

Profile Variables as a Basis for Segmenting Markets: A Guesthouse Perspective

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Abstract: Marketers frequently use profile variables to differentiate between groups of customers. The question arises as to whether these variables can also be used by guesthouses in segmenting their market. Segmentation helps marketers better meet customers' needs and leads to increased customer satisfaction. This study determines whether significant differences exist in visitors' perceptions of experience realms, given their age, gender, education level, and prior visits to the guesthouse, and whether these variables can be used in segmenting the market. The analysis of data provided by 541 guests who stayed at 51 guesthouses in Ghana shows that visitors from different age groups differ significantly with respect to the experience realms, except for Escape. Prior visits to the guesthouse resulted in significant differences in perceptions of Entertainment, Escape, Atmospherics, Peace of mind, and Efficiency, while education resulted in different perceptions of the Entertainment realm. The results can assist guesthouse managers in Ghana in allocating resources to segments that would yield maximum returns in Ghana.

Keywords: *Age, Customer experience, Education, Gender, Guesthouses, Prior visits*

1. Introduction

Ghana is one of the few emerging African countries regarded as being peaceful, politically stable, and growing (Oduro, Awal & Ashon, 2014). Since the reinstatement of a constitutional democracy in 1993 and several successful democratic elections, the government initiated a number of policies and programs (e.g. Economic Recovery program) intended to attract foreign direct investment (FDI), boost trade, growth and development (Sakyi, Commodore & Opoku, 2015). The tourism sector has been singled out in this regard. This sector is the fourth largest foreign exchange earner in Ghana after cocoa, gold, and remittances from abroad. With an annual growth rate of 12%, the tourism sector makes an important contribution to socio-cultural, political, and economic development in the country (Mensah-Ansah, Emma & Egan, 2011; World travel & tourism council, 2015). Tourists, holidaymakers, and business travelers have to rely on hotels and guesthouses for their accommodation needs (Travel & tourism, 2016). Despite the accommodation sector being one of the fastest growing sectors in Ghana, it is still confronted by numerous challenges. Many accommodation providers are accused of offering poor services and not having the capacity to deal with service problems such as staff with bad attitudes and faulty or defective equipment (Mensah-Kuffuor, Mensah & Amenumey, 2015). Furthermore, many guestrooms are untidy, and employees are not properly trained to deliver effective services to customers (Mensah-Kufuor et al. 2015; Travel & tourism, 2016). A large number of accommodation providers are also inexperienced and unable to tailor offerings to customers' expectations and specifications (Travel & Tourism, 2016).

The focus of the study was guesthouses because although there is an increase in their numbers, they also suffer from the aforementioned problems, leading to negative customer perceptions. Guesthouses thus lose out on the benefits of a reasonably positive customer experience, namely customer satisfaction, visitors' return to the service provider and spreading of positive word-of-mouth messages about the service provider (Tussyadiah, 2016; Worsfold, Fisher, McPhail, Francis & Thomas, 2016). While previous studies into Ghana's hospitality sector (e.g. Adam & Amuquandoh, 2014; Mensah-Ansah et al., 2011; Nimako & Mensah, 2013; Amoah, Radder & van Eyk, 2016) have been undertaken, little is known about the effect of customer profile variables on visitors' perceptions of the guesthouse experience. In addition, most the factors often investigated are within the control of marketers while those factors that generally cannot be controlled by the service provider are ignored and hence impede operations and competitiveness. Studies dealing with uncontrollable factors such as age, education, prior visits, and gender are rare especially within the guesthouse industry in Ghana. However, these variables are frequently used to construct customer profiles and segment consumer markets (Carpenter & Moore, 2006; Falk & Dierking, 2016; Juwaheer, 2007; Pride & Ferrell, 2017). Providing the required experiences to specific segments of customers may help to raise levels of satisfaction, if not with the service per se. The aim of the study was to determine whether perceptions of

the guesthouse experience differ based on visitors' age, gender, education level, and prior visits to the guesthouse to such an extent that different clusters of customers' result, which warrant a differentiated managerial and marketing approach to the guesthouse experience. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. A short literature review introduces the customer experience and profile variables relevant to the study, followed by a description of the research methodology, results and conclusions. The last section of the paper provides the managerial implications and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

The literature review focuses on two concepts that provide the context for the study, namely customer experience and experience realms, and customer profile variables.

