EVALUATING GUEST RATINGS FOR SLH HOTELS IN CROATIA: AN EXAMINATION OF PLATFORMS FEATURING GUEST REVIEWS

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Abstract

Purpose - This study presents an empirical analysis of guest ratings assigned to SLH (Small Luxury Hotels of the World) properties in Croatia. The research examines TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Expedia guest-review platforms to identify patterns, trends, and variations in the ratings provided. By systematically investigating these platforms, the study aims to offer insights into the dynamics of guest assessments for SLH accommodations in Croatia, thereby enhancing understanding of the factors influencing guest perceptions and satisfaction within the luxury hotel sector. Given the increasing importance of online guest reviews in shaping consumer decisions in tourism, the analysis of guest-generated evaluations offers valuable insights into perceived service quality in the luxury hospitality segment.
Methodology/Design/Approach - The research is based on a quantitative analysis of secondary data obtained from three widely used online review platforms: TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and Expedia.
Findings - The findings show that guests consistently assign the highest ratings to attributes related to cleanliness and location across all platforms analyzed. These attributes appear to be the main determinants of guest satisfaction in the luxury hotel segment. In contrast, the lowest ratings are given to the attribute "value for money," indicating that even in luxury tourism, guests carefully assess whether the perceived quality of services justifies the price paid.
Originality of the research - The originality of this research lies in its focus on luxury hotels belonging to the Small Luxury Hotels of the World organization in Croatia, a segment that has not previously been systematically analyzed in academic literature. By combining data from multiple online review platforms, the study provides a comprehensive overview of the determinants of guest satisfaction within the Croatian luxury hotel sector and contributes to a deeper understanding of how luxury hotel services are evaluated by guests in the digital review environment.
Keywords luxury hotels, guest ratings, guest-review platforms, SLH brand, hotel attributes

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INTRODUCTION

Luxury travel will become more and more mainstream in the future. A growing number of tourists are looking for luxurious facilities and services when they travel. In the context of the global travel industry, luxury tourism represents a distinct and high-value segment that has seen significant growth in recent years, driven by rising disposable incomes, a desire for unique and enriching experiences, and a shift in consumer preferences towards curated and personalized travel. Padma and Ahn (2020) note that the concept of luxury in tourism and hospitality industry is gaining attention. Forbes (2025) states that the luxury travel market is a substantial and rapidly growing sector with a global reach, generating about $1.5 trillion each year. The luxury market is expected to reach $2.36 trillion within the next five years. According to Nasution and Mavondo (2008), customers perceive that luxury hotels offer greater value in the areas of reputation and quality. This means that customers expect luxury hotels to provide higher satisfaction through better quality of services and facilities. Pullman et al. (2005) point out that guests' preferences are best understood by analyzing feedback. Shu et al. (2023) particularly emphasizes the importance of guest feedback for success in the hotel industry. Numerous academic studies confirm that online reviews can provide rich insights into issues related to hospitality services (Roy, 2023; Roy et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2019).

Taechatungroj and Mathayomchan (2019) list several functions of online reviews: express the reviewers' emotions, describe real experiences, offer recommendations, and provide diagnostic information to consumers. Geetha et al. (2017) found that customer satisfaction and problems with hotel services influence the eWOM valence scores of hotels on online travel booking websites. Koutoulas and Vagena (2023) state that hotel guests are influenced by the ratings and reviews of other guests published on guest review platforms such as TripAdvisor and HotelCheck. TripAdvisor as the largest travel review website (Roy, 2023) is used in a variety of academic research (Abeysinghe & Bandara, 2022; Anderson, 2012; Jang & Moutinho, 2019).

Over the years, numerous research projects have focused on identifying the factors that influence guests' satisfaction with hotel accommodation and their feedback, the reviews. Recognizing the attributes that can influence the guest and their choice of a hotel is extremely important for the hotel industry. Callan (1997) defines ten groups of hotel attributes that influence the guest's decision: Location, Image, Price/Value, Competence, Access, Security, Additional Services, Tangibles-Bedroom, Tangibles-Other, Leisure Facilities and Service Providers. Lockyer (2003) points out the importance of understanding these components as they can ultimately lead to higher guest satisfaction, but can also help hoteliers prioritize when making their daily business decisions. For this reason, guest comments are often used to improve service and the efficient use of hotel resources. Hotel guests usually express their opinions about the hotel services through specialized online review platforms. Therefore, it is not surprising that online review platforms are the main source of guest feedback. Numerous previous studies (Padma & Ahn, 2020; O'Connor, 2008; Law & Cheung, 2006) investigated the quality of online hotel channels and hotel websites.

