

Investigating the Factors Influencing the Intention to Book a Hotel Online—the Moderating Role of Pricing: A Systematic Review of the Literature and Development of the Conceptual Model

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Abstract

The use of digital media has turned out to be a privilege while booking hotels in the hotel and leisure industry. From a customer's viewpoint, web-based portals offer instantaneous access to information. Customers can make continual price comparisons based on their inclination and anticipated value through the discounts provided in real-time, bringing together the various rates, service facilities, and prices. The pricing of hotel rooms is a pivotal factor influencing consumer behaviour in hotel booking decisions. This paper explores factors like consumer ratings, brand image, supply or availability of room location and events affecting booking decisions and the mediating effect of price on these factors. This multiplex reciprocity of factors notably influences their conclusive choice of hotel accommodation. By understanding these critical aspects of consumer behaviour with respect to price and its factors, hoteliers can develop effective price strategies to attract guests and steer the competitive travel perspective. The researchers have proposed a conceptual framework at the end of the paper.

Keywords: *Consumer behaviour, pricing, online reviews, brand image, supply or availability of rooms, events*

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1. Introduction

The literature on tourism and hospitality has extensively investigated the impact of customer satisfaction on customers' purchasing intentions (Ali, 2016; Ryu et al., 2012). Many authors have done extensive studies on the way customer satisfaction promotes the willingness of customers to execute a purchase in a multitude of instances, notably restaurants (Kimetal, 2013), luxury cruise travel (Hanet et al., 2018), the hotel business (Cheng et al., 2019), the possibility for independent travellers to book hotels (Wang et al., 2020), and hotel booking intentions (Akhoondnejad, 2015; Chan et al., 2017). Cheng and Guo (2021) investigated the influence of consumer attitudes towards using technologies on tourist booking intentions.

The digital medium has favoured the tourism-related services industry (Ho & Lee, 2007; Pelsmacker et al., 2018). Agag and El-Masry (2016) examined antecedents like commitment and trust and the impact of habit on booking intention. Other research examined the influence of social media and online reviews on hotel reservations (Caruana & Farrugia, 2018; Amin et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2017) and discovered that visitors' purchasing decisions increasingly rely on them.

On the other hand, investigations, notably those done by Akhtar et al. (2022) and Agagand Eid (2019), have proven the crucial role of buyer confidence as well as perceived risk in travel booking intention. It is extremely valuable to comprehend for people preparing to book a hotel or lodging since it enables us to apprehend what they want, expect, and desire. Thus, it is attainable for us to provide specialised services and goods that meet the unique requirements and preferences of the people we serve, perhaps resulting in higher client satisfaction and loyalty (Ghosh, 2018). The long-term sustainability and profitability of the company will also be enhanced by it. For this reason, understanding booking intentions is essential to efficient travel management and planning. Therefore, knowledge of booking intentions is a key element for effective tourism planning and management.

In the context of hotel or travel research, booking intention refers to consumers' willingness to book accommodations for a future trip or stay, which may

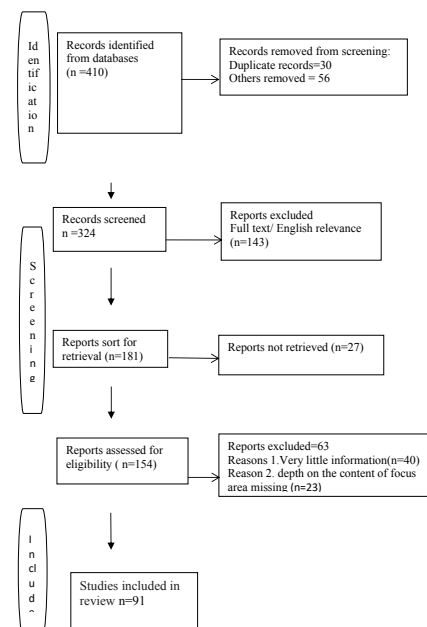
include a hotel or other lodging options (Biswas, 2023; Taimyu et al., 2022). Price is a significant factor that consumers focus on seriously when making hotel arrangements.