Customer experience and experience realms: The customer experience has become an important marketing concern in contemporary business (Tapar, Dhaigude & Jawed, 2017; Yoon & Lee, 2017). Experiences are said to span a number of stages and realms. While every customer experience is different, some fundamental principles can be identified from seminal work to guide staggers of the experience. For example, Jain, Aagja and Bagdare (2017) and O'Sullivan and Spangler (1998) point out that an experience generally comprises three stages namely pre-experience, participation, and post-experience. The pre-experience stage refers to anything and everything that the customer engages himself/herself in *before* the participation in the experience itself (Jain et al., 2017; O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998), such as searching for information and making contact with service providers to gain knowledge about the tourist destination. The pre-experience stage is also characterized by decision making regarding issues of pricing, affordability, availability and assortment of actions and activities that can evoke a memorable experience. In a guesthouse setting, guests might search for accommodation that is affordable, offers a variety of activities that would engage the customer, and result in a pleasant experience. The second stage of a typical experience is the participation stage and includes the *actual involvement* in the experience. Holbrook (1994) notes that in the participation stage the individual or customer can either play a passive or active role in the experience. Passive participation is derived from the consumer's understanding of, appreciation for, or response to a consumption object or experience. With active participation, the customer is involved in intense collaboration with the marketing activity. The more active or participative the customer is, the higher the collaboration between the consumer and the marketing entity (Holbrook 1994) and the more memorable the experience will be (e.g. providing the necessary facilities in the guesthouse that will enable guests to prepare their own menu). The final stage of the experience is the post-experience stage, which represents the *aftermath* of the participation. During this stage, the individual makes three important decisions, namely whether to replicate the same experience; whether to look for alternatives that will bring more fun and enjoyment; or whether to cherish or try to forget the memories from the experience (Jain et al., 2017; O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998). As indicated in the introduction of this article, a positive experience might result in customer satisfaction, return and spread of favorable-of-mouth information about the guesthouse. If the experience has met expectations, the customer will repeat and remember such experiences. In contrast, if an experience falls below expectations, the individual will begin searching for more alternatives that will meet his/her expectations (such as vivid entertainment and appropriate esthetic facilities). Therefore, in the post-experience stage, positive experiences may offer various marketing opportunities for the experience provider (Jain et al., 2017; O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998).

Another seminal approach that embodies the progression of stages describing experiences is the progression of "economic value" leading to the so-called "experience economy" (Pine & Gilmore 1998). The experience economy gained popularity in the 1990s and has influenced many research foci in the past 10 years. The progression in economic value begins with the extraction of commodities and moves through the stages of making products and delivering services, to the final stage of staging experiences. The last stage, representing the experience economy, is the source of a competitive strategy that can be used to differentiate one organization from the other (Pine & Gilmore 1998). Pine and Gilmore (1998:98) argue that "an experience is not an amorphous construct, it is as real as offering any service, good, or commodity". The above experience knowledge also led to the idea of finding out how to create a good experience. Buonincontri, Morvillo, Okumus and van Niekerk (2017) suggest that creating a good experience revolves around a number of realms and levels of customer participation and involvement. Participation in the experience can be passive or active,

while involvement in the experience can be described as absorption or immersion. If participation in the experience is passive, the customer does not actively participate in, or influence the experience, while, if there is active participation, the customer can act and influence the experience. Passive customers have no influence on the performance of the experience stager (organization) (for example, when watching a movie in the guestroom or requesting the waitress to deliver the menu to the guestroom). In active participation, the participants become co-creators of the experience (for example, involving guests to prepare their own breakfast, mix their own drinks in the honesty bar in the guesthouse). Absorption attempts to occupy the customer's attention to the experience (e.g. watching a movie) while immersion indicates that the customer gets drawn into the experience (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011).

In building on the four experience realms suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999), a number of authors further explored these realms. For example, Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007) identified entertainment, aesthetics, escape and education as experience realms in a bed-and-breakfast context. Hosany and Witham (2010) confirmed entertainment, aesthetics, escape and education as realms of the cruising experience. Manthiou, Lee, Tang and Chiang (2014) also confirmed entertainment, aesthetics, escape and education as experience realms for a festival marketing. Radder and Han (2015) however found only three realms (edutainment, escapism and aesthetics) in a museum context. Amoah, Radder and van Eyk (2016) found atmospherics, enjoyment, entertainment, escape, efficiency, excellence and economic value as guesthouse experience realms. The current research focuses on five experience realms, namely entertainment, escape, atmospherics, peace of mind, and efficiency. These realms were chosen based on prior research (Ali, Ryu & Hussain, 2016; Amoah et al., 2016) indicating that these realms positively influence satisfaction and behavioral intentions. *Entertainment* involves fantasies, feelings of joy, and fun (Amoah, et al. 2017; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and represents one of the fundamental experiences that people typically seek at a destination. *Escape*, a critical motivation for unleashing the customer experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), includes activities and situations that help the customer forget about daily routine activities and problems (for example mini competitions for guests to participate in their various apartments of the guesthouse). *Atmospherics*, also known as esthetics, refers to the physical surroundings at the destination. With respect to guesthouses, it might include the natural scenery, neatness of the rooms and the general design and appearance of the buildings, all of which could lead to a sense of liberation (Xu & Chan, 2010) and pleasure. Safety, security and privacy collectively provide the customer with *peace of mind*. Safety and security threats in the form of various types of crime are occurring more frequently and place increasing pressure on businesses and society at large (Habibi, 2017). Hence, it is assumed that safety and security are expected to be important to tourists when choosing a destination (Habibi, 2017) and to guests when selecting accommodation. Customers' perceptions of *efficiency* can be evaluated in terms of what they received relative to what has been sacrificed in terms of money, time and effort (Holbrook, 1994; Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2009; Zeithaml, 1988). In a guesthouse setting, employees' performance and customer service might be crucial because most customers form their experiences on the basis of how employees react to them and perform their duties. A customer profile and knowledge of customer perceptions of their experience might assist guesthouse managers in tailoring their services in a manner that will suit the demands of specific guests.

