

Is tourist accommodation homogeneous? An analysis of the adults-only category through a three-step approach

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Structured abstract

Purpose: This paper classifies tourist accommodation using data from Booking.com and TripAdvisor, and analyses the extent to which the different segments identified differ in terms of being adults-only.

Design/methodology/approach: 1,535 properties located in nine Spanish sun and beach destinations were examined using a latent class cluster analysis (LCCA). The bias-adjusted three-step approach was used to investigate the differences between belonging to adults-only accommodation or not among the identified clusters.

Findings: Results show that adults-only accommodation tends to belong to the cluster with higher online ratings. In small Spanish islands, adults-only hotels account for a

large share (more than 25%) of hotels.

Research limitations: It was not possible to analyse whether the higher rating was due to the accommodation being better or due to the tourists being more satisfied with their stay.

Practical implications: In urban destinations, the model is not widely used. However, in coastal destinations it is becoming more than a novelty or a new trend.

Social implications: In small Spanish islands, people traveling with children are becoming a minority. Families may feel discriminated against and express dissatisfaction with this situation in the future.

Originality/value: This study covers the gap in the academic literature on this growing hotel segment.

Keywords: adults-only, segmentation, latent class cluster, Spain

Introduction

Segmentation is an essential marketing instrument. It is based on the knowledge that customer preferences are heterogeneous (Franke and Piller, 2004), and that the segmentation process creates more homogeneous groups. Thus, segmentation divides the potential market into smaller homogeneous segments, each with its unique characteristics, preferences, and needs (Smith, 1956).

Tourism markets are generally considered heterogeneous (Dolnicar, 2008) for two main reasons. First, currently people from almost every socio-demographic group travel. Second, each tourist has a different concept of their ideal vacation. This heterogeneity is the reason why segmentation processes are very common in travel and

tourism in general, and in the hospitality industry in particular (Crawford-Welch, 1990). In hospitality, markets are divided into lifestyle segments (Ahani *et al.*, 2019; Scott and Parfitt, 2005), benefit segments (Beane and Ennis, 1987), geographic segments (McKercher *et al.*, 2022), and demographic segments (Kotler and Keller, 2015), amongst others. Tourism services are moving towards more individualised packages in order to improve profitability (Çınar *et al.*, 2020).

Adults-only hotels (also known as child-free hotels, childless hotels and hotels for adults) are part of this segmentation process. Adults-only hotels do not cater for customers who are under a certain age. The specific age depends on the policy of each property. Although these hotels currently account for a significant percentage of the accommodation in many places, they have received little attention from the academic sphere. The only information available is published in magazines or blogs.

This study conducts an initial analysis of adults-only hotels, using publicly available quantitative data. The aim of this study is, therefore, twofold: (1) to classify tourist accommodation based on data from Booking.com and TripAdvisor; and (2) to analyse the extent to which the different segments identified differ in terms of being adults-only accommodation.

Literature review

Two of the main reasons for engaging in tourism activities are relaxation and pleasure (Krippendorff, 1999). People look for good weather, try to relax, spend time with those who they care for, and get emotionally and physically refreshed (Kozak, 2002). The search for relaxation involves the need for a quiet environment. In a study of online reviews of hotels in Washington, D.C., noise was the fourth most frequent grounds for complaint (16.5%) (Levy *et al.*, 2013). Another study of online hotel reviews identified the words “noise” and “quiet” in the primary words of customer reviews (Xiang *et al.*,

2015).

Peaceful coexistence with children in a hotel environment becomes more complex when parents opt for certain parenting styles, specifically Baumrind's "permissive" style of parenting (Baumrind, 1996). The presence of children in hotel facilities can cause noise and inconvenience for guests (Backer and Schänzel, 2013; Schänzel and Yeoman, 2015; Walls *et al.*, 2011). Noise and inconvenience are more likely to affect tourists who spend most of the day in the hotel, as opposed to tourists who spend most of the day off the premises, as is usually the case in urban environments.

A qualitative study conducted in an Australian coastal hotel, including interviews with staff and managers, identified adults' main objections to sharing a hotel with children (Bunzel *et al.*, 2002). According to the study, children are labelled as the main "troublemakers" because they are loud, constantly chase each other around the hotel, vandalise hotel property, and disturb other guests.