2. Methodology

In order to convey the current state of research on price, this paper creates a conceptual model using the components that influence pricing and conducts an extensive examination of the literature on hotel booking intentions. Future research opportunities and research needs are also identified in this study. Our paper's main goal was to analyse and summarise a body of research on the impact of pricing on a customer's decision to book a hotel. Using a few acceptable validation criteria, publications from the large body of literature on the topic were chosen using the PRISMA framework (Fig. 1).

This investigation intends to examine the impact of pricing on online hotel booking intentions as documented by multiple reputed tourism and hospitality magazines throughout 2000 and 2023. This report reviewed 91 papers published in travel and hospitality publications for the preceding twenty-two years. Previous studies identified several factors impacting consumers' intentions to make an online hotel reservation.

Figure.1. PRISMA Framework showing the selection of papers



2.1 PRISMA framework

The keywords “pricing, online reviews, brand image, events, location, availability of rooms” on online hotel booking from 2010 to 2021 from the journals with an ABDC rating of A, B, and C were used to find the pertinent publications. A total of 410 journal articles were located. Given that one goal is to create themes throughout the literature and construct a conceptual model, these generic keywords generate a wide range of articles. Additionally, 410 papers on this subject were found by an independent search using A & A+ journals like *Tourism Management*, *International Journal of Tourism Management*, and *Journal of Business Research*.

Additionally, 410 papers on this subject were located by an independent search employing A- & A+ journals like *Tourism Management*, *International Journal of Tourism Management*, and *Journal of Business Research*. 86 of the 410 documents that had been identified were eliminated, leaving 324 records to review. After discarding 143 items, 181 records were selected for additional assessment. Furthermore, 27 records needed to be retrieved. The group of 154 articles was evaluated for generality, high relevance, and relevancy; 63 articles were ruled out for having sufficient matter or insufficient knowledge of the subject under consideration. The ultimate assortment of identified articles underwent a citation check. About 53% of the papers were from ABDC journals.

A summary of the number of papers reviewed, major journals, and ABDC rating of the journals is given in Table -1, below

Journal Title	ABDC Rating	No. of papers	% of papers
Tourism Management	A*	12	13%
Journal of Business Research	A*	3	3%
Journal Political Economy	A*	2	2%
Journal of Travel Research	A*	3	3%
Annals of Tourism Research	A*	1	1%
International Journal of Hospitality Management	A	12	13%
The Service Industries Journal	A	1	1%
International Journal Contemporary Hospitality Management	A	2	2%
Journal of Retailing	A	2	2%
Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences	A	1	1%

Journal of Tourism Economy	A	1	1%
Journal of Business Studies	A	1	1%
Journal of the Association for Information Systems	C	1	1%
International Journal of Information Management.	C	1	1%
Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management	C	1	1%
Tourism Economics the Business & Finance of Tourism & Recreation	C	1	1%
Journal of Business Research	C	3	3%
Total A* A and C journals		48	53%
OTHERS		43	47%

3. Systematic Literature Review Results

Consumer purchase behaviour is a complex interplay of attitudes, preferences, intentions, and decisions that come together when a consumer buys a product or service (Velumani, 2014). This translates to how travellers choose where to stay in the hotel industry.

Information technology (IT) has significantly impacted consumer behaviour in the tourism and hospitality industries (Ishwar Khatri, 2019). The ability to research and book hotels online has revolutionised travel planning. Online travel portals (OTPs) have become a go-to resource for both individual travellers and business travel planners (Carroll & Siguaw, 2003).

Consumers often seek out the opinions and experiences of others, especially when the quality of a product or service is uncertain (Chen et al., 2004). Online reviews are a prime example of this phenomenon, allowing travellers to learn about other guests’ experiences at a particular hotel.

Research has revealed that buyers are more likely to pay attention to user-generated content, such as online reviews, than to information from the seller (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Online reputation is increasingly important, potentially outweighing traditional star ratings (Abrate & Viglia, 2016). Positive word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing can significantly influence purchasing decisions and customer engagement, ultimately leading to increased revenue for hotels (Baker et al., 2016; Litvin et al., 2008; Neirotti et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2015).

Research suggests that most consumers prioritise value for money over simply seeking the lowest

possible price (Gupta & Kim, 2011). Price remains a significant factor in hotel marketing strategies, as even small price changes can majorly impact a hotel's bottom line (Diana-Jens & Ruibal, 2015). Within an acceptable price range, travellers are more likely to perceive a lower price for a given quality as a better value, ultimately influencing their purchase decision (Dodds et al., 1991).