As these platforms are frequently used, they are a valuable tool for hotel industry management to monitor the quality of services offered and guest satisfaction. The ability to rate various attributes of hotel services with simple rating systems makes them attractive to guests and significantly influences their judgment. Review star ratings are the numbers of stars allocated by reviewers to their online reviews, indicating their assessment of the products/services consumed (Bigne et al., 2023). Previous research (Bigne et al., 2021; Pike et al., 2021; Sayfuddin & Chen, 2021) points to the impact of star ratings on consumers' purchase intentions and attitudes towards tourism services. Furthermore, Dhar and Bose (2022) note that consumers use the overall star rating as a heuristic reason for narrowing down the choice of services.

The study was carried out precisely because of the importance of the effect of guest reviews on the operation of luxury hotel facilities, but also on the overall satisfaction of the guest. The aim of the paper is to review the key attributes in the provision of luxury services and analyze their impact on guest satisfaction in hotel facilities belonging to the Small and Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) organization in Craotia. Despite the growing importance of luxury tourism and the increasing influence of online guest reviews on consumer decision-making, empirical studies focusing on luxury hotel ratings in Croatia are still scarce. In particular, no previous research has systematically analyzed guest reviews of hotels affiliated with the Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) organization across multiple online review platforms. This study therefore contributes to the literature by examining guest satisfaction attributes for SLH hotels in Croatia using data from several major online review platforms.

1. LUXURY SERVICES IN TOURISM

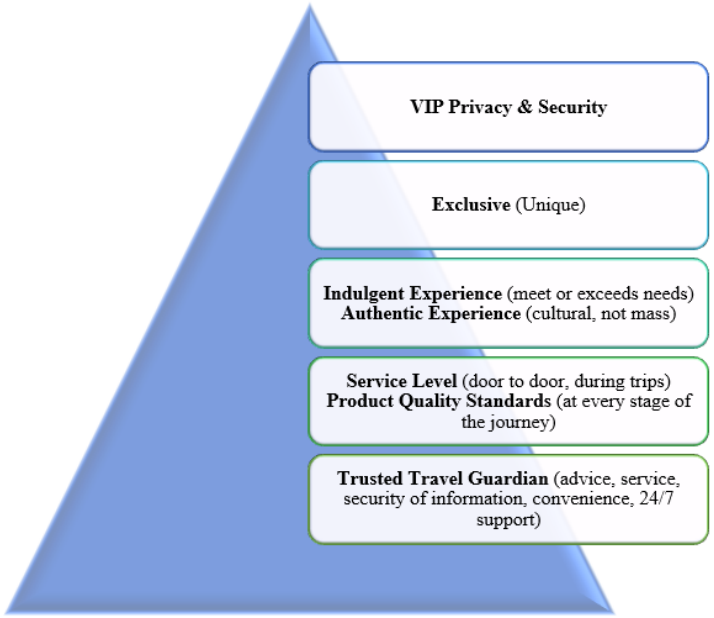
Pajić (2019) states that luxury goods are a specific phenomenon in today's society and economy. Luxury products are defined as high quality, expensive and non-essential products and services that are rare, exclusive, prestigious, authentic and offer a high level of symbolic and emotional/hedonic value through customer experiences (Tynan et al., 2010). The concept of luxury is very subjective (Wiedmann et al., 2009) and Le Monkhouse et al. (2012) point out that the meaning of luxury varies from person to person. Each person perceives luxury differently, depending on their position in society and their personal preferences. Luxury products and services can be described as products and services that are not essential to life and are an indicator of the social status that makes them desirable. Luxury can be a material product, but can also be contained in services that as such go beyond the satisfaction of personal needs and offer an experience that is not accessible to a wider circle of consumers. It is precisely luxury services that give rise to the luxury tourism offer, which includes personal added value for the guest and an authentic experience of staying in a hotel or destination.

Gržinić and Bobanović (2020) define luxury tourism as added value for the customer, which consequently implies a higher level of loyalty and satisfaction with the visit. According to Cerović et al. (2019) luxury tourism is characterized by a personalized, high-quality offer that attracts consumers through the special way in which services are provided.

The luxury hotel segment is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing niches (Jain et al., 2023; Correia et al., 2022; Back et al., 2021) of luxury tourism. Jain et al. (2023), referring to sources from Fortune Business Insights (2023), forecast the luxury hotel segment to grow from USD 93.4 billion in 2022 to USD 238.5 billion in 2028. These predictions underline the intense interest of guests in luxury experiences. Previous research has found that the luxury hotel industry provides an exceptional experience through emotional involvement (Jain et al., 2023), but also through other attributes such as ambient condition, interaction between guests and employees, employees' luxurious appearances, and personal touch during a service interaction. (Heo & Hyun, 2015).

