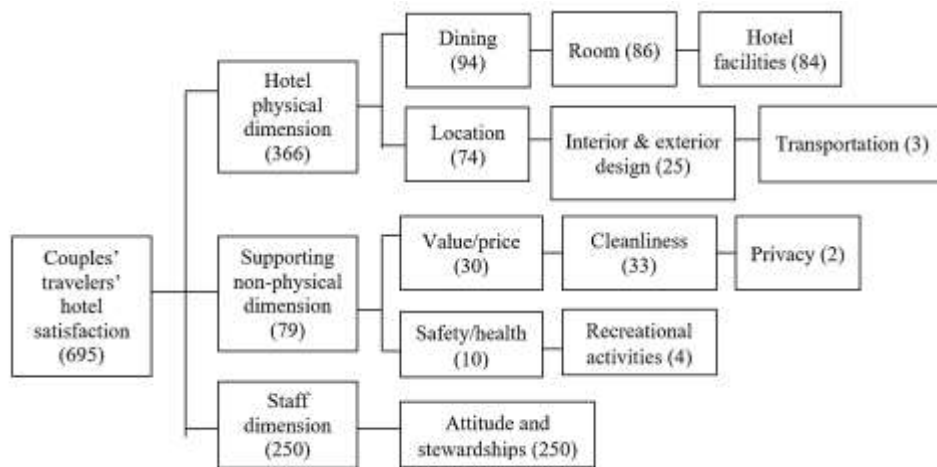


Figure 1. Final Thematic Map of Couples-Travelers’ Hotel Satisfaction

5. Implications

The study's findings offer significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study adds to the body of hospitality literature by providing a new couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction taxonomy. Our results indicate that safety/health and hotel recreational activity are two emerging attributes responsible for couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. Further, our study shows that couples-travelers are less concerned with privacy. This may be due to such travelers' view interactions with strangers as a part of their way to reach happiness. In addition, thematic analysis allows the researchers to include and analyze unbiased couples-travelers feedback, and therefore, the findings present a true reflection of couples-travelers' experience, opinions, and perspectives.

Managerially, this study presents hoteliers several strategic recommendations as follow: hoteliers are recommended to attract couples-travelers carefully and mindfully by fulfilling their needs and preferences and pay more attention to attributes that are perceived more important by such travelers. Examples include a memorable dining experience, world class hotel facilities and design, room comfort, and location. Therefore, (1) hotels should consistently and creatively improve the ambiance of their dining facility and more importantly, tirelessly experimenting and introducing new menus. For example, hotels could offer a personalized dining theme for specific couples by decorating a specific table or corner for such couples and introducing a new and exclusive menu using exotic ingredients and based on their personalities. (2), hoteliers are also strongly recommended to refresh their hotel interiors and exteriors consistently and regularly. In addition, hoteliers also should upgrade and modernize their facilities to meet their guests' preferences. For example, hoteliers should hire professional designers to improve their designs and more importantly, they should follow the world technology trend. For instance, they should have electric car chargers in their parking area and e-wallet payment. (3), hoteliers could improve room comfort by asking their guests' preference prior their arrival and ensure that they could fulfil their needs. For example, type of bed and pillow, favorite amenities etc. (4), hoteliers also should consider a strategic location as non-negotiable factors when building a new hotel. (5), hoteliers are recommended to continuously following the highest level of health protocols and have an independent organization to check and validate their efforts and communicate and show the evidence of their efforts to their guests. (6), hoteliers should creatively and offer various and unique hotel recreational activities. For example, a romantic scavenger hunt that can improve the relationships between the two. (7) hoteliers are also recommended to empower their staff to serve their guests to the next level. For example, hoteliers may provide a day off to their staff to serve as a guide for their guests.

6. Conclusion, Limitation, and Future Research

Our research has contributed to extant hospitality literature by pointing out that couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction is dissimilar with other types of travelers. Our analysis suggests that for the most part, couples-travelers share similar hotel attributes (i.e., dining, room, hotel facilities, location, interior/exterior design, transportation, value/price, cleanliness, privacy, and staff attitude/stewardships) as their main attributes to generate their hotel satisfaction with other type of travelers (i.e., female travelers and business travelers). Interestingly, however, our findings also indicated that two emerging attributes, such as safety/health and recreational activities, uniquely influences couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. These new attributes indicate that existing taxonomies of general hotel guests' satisfaction may not be applicable to couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction and therefore, it is important for hoteliers to approach couples-travelers' with different strategies that are specifically customized to accommodate such travelers.

Despite a thorough and careful effort, our study has two limitations. First, our study was carried out utilizing the customer feedback available on one travel site only— TripAdvisor between November

2021 and October 2022. Although we collected, reviewed, and analyzed 695 couples-travelers' feedback, this feedback was exclusively gathered from TripAdvisor's Top Ten Travelers Choice Most Romantic Hotels – 2022 category. Thus, this feedback may not fully represent all types of couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. Accordingly, future researchers are recommended to extend the timeframe and include multiple travel sites such as Expedia.com, Hotels.com and Trivago.com. — these may offer a holistic picture of couples-travelers' hotel satisfaction. Second, this study gathered specifically from Thailand's hotels. Thus, the generalization of the findings may not be applicable to different tourism industries (i.e., restaurant, amusement park, etc.) and other Southeast Asian countries. Based on this limitation, we recommend future researchers to replicate and extend this study to different Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam etc., and to different tourism industries.

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