Customer profile variables: Customers' socio-demographic characteristics are often used as a basis for effective market segmentation and the consequent optimisation of marketing and promotional resources (Juwaheer, 2007; Radder & Han, 2011). The customer profile variables considered for this study are age of the customer, gender, educational level, and prior visits to the guesthouse. These variables have been used in several studies as foundations of successful market segmentation (Juwaheer, 2007; Radder & Han, 2011; Seiler, Rudolf & Krume, 2013) and were deemed relevant profile variables in terms of a guesthouse experience. *Age* of the consumer is important because different age groups tend to exhibit different behavioural characteristics (Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009) associated with their particular needs and wants (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). For example, research by Radder and Han (2015) shows that the age of a customer has a significant effect on the judgement about edutainment (entertainment and education), escapism and esthetics provided by a museum visit. Letho, Cai, O'Leary and Huan (2004) found that age significantly influences the amount of money travelers spent on shopping and the items that they prefer to buy. Age also had a significant effect on 8 out of 9 service quality dimensions measured by Juwaheer (2007). For example, the age group of 25-34, showed the highest importance ratings on cleanliness of hotel rooms, while guests aged 45-54 years emphasised reliability of staff. Elderly consumers are more focused on

customer service and are more economy conscious (Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009) and might therefore prefer a guesthouse with a full range of services at a price that represents value for money. Lambert-Pandraud, Laurent and Lapersonne (2005) found that older consumers select long-established brands and repurchase a brand more often than younger customers. The post-hoc results conducted by Deshwal (2016) showed no significant difference among various age groups regarding their perceptions of peace of mind in a retail context. Individuals younger than 25 years of age constitute about 50% of the population in Africa and are expected to be the prime consumers of this continent in the next 10 years (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Knowledge of, and possibly targeting different age groups, is therefore important because the needs of the different age groups might cause a shift in the market profile which could significantly impact the strategic focus of the organisation in terms of product and service delivery (Okumus, Altinay & Chathoth, 2010). Based on the preceding discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Different age groups perceive the guesthouse experience differently.

Gender forms the second profile variable investigated in the study. Since individuals' beliefs, values and customs differ, this might influence their decision making. Zeithaml (1985) conducted a study on supermarket shoppers and found that gender influences the preparation and execution of supermarket shopping. Satisfaction with a product has a significant effect on repurchase intention for men but not for women (Homburg & Giering, 2001). Seiler et al. (2013) found no significant differences in the mean scores for different gender groups regarding the type of private banking service provider used and size of liquid assets. Deshwal (2016) establishes that statistically significant differences exist between male and female customers with regard to peace of mind. Female customers showed higher levels of peace of mind than their male counterparts in the context of retail stores. The current study aimed to determine if the difference in perception between genders is also the case with the guesthouse experience in Ghana. It is therefore hypothesized that:

H2: Different genders perceive the guesthouse experience differently.

Education is another important profile variable that may affect the needs, expectations and perceptions of customers. Education influences an individual's social identity and self-concept, which in turn effects consumer preferences and behaviour. For example, contrary to the importance of age, Juwaheer (2007) found that education has little effect on 1 out of 9 service quality dimensions measured. However, Kim, Lee and Klenosky (2003) found a significant difference in travellers' motivations and destination choice when compared across different educational levels. Education has also resulted in different levels of customer satisfaction (Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009). Deshwal (2016) found that significant differences exist in the mean scores for peace of mind for respondents with higher secondary or below education levels, and respondents with a masters' degree in the case of a retail store context. Haralambopoulos and Pizam (1996) established that education levels of visitors correlated with positive tourism attitudes, which might also be the case with guesthouses. With respect to the accommodation sector, guests with a higher educational background might prefer accommodation that matches their status and educational achievement. For the purposes of the current study, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Visitors with differing levels of education perceive the guesthouse experience differently.

Customers' *prior visits* is the final variable researched in the current study. Kotler and Armstrong (2013) deemed prior experience with a product or service to be an important market segmentation variable. Furthermore, satisfaction with the accommodation may prompt visitors to choose the same accommodation for subsequent visits or to recommend the particular accommodation to friends and family (Amoah, 2016). Juwaheer (2007) found that 'first visit or not' exerted a significant effect on expectations and that those visiting the destination for the first time showed the highest ratings for service quality variables. Weaver and Lawton (2001) noted that there are significant differences in the length of stay based on tourists' attitudes to a tourism destination. With respect to guesthouses, this could imply that customers with prior visits may have different attitudes compared to newcomers. It is thus hypothesised that:

H4: Visitors with and those without prior visits to the guesthouse perceive the guesthouse experience differently.