Some authors point out that it is difficult to define the level of luxury in tourism services, as the understanding of luxury depends on the tourists' perspective; the individual perception of luxury in general (Cerović et al., 2019; Stankova & Kaleichev, 2013). Some authors state that luxury tourism is becoming a recognizable market niche that makes those who can afford it feel special (Kemp & Dłużewska, 2023). To meet the needs of luxury travelers, a high level of customer service, personalization and flexibility are essential (CBI EU, 2023). The needs pyramid below shows the levels of demand in luxury tourism. The higher up the pyramid the luxury consumer sees themselves, the higher the level of luxury they require. And the smaller the population of luxury tourists becomes.

Figure 1: **Hierarchy of needs in luxury tourism**



Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting: https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/tourism/luxury-tourism/market-potential

Padma and Ahn (2020), referring to research by Khoo-Lattimore and Ekiz (2014), point out that guest comments can be divided into five main categories: Room, Staff, Food, Service and Location.

Room-related attributes such as the size of the room, the bathroom, the bed and the shower are defined as important factors that influence guests in the study by O'Connor (2008). Further research has shown that the room cleanliness, service quality and staff specialization determine guest satisfaction (Lu et al., 2015), with these attributes introduced as criteria for guest evaluation of hotel services.

An additional criterion that guests often evaluate is the attribute "value". Graf (2007) states that value on the customer side can be perceived as the value guaranteed by a company's product or service. Raza et al. (2012) state that customer value can be divided into perceived customer value and desired customer value, but point out that each person has their own perception of value. In particular, Nasution and Mavondo (2008) point out how customers perceive that luxury hotels offer higher value in the areas of reputation and quality. Lu et al. (2015) conclude that customers expect higher ranked hotels to offer higher satisfaction through better service quality and facilities. Mainly for this reason, service and facilities are one of the attributes that guests often rate in their reviews of hotel facilities.

Taken together, this body of literature indicates that guest satisfaction in the luxury hotel segment is shaped by a recurring and relatively limited set of attribute categories, rather than by isolated or idiosyncratic factors. Room- and facility-related aspects (O'Connor, 2008; Lu et al., 2015), staff and service quality (Lu et al., 2015; Nasution & Mavondo, 2008), and the perceived value of the offering relative to its price (Graf, 2007; Raza et al., 2012; Nasution & Mavondo, 2008) emerge consistently across these studies as the core dimensions along which guests evaluate luxury accommodation. This convergence is further reflected in the broader classification proposed by Padma and Ahn (2020), who group guest evaluations of hotel services into five categories: room, staff, food, service, and location. Rather than treating these contributions as separate strands, the present study synthesizes them into a single conceptual framework. Since cleanliness, location, staff/service, and value for money are the attribute categories that recur most consistently across the reviewed literature and are also the criteria common to all three platforms analyzed (TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and Expedia), they are adopted here as the guiding framework for the empirical analysis of guest ratings for SLH-affiliated luxury hotels in Croatia.

2. CROATIAN LUXURY HOTELS IN THE SMALL LUXURY HOTELS OF THE WORLD ASSOCIATION

The hospitality industry is an important driver of tourism in the Republic of Croatia. With a total of 83 thousand accommodation units in 2025, 26.3 million overnight stays were realized in hotels (DZS, 2026). Of the total number of hotel facilities in the Republic of Croatia, 15% of accommodation facilities belong to a high category of hotel accommodation (5 stars, special standards) (MINTS, 2026). In terms of tourism trends, that indicate an increase in the number of luxury tourists seeking value for money, uniqueness and personal experiences, the luxury hotel industry is presented as a leading trend in the Croatian hotel industry. The need for the development of the luxury segment in the Croatian hotel industry is recognized, and thus the Strategy for the Development of Sustainable Tourism by 2030 (NN, 2022) emphasizes the importance of promoting investments in the luxury hotel segment. The luxury hotel industry can make an important contribution to the economic prosperity of a region and play a decisive role in increasing the attractiveness of tourism destinations.

Depending on their mode of operation, luxury hotels can be divided into independent hotels, branded hotels and hotels operated as part of a marketing alliance brand (Floričić, 2022). Small Luxury Hotels of the World is one of the better-known organizations of luxury hotels operating under a common brand. Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) (2026) is an organization that brings together 520 luxury hotels in more than 90 countries around the world. With an average number of around 50 accommodations, the hotels in the SLH hotel group guarantee a personal approach to the guest and a unique experience. The activities of the SLH organization are focused on the preservation of the environment, respect for the local community and the sustainability of the hotel facilities. The SHL organization includes 8 luxury hotels from Croatia: Boutique Hotel Alhambra, D-resort Šibenik, Hotel Bellevue Dubrovnik, Hotel Excelsior Dubrovnik, Hotel Vestibul Palace, Palazzo Rainis Hotel & Spa, San Canzian Village & Hotel, Boutique & Design Hotel Navis (SLH, 2026).