3.1 Price

The concept of price goes beyond a simple monetary exchange. Kotler et al. (2017) define price in two ways: a narrow definition as "the amount of money wanted for a product or service," Often, consumers use price as a signal of quality, assuming "you get what you pay for" (Erickson & Johansson, 1988).

For consumers, price is critical, particularly in the hotel industry, where price is linked to service quality (Voss et al., 1998). Lockyer's (2005) study found that price was the most important consideration in 43% of hotel selection decisions. While price is a key factor, it is important to understand how consumers perceive it. From the consumer's perspective, price represents the money consumers must give up to get the product/service (Zeithaml, 1988).

Consumers often associate price with value, and this perception is referred to as "value-for-money" (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Perceived quality can influence a company's pricing power. Price is a more easily observable cue than quality, making it a significant factor in consumer decision-making (Yoon et al., 2014).

Online shoppers can compare prices by visiting websites offering similar products (Lee, 2002). In online shopping, customers compare the offered price with reference prices from other vendors, forming their perception of value (Kim et al., 2012). This transparency empowers consumers to be more aware of market prices and compare them effortlessly.

In today's competitive environment, hotels can control low prices (or reasonable prices) to gain a sustainable advantage within their market (Bojanic, 1996). It is important to remember that consumers typically have a range of acceptable prices for a purchase, not a single fixed price.

Price plays a multifaceted role in hotel marketing strategies. Both customer demand and the hotel's perceived level of service quality impact it (Voss et al., 1998). Lockyer's (2005) research reinforces this notion, highlighting price as the most relevant factor in nearly half of all hotel selection decisions. Given the significant role of the service sector in the economy and the widespread use of the internet for travel booking and research, understanding online hotel booking trends is crucial for hotels to remain competitive.

According to Wang, Lu, Chi, and Shi (2015), the relationship between sales and hotel room prices is such that, as room prices increase, sales decrease, and vice versa. Agušaj, Bazdan, and Lujak (2017) drew attention to how customers predict a hotel's quality. They propose that the cost of a service is a good indicator of its perceived quality, meaning that a higher price corresponds to a better quality of service, and a lower price corresponds to a worse quality of service. Customer perception is a factor to consider when adjusting prices. Frequent rate fluctuations can negatively impact customer perceptions of fairness and price acceptability (Kimes, 2010). Studies by Chiang and Jang (2007) and Faryabi et al. (2012) confirm that reasonable prices positively influence booking intentions. Similarly, research by Lee (2012) and Yoon et al. (2014) suggests a positive correlation between price and value perception, indicating that consumers appreciate fair pricing.

An array of factors determines hotel rates, including the variety of items and amenities a hotel offers. This investigation applies a price model to identify the factors regulating hotel pricing and their implications. It also delves into why these factors affect people's choices to book lodgings.

3.2 Consumer rating

Online reviews have become an undeniable force in the travel industry, shaping traveller perceptions and influencing booking decisions (Dwyer et al., 2007). Unlike professional reviews, consumer reviews can provide critical information that hotels might not readily share, offering a more well-rounded perspective for potential guests (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Travellers rely heavily on online reviews, which can significantly impact a hotel's customer attitude and purchasing decisions (Vermeulen &

Seegers, 2009; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Chan et al., 2017; Gavilan et al., 2018). Research by Anderson (2012), Zhang et al. (2011), and Phillips et al. (2017) further highlights the close relationship between online user ratings and hotel room prices.

Online credibility plays an increasingly significant role in hotel pricing. (Anderson, 2009; Schamel, 2012; Serra and Salvi, 2014). Positive online reviews can be a powerful tool for hotels. Studies by Milan (2007) indicate that online reviews influence 84% of travellers and find them more convincing than other hotel features. Ogut and Tas (2012) suggest this presents a significant opportunity for unbranded hotels, as strong customer ratings can act as a quality signal for potential guests. Research by Anderson (2012), B. Agušaj (2017) and others confirm that hotels with favourable reviews tend to have higher pricing power, allowing them to command premium room rates. Green and Lomanno (2012) suggest that online customer reviews determine the prices of hotel rooms. Aznar et al. (2018) and Castro and Ferreira (2018) provide evidence illustrating how positive OCR enables hotels to set higher room prices. Research studies done by Wang et al. (2015) proved that WOM has a negative moderating effect on room prices in online hotel booking. When the WOM is informative enough, consumers rely less on room prices and hotel star ratings to decide. Hotels with higher prices have a higher tendency to be affected by WOM.