3. Methodology

This study formed part of more comprehensive research into the guesthouse industry in Ghana. Four major cities namely Accra, Cape Coast, Koforidua, and Kumasi formed the study area. The target population included guests who have stayed in a guesthouse in these areas for at least one night. A proportional sampling method used to select the guesthouses resulted in the inclusion of 51 guesthouses in the study. Using convenience sampling, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed to guests of the 51 guesthouses. After a period of three months a total of 650 completed questionnaires were received, of which 541 was useable. Prior to the data collection, an initial pool of 38 items was generated to describe the five experience realms. The majority of these items were sourced from the work of Otto and Ritchie (1996) and Chen and Chen (2010), and a few items originated from the relevant literature on the topic. Subject experts from Ghana and South Africa, and four guesthouse managers in Ghana scrutinized these items for relevance and content validity, resulting in 24 items being retained. The final questionnaire was tested in a pilot study with 50 respondents, followed by a reliability assessment for each of the dimensions. The Cronbach's alpha for all of the experience realms were above 0.80, thus exceeding the generally acceptable lower limit of 0.70 (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson 2010). These coefficients suggest that the scale was internally reliable. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), post-hoc Scheffé tests, and cluster analysis formed the core of the data analysis.

4. Results

Profile of respondents: The data indicates that 58.0% of the sample were males. The age distribution includes the following age categories: 18-30 years (50.8%); 31-40 years (24.0%); 41-50 years (20.7%); 51-60 years (4.1%); and 61 years and older (0.4%). The educational levels of the respondents include less than a high school certificate (4.6%); high school certificate (40.7%); postgraduate certificate (7.6%); and a diploma or degree (47.1%). Information about respondents' visits to the guesthouse shows that: 27.9% had no previous visits, 34.4% visited the guesthouse once or twice before; 24.9% did so 3-4 times; and 12.8% visited the guesthouse more than four times.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA): ANOVA was used to investigate whether perceptions of the guesthouse experience realms differ based on the respondent profile variables (age, gender, educational level, and prior visits to the guesthouse). The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: ANOVA Results

Independent variables	Dependent variables					
	Entertainment		Escape		Atmospherics	
	F-value	p-value	F-value	p-value	F-value	p-value
Age	7.48	.001*	1.47	.231	10.07	<.0005**
Gender	1.39	.239	.03	.860	.14	.704
Education	3.98	.047*	1.07	.301	1.99	.159
Prior visits	4.10	.017*	5.00	.007*	6.23	.002*

*p<0.05; **p<0.001

Table 1: ANOVA Results

Independent variables	Dependent variables			
	Peace of mind		Efficiency	
	F-value	p-value	F-value	p-value
Age	8.27	<.0005**	8.73	<.0005**
Gender	2.68	.102	2.73	.127
Education	3.97	.002*	.93	.336
Prior visits	6.30	.047*	8.16	<.0005**

*p<0.05; **p<0.001

It follows from Table 1 that respondents' perceptions of entertainment differed significantly based on age, education and prior visits, while differences in perceptions of Escape only depended on whether the respondent has previously visited the same guesthouse. Respondents from different age groups and with

different levels of experience perceived differences in Atmospherics and in Efficiency. In contrast, age, education level as well as prior visits, resulted in significant differences in their perceptions of Peace of mind. The findings provide support for hypotheses H1, H3, H4. H2 is rejected because no significant differences based on gender were found.

Post-hoc Scheffé test: A post-hoc Scheffé test was performed to determine where the mentioned differences occur and to investigate the effect size of the difference. The post-hoc Scheffé test results are more useful than the ANOVA results, because the ANOVA results only indicate statistical significance. Cohen's d-value, in contrast, reflects a more stringent test of significant differences (practical significance). In addition, the post-hoc Scheffé test helps identify which pair of samples can be considered distinct. This will assist guesthouse managers in focusing on or adjusting their planning and decision-making in accordance with the demands and expectations of individual groups of customers. Cohen's d-values of below 0.20 are regarded as not significant; those between 0.20-0.49 are regarded as indicating a small effect size; those of 0.80 and above as having a large effect size, and those of 0.50-0.79 as having a medium effect size (Pallant, 2013:251). Consistent with prior studies (Huck, 2012), a significant level of $p < 0.05$ was chosen for the ANOVA and the post-hoc Scheffé test. Tables 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 show the results of the post-hoc Scheffé tests. In all cases where a significant difference was evident, the effect size was small. The post-hoc Scheffé test results for *Entertainment* showed significant differences for respondents aged 18-30 and 31-40; respondents aged 18-30 and those 41 years and older; those guests with or without higher education, as well as those with no previous visits and those who have visited the guesthouse three or more times. With respect to the *Escape* realm, only one paired respondent profile showed significant differences, namely respondents with no prior guesthouse visits and those with three and more visits. In the case of *Atmospherics*, significant differences were found for those respondents aged 18-30 and 31-40, and between those aged 18-30 and 41 years and older. Significant differences were also evident between guests with no previous experience with the guesthouse, and those who have visited the guesthouse more than three times. Respondents' perception of *Peace of mind* also showed three significant differences namely those aged between 18-30 and 31-40; those aged between 18-30 and 41 years and older; respondents with no prior guesthouse experience and those with three and more visits. Concerning *Efficiency*, significant differences were found for those aged between 18-30 and 31-40; between 18-30 and 41 years and older; those with no prior visits to the guesthouse and those with 1-2 visits as well as with more than 3 visits.