Boutique Hotel Alhambra (2026) is part of the Lošinj Hotels & Villas hotel group on the island of Lošinj and has 36 deluxe rooms and 15 suites. Among the many luxurious hotel facilities available to guests, the fine dining restaurant Alfred Keller stands out, listed by Gault Millau as one of the best restaurants and awarded a Michelin star. The D-resort Šibenik (2026) is a luxury hotel in central Dalmatia in the town of Šibenik. It is characterized by its luxurious interior and exterior design and by the promotion of sustainability in the hotel industry, which is why it has also received the "Green Key" certificate. D-Resort Šibenik has a total of 63 luxury rooms, 6 apartments and 3 luxury villas. Hotel Bellevue Dubrovnik (2026) is located in the far south of the Republic of Croatia in the city of Dubrovnik and belongs to the Adriatic Luxury Hotels group. It has a total of 91 accommodation units and is characterized by its location as one of its main attributes, in addition to the numerous services available to guests, especially those related to the gastronomic and wellness & spa enjoyment of the guest.

Hotel Excelsior Dubrovnik (2026) is another luxury hotel that belongs to the Adriatic Luxury Hotels group. It is also located in Dubrovnik, in a former royal villa from 1913, which emphasizes the cultural and historical significance of the building. It offers 158 different types of luxuriously furnished accommodation. Three different restaurant concepts stand out from the offer for luxury guests, the Sensus fine dining restaurant, the Prora beach restaurant and the Salin hotel restaurant, which interpret traditional national dishes in a contemporary way, but also offer guests a variety of international cuisines. Hotel Vestibul Palace (2026) is located in the city of Split in Diocletian's Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Hrvatska enciklopedija, 2025) that combines cultural-historical heritage and contemporary design. Considering the total capacity of 7 accommodation units, the exclusivity of the services and the privacy of the guests are one of the distinguishing features they offer to their guests.

The other two luxury hotels in the SLH family are located on the Istrian peninsula: Palazzo Rainis Hotel & Spa in Novigrad and San Canzian Village & Hotel in Buje. Palazzo Rainis Hotel & Spa (2026) is a small luxury hotel complex that has 16 design-oriented rooms and offers its guests numerous luxury services, among which the exclusive spa offer stands out. San Canzian Village & Hotel (2026), built on the foundations of a medieval village, is characterized by the combination of authentic Istrian heritage and rural architecture, which makes it special and unique. It has 28 accommodation units surrounded by olive groves and the famous vineyards of San Canzian. The most recent hotel from Croatia to join the SLH association is Boutique & Design Hotel Navis. Boutique & Design Hotel Navis (2026) is located in Kvarner Bay in Opatija. It is a modern design property with 40 accommodation units. The hotel's distinctive feature is its contemporary architectural design, which follows the shape of the rocky coastline on which it is built, and the fact that all accommodation units are oriented towards the sea.

3. METODOLOGY

In line with previous studies and to analyse luxury hotel service ratings and the attributes that provide the greatest sense of guest satisfaction, this research uses guest satisfaction rating data from the three most relevant platforms for hotel accommodation. The study refers to luxury hotels that belong to the Small Luxury Hotels of the World organization and are located in the Republic of Croatia. There are 8 hotels in total: Boutique Hotel Alhambra, D-resort Šibenik, Hotel Bellevue Dubrovnik, Hotel Excelsior Dubrovnik, Hotel Vestibul Palace, Palazzo Rainis Hotel & Spa, San Canzian Village & Hotel, Boutique & Design Hotel Navis. The research adopts a quantitative research design based on secondary data analysis of online guest reviews collected from major review platforms and comparative cross-platform review analysis. The most commonly used websites for hotel reviews are: Google, TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Expedia, Hotels.com, Yelp, Facebook, Orbitz and Travelocity. These platforms were developed specifically for the tourism sector and promote reviews of consumer experiences in this sector (Xiang et al., 2017). TripAdvisor, the largest travel review website (Roy, 2023), is used in numerous academic studies (Abeysinghe & Bandara, 2022; Anderson, 2012; Jang & Moutinho, 2019) and is considered one of the most important review platforms for hotels (Padma & Ahn, 2020; Torres et al., 2015). Xu and Li (2016) base their study on data collected via the Booking.com platform. Oliveira et al. (2019) point out that the Booking.com platform is the most frequently used in the papers examined, as it is internationally recognized as the leading accommodation booking platform at present. Numerous academic studies have used the Expedia platform as a means of collecting and analyzing data relevant to the hotel industry (Zhou, 2023; Wang et al., 2015). Research has shown that the most popular platforms for reviewing hotel services are TripAdvisor (over 1.3 million hotel listings and 730 million users), Booking.com (30 million hotel listings) and Expedia (675 million website visits per month) (Podium, 2023), which is why these platforms are used in the further analysis of this research.