3.3 Brand Image

The power of a brand name must be recognised in terms of hotel pricing. Studies by Biswas (1992) and Anselmsson et al. (2014) have shown that consumers are less concerned about price when dealing with a recognised brand. Consumers often move towards familiar and well-known brands when making purchasing decisions (Chi et al., 2009). Travellers feel more assured when booking with a recognised hotel brand.

Hustić and Gregurec (2015) note that loyal customers are often less sensitive to price changes, especially for trusted brands. Familiarity with a brand name reduces their anxieties about comparing prices, allowing hotels with strong reputations to justify higher room rates. This aligns with Grewal et al. (1998) and Ryu et al. (2008), who found a positive

correlation between brand image, price, and value. In simpler terms, a respected brand name allows hotels to charge a premium price while simultaneously enhancing the perceived value of their offerings to guests.

However, it is important to note that the impact of brand image on booking a hotel room, mediated by trust, appears less significant. Perceived price remains a key factor. Chiang and Jang (2007) further emphasise the importance of brand trust within the hospitality industry. Their research aligns with the findings of Inversini and Masiero (2014), who discovered that hotels with strong brand images achieve higher sales than weaker competitors. Lien et al. (2015) reinforce this notion by highlighting the positive impact of a brand image on perceived value and guest trust. Their study concludes that hotels with effective brand image strategies can command higher room rates.

3.4 Room availability and internal attributes

As stated in the earlier paragraphs, hotel pricing is complex and influenced by various factors. One key element is the supply and internal facilities provided by the hoteliers. Similarly, numerous online competitors can trigger hotels to adjust their prices strategically (Abrate & Viglia, 2016). Balaguer and Pernias (2013) found that a higher density of competitors leads to lower overall price variations, suggesting new competitors can force existing hotels to adapt their pricing strategies, particularly during weekdays when competition for business travellers is higher.

Seasonality also plays a significant role in hotel pricing. A temporal imbalance in demand, known as seasonality, can be described by the frequency of travellers, their spending, and the number of hotel nights occupied (Butler, 2001). Numerous studies confirm that prices fluctuate based on the time of year (Juaneda et al., 2011; Rigallitorrent & Fluvià, 2011). Seasonality is problematic for many tourist destinations (Jang, 2004). Research suggests that higher-rated hotels or branded chains offer fewer discounts during off-seasons, resulting in smaller seasonal price fluctuations, even in popular beach destinations (Espinet et al., 2012; Becerra et al., 2013). Conversely, lower-quality hotels often offer

more frequent discounts during lower seasons (Lee & Jang, 2013). Their study further reveals that lower-scaled establishments utilise steeper discounts to compete with upscale options during lower seasons, while higher-scale hotels raise rates gradually to discourage guests from shifting to budget-friendly alternatives.

The timing of a reservation also plays a role in hotel pricing. Business travellers, typically high spenders, tend to book closer to their travel date, with a short notice of one or two days (Guo, 2013). This creates a dilemma for hotels: maximising occupancy by selling all rooms before the target date versus securing higher profits from bookings made well in advance. Additionally, hotels prioritise selling their most expensive rooms first to minimise losses from unsold rooms. In contrast, price-sensitive customers are more likely to wait for last-minute deals, exhibiting a higher degree of patience than high-spending customers (Su, 2007; Abrate et al., 2012). In contrast, other research has demonstrated that hotels with an established reputation—that is, those that are part of a branded chain—are less impacted by the seasonality of travel (Espinet et al., 2012).