Table 2: Post-hoc Scheffé Test Results for Entertainment

Respondents profile	Level 1	Mean	Level 2	Mean	p-value	Cohen's d
Age	18-30	3.46	31-40	3.76	.005**	0.36
	18-30	3.46	41+	3.70	.028*	0.28
	31-40	3.76	41+	3.70	.873	0.07
Gender	Male	3.65	Female	3.52	.239	0.15
Education	High sch./less	3.64	D.D.PG	3.56	.047*	0.09
Prior visits	No prior visits	3.43	1-2 times	3.57	.317	0.17
	No prior visits	3.43	3 times+	3.74	.004**	0.38
	1-2 times	3.57	3 times+	3.74	.164	0.21

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$, Note: D.D.PG=Diploma, Degree, Post graduate

Table 3: Post-hoc Scheffé Test Results for Escape

Respondents profile	Level 1	Mean	Level 2	Mean	p-value	Cohen's d
Age	18-30	3.16	31-40	3.23	.696	0.09
	18-30	3.16	41+	3.16	1.000	0.00
	31-40	3.23	41+	3.16	.776	0.09
Gender	Male	3.19	Female	3.17	.860	0.02
Education	High sch./less	3.23	D.D.PG	3.13	.301	0.11
Prior visits	No prior visits	3.05	1-2 times	3.13	.726	0.09
	No prior visits	3.05	3 times+	3.31	.015*	0.31
	1-2 times	3.13	3 times+	3.31	.087	0.24

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$, Note: D.D.PG=Diploma, Degree, Post graduate

Table 4: Post-hoc Scheffé Test Results for Atmospherics

Respondents profile	Level 1	Mean	Level 2	Mean	p-value	Cohen's d
Age	18-30	3.69	31-40	3.99	.001*	0.36
	18-30	3.69	41+	3.96	.002*	0.31
	31-40	3.99	41+	3.96	.944	0.04
Gender	Male	3.85	Female	3.79	.704	0.08
Education	High sch./less	3.83	D.D.PG	3.82	.159	0.00
Prior visits	No prior visits	3.65	1-2 times	3.81	.129	0.19
	No prior visits	3.65	3 times+	3.97	<.0005**	0.38
	1-2 times	3.81	3 times+	3.97	.127	0.19

*p<0.05; **p<0.001, Note: D.D.PG=Diploma, Degree, Post graduate

Table 5: Post-hoc Scheffé Test Results for Peace of mind

Respondents profile	Level 1	Mean	Level 2	Mean	p-value	Cohen's d
Age	18-30	3.67	31-40	3.94	.005*	0.32
	18-30	3.67	41+	3.90	.018*	0.27
	31-40	3.95	41+	3.90	.910	0.05
Gender	Male	3.85	Female	3.70	.102	0.18
Education	High sch./less	3.82	D.D.PG	3.76	.047	0.07
Prior visits	No prior visits	3.62	1-2 times	3.75	.302	0.15
	No prior visits	3.62	3 times+	3.95	.001*	0.39
	1-2 times	3.75	3 times+	3.95	.048	0.25

*p<0.05; **p<0.001

Note: D.D.PG=Diploma, Degree, Post graduate

Table 6: Post-hoc Scheffé Test Results for Efficiency

Respondents profile	Level 1	Mean	Level 2	Mean	p-value	Cohen's d
Age	18-30	3.48	31-40	3.78	.004*	0.35
	18-30	3.48	41+	3.76	.006*	0.32
	31-40	3.78	41+	3.76	.985	0.02
Gender	Male	3.60	Female	3.66	.127	0.08
Education	High sch./less	3.62	D.D.PG	3.63	.336	0.01
Prior visits	No prior visits	3.40	1-2 times	3.63	.033*	0.27
	No prior visits	3.40	3 times+	3.78	<.0005**	0.46
	1-2 times	3.63	3 times+	3.78	.213	0.19

*p<0.05; **p<0.001

Note: D.D.PG=Diploma, Degree, Post graduate

Cluster Analyses: Following the approach and recommendation by several scholars (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson 2010:536; Josiam, Huang, Bahulkar, Spears & Kennon 2012: 85; Li, Zhang, Mao & Deng 2011:637; Lo, Law & Cheung 2011:832), this study adopted a combination approach using a hierarchical approach followed by a non-hierarchical approach to extract clusters. Firstly, Ward's hierarchical cluster analysis using the squared Euclidean distance as a measure of similarity was performed to establish the optimal number of clusters by reviewing the amalgamation schedule. Different cluster solutions ranging from two to ten were given special attention (see Table 7).