Market segmentation in the tourism industry has led to the emergence of various market niches (Bloom, 2005; Graf, 2011). The academic field has therefore studied niches such as markets for parents with young children (Hay, 2017; Khoo-Lattimore *et al.*, 2015, 2018); the adventure travel market (Sung *et al.*, 2000); sports tourism in general (Bull and Weed, 1999), and specific sports travel such as golf (Tassiopoulos and Haydam, 2008) or surfing (Fluker, 2003); markets for disabled guests (Huh and Singh, 2007; Ozturk *et al.*, 2008); wellness tourism, and more specifically, yoga (Lehto *et al.*, 2006). The personalization of offered services, when it responds to a real demand, can lead to increased hotel occupancy and/or price increments that consumers are willing to pay (Tomczyk *et al.*, 2022).

In this same line of segmentation and market niches within the accommodation sector, the concept of child-free tourism emerges, offering child-free holidays, often associated with elements of exclusivity, luxury or peacefulness (Vicentini, 2017). These child-free spaces are emerging along the entire value chain of the tourism sector, with airlines creating adults-only zones in response to the classic problem of babies crying on planes (Gibbs, 2023; Small and Harris, 2014). Similarly, the main attraction for the guests of adults-only hotels is that they can avoid the noise and disturbance often caused by children (Walls *et al.*, 2011).

A conventional hotel can occasionally be transformed into a specialised adults-only hotel without any substantial investment, simply by adapting the facilities (Carriles Bedia, 2020). For example, in a holiday hotel, it may suffice to eliminate or transform children's areas and, optionally, incorporate specific services for adults. Séraphin *et al.* (2020) also point to the fact that adults-only hotels can be a way of dealing with seasonality. Family hotels, mainly frequented by families with school-age children, experience large drops in demand on school days.

Adults-only hotels are considered an interesting, curious, and novel niche market, which is growing significantly (Yılmaz *et al.*, 2018). Although such a restriction has been interpreted as a form of discrimination prohibited by law (portugalpress, 2016; Sonti, 2009), adults-only hotels appear to have been increasingly accepted by tourists, as proved by the fact that the number of adults-only hotels has steadily grown in the last few years (Uniglobe, 2018). Adults-only hotels usually elude accusations of discrimination by advertising that they do not have facilities or services to cater for children, such as cots, an extra bed in the room, children's food, and so on (Carriles Bedia, 2020). A study published in 2017 highlighted the growing presence of adults-only hotels worldwide, with an annual growth of 167% (Canalis, 2017). The

study also ranked each country according to the number of adults-only hotels. Japan and Brazil led the rankings. In Europe, Spain ranked first, with 123 hotels, and Turkey second, with 59 (Canalis, 2017). In the rest of Europe, the proliferation of adults-only hotels is unequal. While there are numerous such establishments in Greece and Germany, there are almost no adults-only hotels in England, Italy or France (Biga, 2017).

Interestingly, information published about adults-only accommodation is almost exclusively restricted to certain magazines or news websites. In the academic sphere, little research has been conducted on the segment of adults-only hotels, even though more specialised segments with a very limited audience (such as yoga or surfing) have been examined (Picazo-Peral and Moreno-Gil, 2018). One of the few manuscripts that deals with the case of adults-only hotels is by Séraphin *et al.* (2020). However, this research deals rather with the situation of children who are excluded from some hotels than with adults-only hotels. A recent book on “managing hotels” dedicates an entire chapter to this issue, analysing the advantages and disadvantages (Gupta, 2020). However, it approaches the topic from a predominantly business-oriented perspective.

Therefore, the main objective of this research is to analyse the adults-only model: where it is more frequently implemented and what the main characteristics of the accommodation units that have incorporated this business model involve.

Methodology

This study focuses on Spain, the European country with the highest number of hotels classified as adults-only. It was challenging to obtain an accurate census of adults-only accommodation, as the main international websites do not include an option to search for “adults-only” accommodation. Therefore, this research used a local travel agency (El Corte Inglés) that is almost exclusively based in Spain and has a specific option to

search for adults-only accommodation. At the same time, a search for accommodation listed on Booking.com that included the word “adult” was carried out. A search was also performed on Google to find out whether these types of hotel are classified under any other names.