Internal features consist of matters including the number of rooms (White & Mulligan, 2002), the complimentary breakfast supplied (Chen & Rothschild, 2010; Lee & Jang, 2011), and hotel amenities such as a swimming pool (Rigallitorrent & Fluvià, 2011; Yang et al., 2016), child-friendly facilities and the hotel's spa (X. Wang et al., 2019); the parking lot (Espinet et al., 2003) and the health club (Andersson, 2010; Chen & Rothschild, 2010). The total expense of the hotel is expected to increase by about 25% if breakfast is offered at the room rate. Furthermore, the provision of facilities like a spa, fitness centre, children-friendly areas and a parking lot will considerably augment hotel charges (X. Wang et al., 2019).

3.5 Events

Big events can significantly impact hotel pricing. Herrmann and Herrmann's (2014) research on Munich hotels during the October Fest exemplifies this. Their study analyses how the event affects daily online and hotel price differentials. Major events like World Cups, Olympics, religious conventions, or political gatherings create a surge in demand,

allowing hotels to raise prices without sacrificing occupancy rates.

Pricing power is the ability of an organisation to raise prices despite reducing demand (D'Aveni, 2010). Companies with minimal price power would ultimately heavily depend on external variables, like fierce competitors and consumers, due to greater openness in pricing practices (Cooper, 2011). Events and occasions like World Cups, the Olympics, social or political conventions, and the like may substantially increase hotel demand.

As a result, hotels can increase their rates enormously during these instances without experiencing an adverse effect on occupancy levels (Karmin, 2015). The researcher also highlights the emergence of traditional and non-traditional competitors that challenge hotels' pricing power. This necessitates a strategic approach to pricing, considering competitor offerings and market dynamics. A study by (X. Wang et al., 2019) exemplifies this by demonstrating a significant increase in hotel prices during peak seasons like Chinese New Year (159.9% compared to the low season in May). Such drastic price hikes can trigger negative customer reactions.

3.6 Location

Likemanybusinesses today, the hotel industry operates in a highly competitive environment. Customers are no longer passive participants. They actively research, compare, and influence buying decisions. This shift in consumer behaviour puts pressure on traditional hotel pricing strategies, forcing hotels to consider new approaches. The attributes related to hotel prices could be categorised into internal and external factors (Chen & Rothschild, 2010). Prices rise when hotels are scarce in a particular location (Ibrahim & Atiya, 2016).

One of the most crucial external factors influencing hotel pricing is location. The presence of beaches near a hotel also positively affects prices, as studies by Espinet et al. (2003), Lee and Jang (2011), Rigallitorrent and Fluvià (2011), and Alegre et al. (2013) have demonstrated. A hotel's location and the surrounding tourist resources significantly impact pricing decisions. Guizzard et al. (2017) emphasise location's role in revenue management strategies.

Their research indicates that proximity to key business locations is correlated with higher prices.

However, location can have an imperceptible effect. Thrane's (2007) study found that distance to the downtown area for Oslo hotels negatively affects room rates. This contrasts with Lee and Jang's (2011) findings in the US, where hotels near central business districts and airports commanded higher rates. Alegre et al. (2013) highlight how location, availability, and regional fidgeting influence pricing strategies. Costa (2013) reinforces this by arguing that prices depend on a combination of factors, including hotel category, accommodation types, and geographical location.

Recent research by Latinopoulos (2018) explores the specific impact of a sea view on room rates. The study examines whether rooms with a sea view command higher prices than other room types. The findings suggest that local natural resources like a beachfront location can significantly influence a hotel's rent and aesthetic value

4. Discussion

The influence of pricing and its various factors on consumer ratings, brand image, room availability and amenities, events, and location is thorough and varied for online hotel booking motives. Competitive pricing strategies can entice rate-receptive travellers, but it is not solely the sheer price that matters; it is also about anticipated value. Consumers often assimilate higher prices with higher quality and service.

Online reviews are a derogatory factor in today's hotel pricing approaches. The paper asserts that hotels remark on the enormous potential of online reviews and ardently develop a positive online reputation can leverage this to appeal to guests and potentially charge higher room rates (Morrison, 2009). Brand image plays a crucial role in hotel pricing. A robust brand allows hotels to charge superior prices while providing trust and intensifying perceived value with their guests.