Table 7: Amalgamation schedule

Number of clusters	Coefficient	Change in coefficient	Change rate
2	399.047	206.919	107.70%
3	192.128	37.362	24.14%
4	154.766	76.531	97.82%
5	78.234	14.199	22.17%
6	64.035	8.377	15.05%
7	55.658	14.286	34.53%

8	41.372	2.768	7.17%
9	38.604	2.101	5.76%
10	36.503	4.136	12.78%
11	32.367	-	-

It emerged that the largest change in the coefficient occurred from a cluster three to a cluster two solution, suggesting that the two cluster solutions would be the optimal option for the current study. The K-means non-hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted with two clusters (see Figure 1). The results showed two different clusters. According to the mean scores characteristics with regard to the clustering variables (see Table 8), the first cluster (n=374 or 69.1%) had a higher mean score for all the variables than those in the second cluster (n=167 or 30.9%). The results of ANOVA indicated that the mean scores were all significantly different between the two clusters ($p < 0.001$).

Figure 1: Plot of K-mean scores for each Cluster

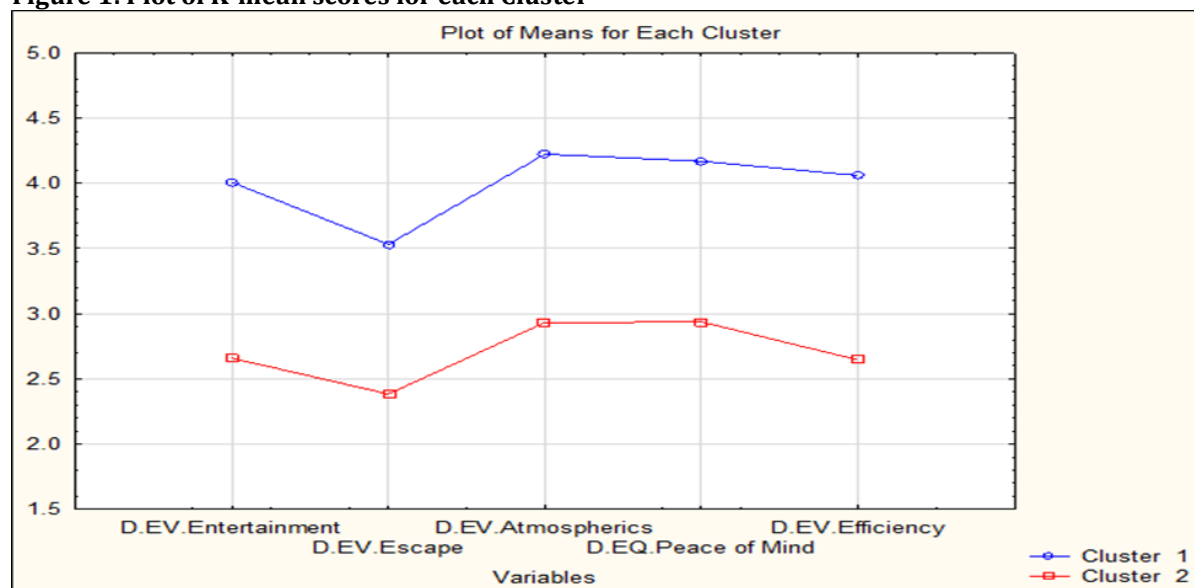


Table 8: Descriptive statistics for clusters

Experience realms	Cluster 1 Low expectation/motivated n=374		Cluster 2 High expectation/concerned n=167		F-value
	Mean	Std	Mean	Std	
Entertainment	4.01	0.58	2.66	0.75	513.71***
Escape	3.53	0.68	2.38	0.65	341.74***
Atmospherics	4.22	0.40	2.93	0.59	869.80***
Peace of mind	4.17	0.53	2.94	0.63	552.34***
Efficiency	4.06	0.48	2.65	0.64	808.60***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

Table 9: Cluster profile differences

Variable	Cluster 1 (n=374)		Cluster 2 (n=167)		CHI-SQUARE
	Low expectation/motivated		High expectation/concerned		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Age					31.097***
18-30	162	43.3	113	67.7	
31-40	105	28.1	25	15.0	
41-50	92	24.6	20	12.0	
51+	15	4.0	9	5.4	
Gender					0.864
Male	222	59.4	92	55.1	
Female	152	40.6	75	44.9	
Education					4.591
<High sch.	13	3.5	12	7.2	
High sch.	150	40.1	70	41.9	
Dipl./ Degree	180	48.1	75	44.9	
Postgrad.	31	8.3	10	6.0	
Prior visits					29.935***
No previous visits	79	21.1	72	43.1	
1-2 visits	134	35.8	52	31.1	
3-4 visits	106	28.3	29	17.4	
5+ visits	55	14.7	14	8.4	