All platforms have a prominent rating for overall hotel service in intervals from 1 (lowest rating) to 5 (highest rating) on the TripAdvisor platform, while the Booking.com and Expedia platforms use intervals from 1 (lowest rating) to 10 (highest rating) as the overall rating for hotel service. The criteria on which guests can evaluate the hotel services include the following attributes: staff/service, cleanliness, amenities, eco-friendliness, property condition& facilities, comfort, free Wi-Fi, value for money, location. Depending on the platform, there are slight differences in the attributes that guest's rate, but the attributes cleanliness, service/staff and value can be rated by guests on all the platforms mentioned. Data were collected from the TripAdvisor, Booking.com and Expedia platforms in March 2026. For all hotels included in the sample, the overall numerical guest ratings were obtained according to the predefined evaluation criteria available on these platforms. The study used aggregated ratings for individual hotel service attributes without including additional guest comments, i.e. descriptive written reviews.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

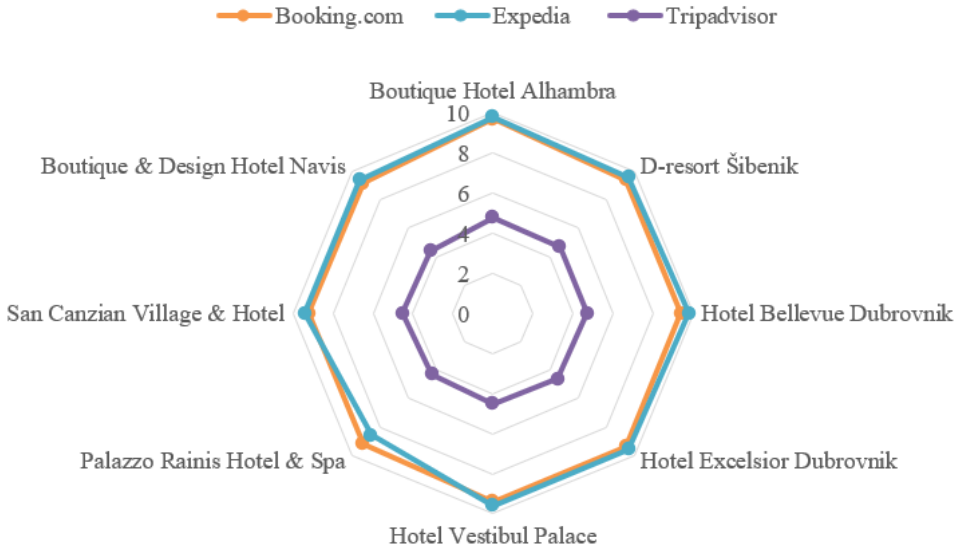
As previously stated, data for eight hotels belonging to the SLH group were analyzed using the three most relevant platforms that collect guest ratings and reviews. Out of a total of 12,073 reviews, the highest numbers are for Hotel Bellevue Dubrovnik (3,679) and Hotel Excelsior Dubrovnik (2,598), while the lowest are for Palazzo Rainis Hotel & Spa (270) and Boutique Hotel Alhambra (222).

Table 1: **Total number of reviews on the observed platforms**

Luxury Hotels in SLH Organization	Online platforms		
	TripAdvisor	Booking.com	Expedia
Boutique Hotel Alhambra	113	89	20
D-resort Šibenik	549	963	237
Hotel Bellevue Dubrovnik	2183	495	1001
Hotel Excelsior Dubrovnik	857	784	957
Hotel Vestibul Palace	557	481	366
Palazzo Rainis Hotel & Spa	22	233	15
San Canzian Village & Hotel	179	228	26
Boutique & Design Hotel Navis	363	1152	203
TOTAL	**4823**	**4425**	**2825**

Source: Authors' own study based on: www.tripadvisor.com; www.booking.com; www.expedia.com