The initial search with El Corte Inglés found 281 adults-only properties in Spain. When the results were broken down by destination, it was found that the large majority of the 281 hotels were in sun and beach destinations. In fact, the two largest Spanish cities (Madrid and Barcelona) only had five adults-only properties.

This study focused on destinations with a minimum of 10 adults-only hotels. These destinations were the three largest of the Balearic Islands (Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza), the four largest of the Canary Islands (Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura), as well as the Costa del Sol, in Malaga, and the Costa Blanca, in Alicante. The sample included almost 95% of the adults-only hotels identified. Data were downloaded in March 2019, just before the onset of the covid-19 pandemic.

The numerical information provided by the reviews of websites such as Booking.com, based on eWOM attribute ratings, is of great interest, having previously been used in studies on segmentation in the tourist accommodation market (Nessel *et al.*, 2021). In order to compare adults-only hotels with hotels that do not specialise as adults-only, data for all the hotels in the selected destinations that were listed on Booking.com were also included.

The final sample was composed of 1,535 properties with at least 20 reviews, of which 264 were adults-only properties. The rating and stars of each property were downloaded from Booking.com. Each property was assigned a dichotomous variable indicating whether it was an adults-only property.

Each property was matched with its profile on TripAdvisor. This allowed to obtain the following additional data from TripAdvisor: number of rooms, average daily rate, information on amenities (e.g. pool, free Wi-Fi, spa), and hotel typology.

A latent class cluster analysis (LCCA) was used to identify homogeneous groups or “classes” within a population of tourist accommodation. This technique presents several advantages compared to traditional segmentation techniques (Vermunt and Magidson, 2005). Latent GOLD 5.1 was used to develop this LCCA. The seven variables used as indicators for the latent class cluster analysis were the different attribute ratings on Booking.com (facilities, cleanliness, comfort, value for money, location, staff and free Wi-Fi). To outline the resulting segments, the following covariates were introduced: type of accommodation, destination, the existence of a spa, restaurant, free parking, room service and multilingual staff, belonging to a hotel chain, accommodation size (number of rooms), minimum price and maximum price. Groupings that meet the principles of maximum internal coherence and maximum external differentiation based on the positioning of the different individuals in relation to these variables were obtained. In many applications of the LCCA, the priority is to not only determine the number of latent classes (segments) but also to link class membership to external variables, such as, in this case, whether or not the accommodation is adults-only or not (Bakk and Vermunt, 2015). This approach is based on the concept that when assigning individuals to the latent classes, the number of classification errors can be estimated and subsequently corrected in the third step (Vermunt and Magidson, 2016). Bakk *et al.* (2013) and Vermunt (2010) further refined the methodology to account for bias. The new Step3 submodule in Latent GOLD implements these bias-adjusted three-step methods.

Three-step latent class analysis entails carrying out the following steps (Vermunt and Magidson, 2016): (1) First, a latent class model for a set of indicator variables is constructed. This step entails selecting the appropriate indicators and determining the number of classes. In this research, this is the global segmentation for the aforementioned indicators and covariates. (2) Then, cases are assigned to latent classes, and the classification information is saved to a file. (3) In the third step, the latent classification scores saved in Step 2 are related to external variables of interest, in this case whether the accommodation is adults-only or not, with the classification error corrected to avoid bias.

Model parameters were estimated using Latent GOLD 5.1. Full details on the parameter estimation method are available in Vermunt and Magidson (2016).

Findings

Adults-only hotels were more common amongst four- and five-star hotels. In both these groups, more than 20% of the hotels were adults-only, in contrast, only 10.7% of three-star hotels were adults-only. Adults-only accommodation is found in a higher proportion in small islands (Ibiza: 38.2%, Fuerteventura: 26.7%) than in peninsular destinations (Costa Blanca: 8.6%, Costa del Sol: 6.2%). Information of the sample can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Tourist accommodations per destination analysed and segmented by adults-only