Note: ***p<0.001

A cross-tabulation analysis with a chi-square test was performed to determine the demographic characteristics of each of the two clusters. As displayed in Table 9, only two variables (age and prior visits) were found to differ significantly between the two clusters. In terms of Age, cluster 1 (LEM) had a comparatively larger proportion of people who were between 31 and 50 years old (52.7% vs 27.0%), whereas cluster 2 (HEC) had a comparatively larger proportion of people who were in either the youngest age group of 18-30 years (67.7% vs 43.3%) or the oldest age group of 51 years and older (5.4% vs 4.0%). With reference to prior visits, respondents with no prior visit to the guesthouse were relatively more in cluster 2 (HEC) (43.1% vs 21.1%), whereas those who have visited the guesthouse before and had some level of experience with the guesthouse were likely to be more in cluster 1 (LEM) (78.8% vs 56.9%).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether perceptions of the guesthouse experience differed based on visitors' age, gender, education level, and prior visits to the guesthouse to such an extent that different clusters of customers' result which warrants a differentiated managerial and marketing approach to the guesthouse experience. It emerged from the empirical findings that practically significant differences in perceptions exist for *age* in the case of Entertainment, Atmospherics, Peace of mind, and Efficiency but not for the Escape realm. The finding supports *H1* (the guesthouse experience is perceived differently by different age groups) and is consistent with research by Carpenter and Moore (2006), Deshwal (2016), O' Mahony and Hall (2007), Radder and Han (2015), and Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou (2009) albeit in different contexts. Respondents aged 31-40 (M=3.76), as well as those 41 years and older (M=3.70), had a higher mean score for *Entertainment* than the 18-30-year-old (M=3.46), which indicate that different forms of entertainment should be provided to satisfy the different groups. Although, no significant differences were evident with regards to *age* from the post-hoc Scheffé test for *Escape*, it is worth noting the differences in the mean scores. Respondents aged 31-40 years old had a higher mean score (M= 3.23) than the 18-30 years olds (M=3.16) and those older than 41 years (M=3.16), suggesting the need for different amenities and activities that will enhance the feeling of escape. The results further show that those older than 30 years had a higher mean score (M=3.99) for *Atmospherics* than those younger than 30 years (M=3.69). Those aged between 31-40 years old had a higher mean score (M=3.99) for *Atmospherics* than those older than 41 (M=3.96). These results suggest different levels of perceptions among the various age categories. Respondents aged 31-40 (M=3.94)

and those aged 41 years and older (M=3.90) had higher mean scores when compared to those aged 18-30 (M=3.67) with respect to *Peace of mind*. The finding seems to suggest that the older group is more conscious of their safety, security, and privacy than the younger generation. With respect to *Efficiency*, the mean scores for those aged 31-40 (M=3.78) and 41 years and older (M=3.76) were higher than for respondents aged 18-30 (M=3.48). This might suggest that the older population may perceive time, value for money, and employees' performance towards guests as important experience characteristics.

Significant differences in customers' perceptions of *Entertainment* exist for different educational levels, and thus support H3. This finding also lends support to Juwaheer's (2007) and Haralambopoulos and Pizam's (1996) research results. Guesthouse visitors with lower levels of education had a higher mean score (M=3.64) for *Entertainment* than those with post school education (M=3.56). Although there are no significant differences in customers' perceptions of *Escape*, *Atmospherics*, *Peace of mind*, and *Efficiency*, it is still worthwhile to consider the differences in the mean scores. Respondents with lower levels of education had a higher mean score for *Escape* than those with post school education. Those with lower levels of education had a higher mean score for *Atmospherics* than those with post school education. Those with lower levels of education had a higher mean score for *Peace of mind* than those with post school education. Respondents with post school education had a high mean score for *Efficiency* than those with lower levels of education. It appears that visitors with lower levels of education might be more satisfied with current offerings by the guesthouses.

Significant differences are also evident in customers' perceptions of all the experience realms, when the realms are compared based on *Prior visits* to the guesthouse. H4 is thus supported. The findings also lend support to those of Juwaheer (2007) and Weaver and Lawton (2001) albeit in different contexts. Those who have visited the guesthouse once or twice had a higher mean score (M=3.57) for *Entertainment* than those with no prior knowledge (M=3.43). Those who have visited the guesthouse on more than three occasions had a higher mean score (M=3.74) for *Escape* than those who have visited the guesthouse on at least two occasions. Customers with prior visits to the guesthouse (at least two occasions and those visiting on more than three occasions) had higher mean scores for atmospherics than those with no experience. Customers who have visited the guesthouse on more than three occasions had a higher mean score (M=3.97) for *Atmospherics* than those who have visited the guesthouse on at least two occasions (M=3.81). Customers with no previous visits (M=3.62) to the guesthouse had a lower mean score for peace of mind than those with at least two occasions (M=3.75). Lower mean scores were also evident for peace of mind between those with no prior visits (M=3.62) and those with more than three visits (M=3.95) as well as those with at least two visits (M=3.75) and those with more than three visits (3.95). In all cases for efficiency, those with no previous visits to the guesthouse had a lower mean score when compared to those with at least two visits and more than three visits to the guesthouse. Those with at least two visits to the guesthouse for efficiency also had a lower mean score (M=3.63) than when compared to those with more than three visits to the guesthouse (M=3.78). Thus, it can be concluded that customer perceptions become more positive with an increase in the number of visits to the same guesthouse. The cluster analysis also provided additional evidence that marketers might consider segmenting their market based on two categories of customers. Cluster 1 are likely to consist of customers aged 31 to 50 years old with some level of prior visits to the guesthouse. The second group of customers are likely to be those aged between 18-30 and 51+ years old.