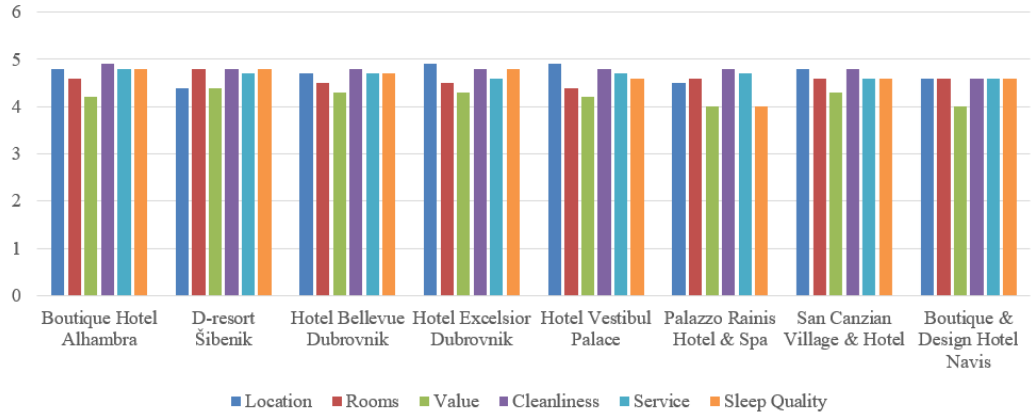
Figure 2: **Overall hotel ratings**



Source: Authors' own study based on: www.tripadvisor.com; www.booking.com; www.expedia.com

When analyzing the overall ratings of the hotel facilities, the Boutique Hotel Alhambra has the highest ratings on the platforms Booking.com (9.7) and TripAdvisor (4,8), while on the platform Expedia the Hotel Bellevue Dubrovnik has the highest rating of 9.8. All other hotels are in the high rating range of 9.2 - 9.4 on the Booking.com platform, 9.4 – 9.6 on the Expedia platform and 4,3 - 4.7 on the TripAdvisor platform. Of the eight hotels analyzed from the group of SLH facilities in Croatia, Palazzo Rainis Hotel & Spa received the lowest rating according to the data from the selected platforms.

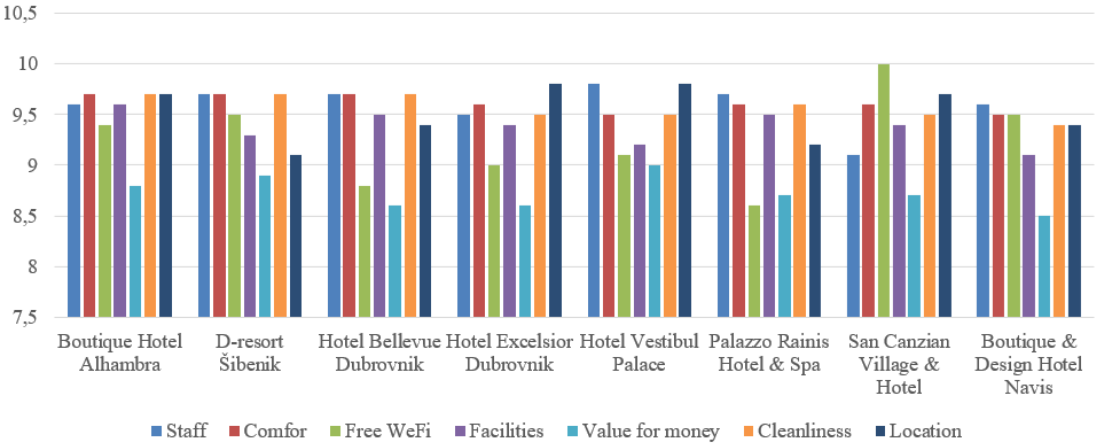
Figure 3: **TripAdvisor ratings**



Source: Authors' own study based on www.tripadvisor.com

TripAdvisor, the world's largest review platform, unlike other platforms, has a specific review ranking for individual attributes of hotel services, ranging from 1 to 5. According to the data analyzed on this platform, guests of luxury hotels in Croatia gave the highest rating for the attribute of cleanliness (average grade 4.8), while the attributes of location and service were rated at average 4.7. Guests gave the lowest rating for the attribute "value", which ranged between 4 and 4.4 depending on the luxury hotel. Three hotels, The Boutique Hotel Alhambra, D-resort Šibenik and Hotel Excelsior Dubrovnik received the highest average score of 4.7 for all attributes assessed.

Figure 4: **Booking.com ratings**



Source: Authors' own study based on www.booking.com

The data from Booking.com shows us that guests give the hotels the best marks for the attributes of staff, comfort and cleanliness (9.6), followed by the attributes of location and facilities, with high marks of 9.5 and 9.4. Guests rated the attributes of free Wi-Fi (9.2) slightly lower. Guests gave the hotels the lowest score for the value for money attribute (8.7), which is quite interesting data considering that these are luxury hotel properties that offer top luxury-level services to a specific and limited segment of hotel guests.