		Accommodations				Chi-square (χ^2)	p-value
		Total	Non adults-only	Adults-only	% of adults-only		
Destination	Costa Blanca	243	222	21	8.6%	76.324	0.000
	Costa del Sol	258	242	16	6.2%		
	Fuerteventura	45	33	12	26.7%		
	Gran Canaria	101	77	24	23.8%		
	Ibiza	89	55	34	38.2%		
	Lanzarote	46	34	12	26.1%		
	Mallorca	557	452	105	18.9%		
	Menorca	48	34	14	29.2%		
	Tenerife	148	122	26	17.6%		
Type of accommodation	1-star hotels	36	35	1	2.8%	48.474	0.000
	2-star hotels	141	132	9	6.4%		

3-star hotels	392	350	42	10.7%
4-star hotels	736	567	169	23.0%
5-star hotels	131	102	29	22.1%
Other accommodations	99	85	14	14.1%
Total	1535	1271	264	17.2%

Focusing exclusively on four- and five-star hotels, the market share of adults-only hotels is even higher. For example, in Ibiza 47% of the four- and five-star hotels are adults-only, while in other destinations (Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, Menorca) it is close to or above 30%.

Latent class cluster analysis: A typology of tourist accommodation based on Booking.com attribute ratings

The first step in the LCCA involved choosing the optimum number of clusters/segments. The model was programmed to estimate from one to eight clusters and provided the summary of the estimation and the adjustment indices for each model. Table 2 shows the estimation summary and the adjustment indices for each one of the eight models.

Table 2. Summary of the model results

Number of conglomerates	LL	BIC(LL)	Npar	Class.Err.
1-Cluster	-28063.16	57561.15	196	0.0000
2-Cluster	-27555.30	56977.34	255	0.1007
3-Cluster	-27328.93	56956.51	314	0.1255
4-Cluster	-27157.60	57045.76	373	0.1245
5-Cluster	-27083.33	57329.14	432	0.1644
6-Cluster	-26957.02	57508.43	491	0.1334
7-Cluster	-26901.04	57828.39	550	0.1495
8-Cluster	-26777.21	58012.61	609	0.1428

LL=log-likelihood; BIC=Bayesian information criterion; Npar=number of parameters; Class.Err.=classification error.

The goodness of fit was examined utilizing the Bayesian information criterion (BIC). This technique enables determining the model with the fewest classes that best fits the data. The lowest BIC value represents the ideal model (Vermunt and Magidson,

2005). Dividing the sample into three groups of users was the best option as it had the lowest BIC value.

An analysis of the Wald statistic was performed to establish the significance of the estimated parameters (Table 3). The p-value associated with the Wald statistic shows that each indicator and the vast majority of the descriptive criteria included in the analysis (covariates) are capable of discriminating between the clusters in a statistically significant way (Vermunt and Magidson, 2005). Nevertheless, no significant differences were seen in type of accommodation, spa, and maximum price. The R^2 of the indicators ranged from 17.05% (value for money) to 48.39% (comfort).

Table 3 also includes the profiles of each cluster, which are as follows: “High-quality accommodation” (46.15% of size), “Good quality – Poor Wi-Fi accommodation” (34.71% of size) and “Modest quality – Good Wi-Fi accommodation” (19.14% of size), based on the Booking.com attribute ratings and the covariates. Table 3 also shows the average score for each segment for each of the indicators and the frequency distribution of the covariates and the mean when they are quantitative variables. Regarding the indicators, it can be concluded that there is a high likelihood that the tourist accommodation with the highest scores for all attributes considered belongs to Cluster 1. In contrast, the accommodation with the lowest scores in the attributes considered, except for Free Wi-Fi, belongs to Cluster 3. Therefore, considering all the variables included in the segmentation, we can describe the three segments obtained.

The first segment was tagged “High-quality accommodation”, and includes accommodation with the highest scores in all the Booking.com attributes ratings. Moreover, although the differences are not significant compared to the other clusters, there are more 4- (54.50%) and 5-star (17.44%) hotels in this group. In addition, there is

a higher proportion of accommodation with a spa (42.47%), room service (54.54%), multilingual staff (87.20%) and that belongs to a hotel chain (22.80%). Furthermore, compared to the other segments, this cluster has a medium hotel size (an average of 135.44 rooms), and a higher proportion of hotels with less than 23 rooms (22.76%), and the highest minimum and maximum prices.