Managerial implications and recommendations: Accommodation is important to the Ghanaian tourism industry. However, it has been shown that managers in the hospitality sector often experience service failures and lack the necessary marketing and management skills, resulting in a negative effect on the industry (Mensah-Kufuor, Mensah & Amenumey 2015). Guesthouses, as important and emerging role-players in the industry, do not only provide accommodation, but also offer entertainment and escape, and when coupled with particular atmospherics, could enhance visitors' experience. Safety, security, and privacy, which forms the peace of mind realm and efficient staff, also cannot be ignored if the guesthouse aims to be competitive and position itself above similar establishments. Better tailoring experiences to meet the needs of specific groups of visitors can enhance the likelihood of success of the guesthouses, and also the industry.

The results of the study therefore hold important implications for guesthouse managers. When considering the differences in visitor perceptions, it is worth noting that significant practical differences exists between

those visitors under the age of 31 and those aged 31 and older, suggesting two distinct market segments. While no significant differences existed with respect to *Escape*, the 30 years and younger group perceived *Entertainment*, *Atmospherics*, *Peace of mind*, and *Efficiency* to be less to their liking compared with the older group. To attract the younger age group, the following recommendations are offered. Guesthouse management have to add additional forms of entertainment that will appeal to young people, such as a reserved destination or apartment within the guesthouse set aside for live cultural and musical performances (e.g. on weekends and public holidays), provision of bus travel tour opportunities to the city and other heritage sites to visitors with minimal or at no cost. Other sporting entertainment activities (e.g. table tennis courts, grass courts for volley ball, full sized billiard table, pool table) can also be introduced to attract more visitors. Security and safety measures such as access cards to guest rooms should be introduced, with security personnel on guard at all times. Personal information about customers should remain confidential and stored at a central database in order to minimize time spent during check-in and to easily access guest preferences. To improve on the effectiveness of employees, it is recommended that guesthouse managers recruit staff with high integrity, knowledge in dealing with customer complaints, and good general etiquette. Employees should be encouraged to attend programs designed to enhance their knowledge and expertise not only within the industry, but also with respect to their interpersonal skills. The attendance of these programs can be sponsored by the respective guesthouse.

Level of education made a difference to perceptions of *Entertainment*, but not to perceptions of *Escape*, *Atmospherics*, *Peace of mind*, or *Efficiency*. Two distinct groups of customers resulted: those with a high school or lower educational level, and those with post school education. The first group are more positive about the *Entertainment* provided by the guesthouses, suggesting that guesthouses should differentiate its entertainment activities to match the level of education and provide visitors with the desired levels of stimulation and escape. Prior experience with the guesthouse also resulted in two distinct groups of customers, namely those with no prior visits, and those with three and more visits. Those customers who have visited the guesthouse on more than three occasions had higher mean scores for *Entertainment*, *Escape*, *Atmospherics*, *Peace of mind*, and *Efficiency*, implying that repeat customers are more positive about their experience than first time customers. The latter points to the importance of loyalty, as repeat customers are the loyal ones, and guesthouse managers are advised to recognize customers who have visited the guesthouse before. These customers can be approached with special offerings such as discounts, and providing the preferred room and entertainment on each visit.

Finally, segmentation is an important marketing ploy, which can assist organizations in better understanding the needs, preferences and attitudes of a smaller group of customers (Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009) rather than trying to understand the total market. In addition, segmentation can also assist marketers in the effective use and targeting of marketing communication, and positioning of the organization (Juwaheer, 2007; Morritt, 2007; Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009), and optimizing the possibilities of influencing customer behavior (Stanford, 2014). The cluster analysis in the current study provided support that the guesthouse industry (at least within the current study focus) can segment the market into two distinct groups of customers. The first group can be customers between 31 to 50 years old with previous experience of the guesthouse and the second group are likely to be customers aged 18-30 and 51+ years with no prior visits to the guesthouse. Customers within the second cluster (18-30 and 51+ years) had lower mean scores when compared to customers in the first cluster, which could suggest that they had high expectations. Guesthouse managers are advised to tailor-made their services to meet the needs of the different group of customers. For example, those within the second cluster (18-30 and 51+ years) can be offered special guest rooms with age-relevant entertainment facilities, maximum security area and offered professional services.

Limitations and recommendations for further studies: Although the profile variables investigated in the current study might assist guesthouse managers in Ghana to overcome the numerous challenges facing the industry, it is important to acknowledge, and therefore it is recommended, that other variables, such as income, may be equally important. The study focused on only four major cities in Ghana, therefore further research may extend the horizon of the study area in the effort to generalize the findings. Finally, several authors have contextualized numerous realms of customer experience of which only five were investigated in the current study. An extension of the realms might be necessary to provide more scientific evidence within the study area.

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