Figure 5: **Expedia ratings**

Source: Authors' own study based on www.expedia.com

Analysis of the data collected via the Expedia platform shows that guests gave the attribute of cleanliness of hotel facilities the highest score (9.8). The hotel service attribute guests rate slightly lower (9.5). When analyzing the ratings for the individual hotel facilities in this segment, three hotels Boutique Hotel Alhambra, Hotel Bellevue Dubrovnik and San Canzian Village & Hotel stand out with high ratings (10) for cleanliness.

This research shows that cleanliness and location are the most important attributes, as all analyzed platforms monitor guest satisfaction with these elements. All analyzed hotels on the researched platforms receive the highest average ratings from guests for cleanliness and location. The lowest average ratings for all hotels on all observed platforms are in the value for money segment. Guests have always paid attention to "value for money" and this attribute is further emphasized in the luxury hotel industry. The results of this research suggest that the physical environment may play a prominent role in determining customers' perceptions of the value of luxury hotels (Mattila, 1999). Further research has confirmed that guests rate the quality of the "tangible" dimension of the hotel product the lowest (Al Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011), from which it can be concluded that luxury hotels need to pay more attention to the physical aspects of service quality. Lu et al. (2015) state that these areas include equipment and facilities, appearance of employees, materials associated with service, and operating hours in hotels. It can be concluded that investment in the physical appearance of luxury properties, both inside and outside, can influence guests' perception and evaluation of the value attribute.

The scientific contribution of this study is evident in several aspects that extend the existing body of knowledge on guest satisfaction and luxury hotel services. The paper contributes to the academic literature by providing an empirical analysis of guest ratings for luxury hotels affiliated with the Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) organization in Croatia. While previous studies have extensively examined online guest reviews in the hospitality industry, limited research has focused specifically on the luxury hotel segment within smaller tourism markets such as Croatia. The study contributes methodologically by integrating data from multiple online review platforms – TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and Expedia – to analyze guest evaluations of luxury hotel services. This comparative approach allows for the identification of consistent patterns in guest satisfaction across different digital review environments, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how service attributes are evaluated by hotel guests. The research contributes to the literature on service quality in luxury hospitality by identifying the attributes that receive the highest and lowest guest ratings. The findings show that cleanliness, and location are the most highly valued attributes among guests of luxury hotels, whereas perceived value for money is the lowest-rated attribute across the analyzed platforms. These results provide empirical evidence on the importance of aligning luxury service offerings with guests' expectations regarding the relationship between service quality and price. Finally, the study highlights the emerging relevance of eco-friendly practices in the evaluation of hotel services. Although environmental sustainability is not yet a standard attribute across most online review platforms, the inclusion of eco-friendliness practices in hotels indicates the growing importance of sustainable hotel operations in shaping guest perceptions and satisfaction in the luxury tourism segment. Overall, the study contributes to a better understanding of how luxury hotel services are evaluated in the digital review environment and provides a foundation for future research examining guest satisfaction and service quality in the luxury hospitality sector.

The findings of this study can be more directly linked to the existing literature on hotel service quality and guest satisfaction. The consistently high ratings for cleanliness and location, contrasted with the comparatively low ratings for value for money, support earlier evidence that the physical environment strongly shapes guests' perceptions of value (Mattila, 1999) and that guests tend to rate the tangible dimensions of hotel service the lowest (Al Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011), while elements such as facilities, equipment and staff appearance remain central to how that value is judged (Lu et al., 2015). These results are also consistent with the notion that price functions as a signal of luxury (Al Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011) and that higher prices raise guest expectations regarding service, location and comfort (Dolnicar, 2002), which helps explain why value for money remains the most sensitive attribute even among high-performing luxury properties. From a theoretical perspective, these findings extend prior research on guest satisfaction in the hospitality sector (Nasution & Mavondo, 2008; Padma & Ahn, 2020) by confirming, within a previously unexamined market segment, that satisfaction in luxury accommodation depends less on absolute service levels than on the perceived alignment between price and the experience delivered. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that SLH-affiliated hotels in Croatia should continue to invest in the physical environment and in personalized service delivery (Callan, 1997; Lockyer, 2003), while more clearly communicating the added value embedded in their offering, in order to narrow the gap between guest expectations and perceived value for money observed consistently across all three platforms analyzed.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that guests of luxury hotels affiliated with the Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) organization in Croatia consistently assign the highest ratings to attributes related to cleanliness, and location across all analyzed online review platforms. These results confirm the crucial role of service quality and the physical environment in shaping guest satisfaction within the luxury hospitality segment.