The second segment was tagged “Good quality – Poor Wi-Fi accommodation”, expressing a medium score in all the Booking.com attributes ratings except for Wi-Fi. Moreover, compared to the other clusters, there is a higher proportion of accommodation with a restaurant (89.59%), free parking (45.88%), and with a higher number of rooms (155.87 on average). Regarding price, there is a higher proportion of medium-priced hotels.

Lastly, the third segment was tagged “Modest quality - Good Wi-Fi accommodation”, and includes those with the lowest scores in all the Booking.com attributes except for Wi-Fi. Compared to the other clusters, there is a higher proportion of one-, two- and three-star hotels (7.69%, 24.86% and 35.84%, respectively), with a lower number of rooms (81.99 on average), and with lower prices.

Table 3. Tourist accommodation’s cluster profiles: indicators (average rating) and covariates (frequency distribution and mean)

	Cluster1: High-quality accommodations (46.15%)	Cluster2: Good quality – Poor Wi-Fi accommodations (34.71%)	Cluster3: Modest quality - Good Wi-Fi accommodations (19.14%)	Wald	p-value	R ²	
Indicators							
Booking.com attributes	Facilities	86.61	80.46	74.07	139.8792	4.20E-31**	0.4634
	Cleanliness	90.75	85.05	80.56	148.3285	6.20E-33**	0.4013
	Comfort	87.93	81.21	74.60	147.8591	7.80E-33**	0.4839
	Value for money	82.73	79.82	77.04	62.4941	2.70E-14**	0.1705
	Location	90.35	85.79	81.61	85.7041	2.50E-19**	0.2876
	Staff	90.96	86.78	83.11	82.612	1.20E-18**	0.3322
	Free Wi-Fi	84.66	70.85	76.67	234.5184	1.20E-51**	0.3292
Covariates							
Type of accommodation	1-star hotels	0.84%	1.31%	7.69%	12.593	0.25 ^{ns}	
	2-star hotels	4.04%	7.62%	24.86%			
	3-star hotels	17.22%	30.42%	35.74%			
	4-star hotels	54.50%	53.04%	24.8%			
	5-star hotels	17.44%	1.54%	0.43%			
	Other accommodations	5.95%	6.06%	6.48%			

Destination	Costa Blanca	13.75%	11.07%	29.07%	28.9214	0.024*
	Costa del Sol	17.30%	11.14%	25.23%		
	Fuerteventura	2.52%	4.81%	0.4%		
	Gran Canaria	7.85%	5.4%	5.85%		
	Ibiza	5.18%	8.83%	2.28%		
	Lanzarote	2.38%	5.1%	0.58%		
	Mallorca	36.9%	42.06%	25.95%		
	Menorca	4.1%	2.62%	0.93%		
	Tenerife	10.02%	8.97%	9.71%		
Spa±	Yes	42.47%	29.55%	29.68%	0.5369	0.76 ^{ns}
Restaurant±	Yes	84.04%	89.59%	84.75%	10.2408	0.006**
Free parking±	Yes	37.75%	45.88%	44.67%	6.4125	0.041*
Room service±	Yes	54.54%	27.31%	46.48%	11.6097	0.003**
Multilingual staff±	Yes	87.20%	71.88%	81.94%	9.7836	0.0075**
Part of a hotel chain ±	Yes	22.80%	10.54%	11.66%	20.3167	3.90E-05**
Hotel size (number of rooms) ‡	< 23	22.76%	16.53%	18.53%	7.1144	0.029*
	23 - 60	18.12%	15.7%	33.66%		
	61 - 122	17.60%	19.69%	25.58%		
	123 - 211	20.11%	21.57%	17.84%		
	212 - 396	21.41%	26.5%	4.40%		
	Mean	134.44	155.87	81.99		
Minimum price ‡	< 31	8.37%	16.61%	60.39%	36.4731	1.20E-08**
	31 - 44	13.36%	20.44%	26.51%		
	45 - 62	21.72%	24.49%	11.10%		
	63 - 92	24.86%	23.45%	1.95%		
	93 - 199	31.70%	15.02%	0.05%		
	Mean	99.94	79.44	47.20		
Maximum price ‡	< 71	9.55%	14.55%	54.35%	2.1782	0.34 ^{ns}
	72 - 116	16.13%	21.53%	26.49%		
	117 - 166	19.40%	25.50%	12.78%		
	167 - 250	24.48%	22.56%	3.79%		
	251 - 461	30.45%	15.86%	2.58%		
	Mean	306.61	238.20	137.31		

Note: Bold values indicate the most relative importance comparing with the other clusters.

± Only positive values (yes) have been reflected in the Table.

‡ Metric variables whose ordinal categories are created by the software.

**Sig. 1%; *Sig. 5%; ^{ns}=no significant.

Differences between adults-only and non-adults-only accommodation.

Modelling at three levels (Step3)

The results of the Step3 submodule with its dependent option were used to find differences between adults-only and non-adults-only accommodation in the three clusters.

Table 4a shows in detail the coefficients for the adults-only (yes or no) variables, which reflect the influence each variable has on belonging to each segment. A high positive coefficient indicates that the accommodation in that category (adults-only

or not) is more likely to be found in that segment, while a large negative coefficient implies that this accommodation is unlikely to be present.

Belonging to the adults-only category variable is significant at the $p < 0.001$ level; that is, there are significant differences between being adults-only or not. Specifically, it is observed that cluster 1 hotels (High quality accommodation) and 2 (Good quality – Poor Wi-Fi accommodation) are more likely to be adults-only, being higher in cluster 1, while cluster 3 (Modest quality – Good Wi-Fi accommodation) is more likely to be non-adults-only (see Table 4a).

Table 4. Adults-only vs. non adults-only

a. Differences in adults-only and non adults-only accommodation between the clusters						
		Cluster 1: High-quality accommodations	Cluster 2: Good quality – Poor Wi-Fi accommodations	Cluster 3: Modest quality - Good Wi-Fi accommodations	Wald	p-value
Belonging to the adults-only category	No	-0.3529	-0.1587	0.5116	24.6113	4.50E-06
	Yes	0.3529	0.1587	-0.5116		

Note: the coefficients represent the impact of each variable (whether adults-only or not) on belonging to each segment.

b. Profile of the segments according to their belonging to the adults-only category or not				
		Cluster1: High-quality accommodations	Cluster2: Good quality – Poor Wi-Fi accommodations	Cluster3: Modest quality - Good Wi-Fi accommodations
Belonging to the adults-only category	No	77.19%	83.31%	95.02%
	Yes	22.81%	16.69%	4.98%

Table 4b shows the profile of the segments according to belonging to the adults-only category or not. There is a higher percentage of adults-only accommodation in Cluster 1 (High-quality accommodation) (22.81%), followed by Cluster 2 (Good quality – Poor Wi-Fi accommodation) (16.69%). The proportion is smaller in Cluster 3 (Modest quality – Good Wi-Fi accommodation) (4.98%).

Discussion

The results of this research show that the adults-only hotel model is associated with

relaxation, as it is mostly found in sun and beach destinations.

It is also associated with establishments offering higher levels of quality or amenities, whether measured by conventional star ratings or the scores obtained from websites like Booking.com. In fact, the adults-only model has been implemented mainly in four- and five-star hotels. It is also associated with the “High-quality accommodation” cluster, which includes hotels with high scores in the different attributes evaluated. It could be the case that tourists who demand adults-only hotels also demand higher standards of service and quality or it could be that the absence of children in the hotel can make the guests more relaxed, and consequently more satisfied. These results confirm and nuance previous research that had warned that in the case of adults-only hotels, guests would be more demanding, and therefore there could be a gap between expectations and perceptions that could lead to serious conflict (S raphin *et al.*, 2020).

Regarding the places in which it is deployed, in the case of Spain, the European country with the highest number of adults-only hotels, it is mainly the two archipelagos and, more specifically, to a higher degree in the smaller islands. In these small islands, adults-only hotels are, or are about to become, a frequent and common characteristic of the hotels located there. Conversely, they are less common in the two mainland destinations analysed (Costa Blanca and Costa del Sol) and in other popular destinations, such as the Costa Brava and the Costa Dorada. In urban destinations, the model is not widely implemented. There are cases of destinations, such as Playa de Palma (Mallorca) that have developed a rehabilitation plan around this business model (Nain, 2018).