Conversely, the lowest ratings were consistently associated with the attribute "value" or "value for money," suggesting that even in the luxury tourism segment, guests carefully assess whether the perceived benefits of the service justify the price paid. This finding highlights the importance for luxury hotel operators to ensure that the level of service quality, facilities, and

overall guest experience adequately reflects the premium prices charged. It has already been emphasized that the concept of luxury tourism implies an added value for the guest, carefully designed programs and services that are not only aimed at filling free time, but represent an added value that cannot be bought with money and makes the stay at a destination an authentic experience. Irrespective of this, however, the guest should not feel cheated or deprived of the quality of the service or value for money. Luxury services in tourism are, by their very nature, expensive services that must justify their price by the quality of the service, the uniqueness and the quality of the offer. It is undoubtedly that luxury hotels are generally differentiated from other hotels by the physical environment and personalized services of luxury properties where hotel services are offered to guests. The facilities of luxury hotels require a large investment capital to create an impressive appearance. These costs, in addition to the cost of staff who must provide a high level of personalized service to guests, mean that operating in the luxury hotel segment involves high extraordinary costs. Al Khattab and Aldehayyat (2011) state that prices are an indicator of luxury, and this is how luxury hotels can be differentiated from other hotels. Consequently, Dolnicar (2002) points out that higher prices lead to higher guest expectations in terms of good service, location, pleasant atmosphere, large rooms and comfort in general. Therefore, hotels within the SLH organization operating in Croatia should continuously monitor guest feedback on online review platforms and adjust their service offerings accordingly to ensure that guests perceive the delivered experience as consistent with the price paid. Particular attention should be given to maintaining high standards in the physical environment and service delivery, as these factors significantly influence guests' perception of value.

Another important insight from this study concerns the growing significance of sustainability and environmentally responsible hotel operations. Although eco-friendliness is not yet a standard attribute on online review platforms, this attribute is becoming an increasingly relevant factor in evaluating hotel services. With rising awareness of sustainability issues among travelers, particularly in the luxury tourism segment, hotels that adopt environmentally responsible practices may achieve higher levels of guest satisfaction and loyalty. By evaluating hotel performance in the eco-friendly segment, the online platform would take a step forward in an area that is becoming increasingly prominent in the tourism market, as new guests are paying more attention to this attribute.

Hotel companies, especially those that base part of their business on luxury hotel services, such as InterContinental Hotel Group (IHG, 2020), Hilton and Marriott (Yu et al., 2017), have integrated eco-friendly activities (Kang et al., 2012) into various business areas. In fact, this proves to be one of the most important factors for their guest satisfaction. Lagun (2023) points out that environmentally conscious hotels increase guest satisfaction. Yusof et al. (2017) point out that implementing green practices has an overall positive impact on customer satisfaction. Furthermore, research shows that guests in luxury accommodations are willing to participate in environmentally friendly activities (Bruns-Smith et al., 2015). Customer satisfaction acts as a mediating variable between environmentally friendly actions and customer loyalty, as environmentally friendly practices have a positive impact on customer satisfaction, which in turn has a significant impact on customer loyalty (Yusof et al., 2017). Research has shown that guests have a positive image of a hotel when the hotel implements sustainable business and environmental management activities, which ultimately leads to guests' intention to return (Ham & Han, 2013; Baker et al., 2013).

In this context, the results of the present study contribute to a better understanding of the determinants of guest satisfaction in luxury hotels in Croatia and highlight the importance of continuously aligning service quality, pricing strategies, and sustainability initiatives with the evolving expectations of luxury travelers.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite providing valuable insights into guest satisfaction within luxury hotels belonging to the SLH organization in Croatia, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research relies exclusively on data collected from three online review platforms (Booking.com, TripAdvisor, and Expedia). Although these platforms are among the most widely used review channels in the tourism industry, they do not cover the full range of online feedback sources available to travelers. Other platforms may offer additional perspectives on guest satisfaction. The study is based on aggregated rating scores rather than individual textual reviews, which limits the ability to capture deeper insights into guests' experiences and perceptions. Numerical ratings alone may not fully reflect the complexity of guest satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Future research should broaden the scope of analysis by incorporating additional online review platforms, particularly those specializing in luxury tourism and high-end hospitality services. In addition, future studies should consider applying content analysis or text mining techniques to examine the textual component of guest reviews. These approaches would enable researchers to identify recurring themes, emotional expressions, and service quality issues that may not be apparent from numerical ratings alone. Another promising direction for future research is to investigate the relationship between sustainability practices and guest satisfaction, particularly in the luxury hotel segment, where environmentally responsible operations are becoming increasingly important. Including eco-friendliness as an evaluative attribute may provide valuable insights into the evolving expectations of luxury travelers.

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