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to conduct a quantitative analysis of the adults-only hotels segment from an academic perspective. It provides

much richer and more comprehensive information than the analyses that have previously been published in newspapers and on specialised websites. It partially covers the gap in academic studies on this hotel segment that is evidently growing. Both academics and professionals are presented with basic information that can be useful for future research and investment decision-making.

Theoretical and methodological contributions

The main theoretical contribution of this research is that the adults-only model is becoming significantly relevant in some destinations and therefore, it is a model to which academia should pay attention.

From the methodological perspective, the findings indicate that latent class segmentation can be an effective tool for distinguishing between types of tourist accommodation according to Booking.com attribute ratings. This study has demonstrated that there is significant variance (heterogeneity) between tourist accommodation regarding ratings on the platform.

Practical implications

The main practical implication of this study is that ratings of adults-only are generally higher than those of non-adults-only accommodation. With our data, we have not been able to analyse whether this is because the accommodation is better per se or because tourists feel happier due to being more relaxed and less disturbed by noise. Indeed, the apparent success of this type of hotel in sun-and-beach destinations, particularly in small islands, could serve as an example for its implementation in other destinations with similar visitor profiles. In any case, accommodation managers might consider this model as a possible alternative, whether by converting their units into adults-only ones or by enabling an adults-only area in their installations.

In some destinations, people who travel with children and are looking for high quality accommodation may start to encounter problems finding units that meet their needs. Paradoxically, what they are demanding is for age-based policies limiting admission to disappear, leading hotels to revert to their original policies. It may be the case that admitting children will become as minor and unique a policy for a hotel as taking pets (pets allowed), and some establishments may start to be labelled “children allowed”.

Lastly, there seems to be some dispute as to whether this model is discriminatory and legal. This issue requires analysis by policy-makers, especially in destinations where the model is becoming more prevalent.

Conclusions

The adults-only accommodation model is becoming very popular in specific areas but not in others. In our study, we found it to be very popular in small islands, less so in big islands, and not very popular in other sun and beach areas or in urban destinations. The adults-only model is connected to sun and beach destinations in which tourists seek to relax. It is also associated with high quality accommodation. However, it is very uncommon to find it among modest-quality accommodation. Therefore, this research describes a consumer profile that goes beyond the obvious: adults who prefer hotels without disruptive children. The quest for child-free spaces is primarily sought when it comes to enjoying vacation periods focused on very specific activities such as beach, pool, and relaxation. It is mostly absent from other types of travel such as business, cultural, or activity trips.

Limitations and future research

This research is not exempt from limitations, some of which could be overcome in future research. The main limitation of this study is that it was conducted in Spain, and therefore its findings may not be applicable to other countries or accommodation that are not beach and sun destinations. For these results to be more widely applicable, similar studies should be conducted in other countries, especially where the adults-only model is found in places that are not sun and beach destinations. While having recourse to pre-pandemic data can be advantageous, as it helps avoid anomalies related to satisfaction levels, temporary closures, etc., it would be advisable to repeat the analysis with data from 2023, in view of the fact that tourism activity has fully recovered in most parts of the world.

There are a number of other data points that were not included in this research due to the difficulty in obtaining them: the date in which the hotel became adults-only, financial performance since becoming adults-only and that of competing accommodation, and variations in occupancy levels and prices throughout the year. Some of these could help explain the differences in scores between the accommodations analysed in this research.

This study also opens some interesting research opportunities. First, it would be of interest to delve into the behaviour and motivations of the guests of adults-only hotels. For example, it would be interesting to ascertain whether their guests are couples without children or parents that travel without their children in certain cases, since the way in which hotels should treat each of the cases could be quite different. Second, it would be interesting to linguistically process the comments of the guests of adults-only hotels in order to understand what they really appreciate, and which are the sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction during their stay and compare them to those of guests of other hotels. Third, this study focuses on the case of adults-only hotels, that is, hotels

that are exclusively intended for adults. However, there is also the case of hotels that designate some rooms and areas of the hotel as adults-only (Carriles Bedia, 2020). This is a case that should also be further researched.

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