By nurturing a positive brand image, hotels can not only palliate higher prices but also allure and retain guests who think highly of the value proposition associated with the brand. In the digital age, brand image is massively influenced by online reviews and ratings. Positive reviews and high ratings can augment

a hotel's brand image, leading to surging trust and higher booking rates. Conversely, negative reviews can dissuade prospective customers, regardless of price initiatives. Alluring with customers online—responding to reviews, manoeuvring complaints, and unveiling confirmations—can favourably influence perceptions and enhance the hotel's online proximity. The digital landscape presents challenges and opportunities, and hotels that effectively traverse this domain stand to gain a prominent competitive advantage.

Booking intentions are heavily distorted by hotel accessibility and event timing. In online hotel booking, hoteliers who can proficiently handle their repertoire and conventionally give guests up-to-date information do better. Last-minute cancellations can harm a hotel's reputation, leading to negative consumer feedback. Events significantly influence booking intentions. Travelers often schedule their trips around important occasions like festivals, conferences, or exhibitions. Hotels can take the edge of this by providing exclusive packages or early individual discounts if their marketing strategies concur with the dates of local events. When booking platforms make event information available, it can further improve the hotel's acquisition and make it a more desirable conversation for guests looking to ally lodging with distinctive experiences. Proximity to key locations causes hotels to optimise their pricing strategies in today's enterprising background.

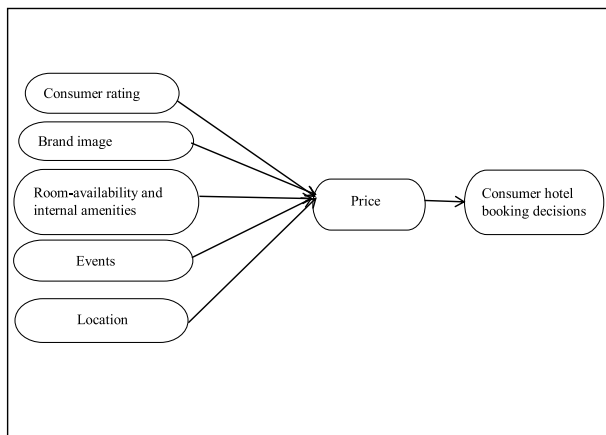
4.1 Strategic Implications

In order for hotels to proliferate in the aggressive online booking environment, it is indispensable that they adopt a wider approach to besieged pricing policies, attainability management, event alignment, and enhancement of their brand image. This includes: 1. Implementing dynamic pricing that adjusts rates based on demand, competition, and market trends can improve occupancy and revenue. 2. It is imperative to ensure transparency in pricing and booking policies to foster trust and enhance consumer ratings. 3. Working with local event organisers to offer tailored packages and promote these offerings through online booking platforms. 4. Managing online reviews and ratings to enhance the brand image and build customer loyalty. 5. Utilise advanced technologies and data analytics to predict

demand patterns, personalise marketing efforts, and streamline operations.

From the review, the researchers assert that pricing remains a pivotal factor in shaping consumer decisions in the hotel industry, and the paper proposes the following conceptual framework:

5. Proposed conceptual framework of price that affects consumer booking decisions



(Fig: 2)

6. Conclusion:

To summarise, there is interaction between pricing, consumer ratings, brand image, room availability, event offerings, and location, and it has a reminiscent influence on online hotel booking intentions. Hotels can increase bookings, promote loyalty, and improve market pursuit by strategically directing these factors. Keeping aligned with consumer preferences and taking advantage of data-driven intellect will be the key to long-lasting success in the online hotel booking industry as the industry progresses. Hotel pricing is an intricate intent influenced by factors like consumer rating, brand image, room availability and its amenities, events and location. Understanding these dynamics is pivotal for hotel managers, marketers, and policymakers focusing on enhancing their impassioned asperity in the digital market to multiply profits while maintaining customer satisfaction.

7. Scope for future research

It is essential to comprehend several study limitations when booking an online hotel, including how pricing and related factors impact consumer ratings, brand image, room availability, events, and location. Other price-influencing factors not considered in the study included star ratings, the volume of online reviews, the valence of the review, the trustworthiness of online reviews, and other internal amenities like spas, salons, gyms, etc. Previous research has shown that these factors also affect price. These limitations underline the need for continued research and improvement, even though the study offers discerning information about the impact of pricing, customer ratings, brand image, room availability, amenities, events, and location on online hotel booking intentions. Subsequent research attempts ought to concentrate on these limitations by assimilating a wider range of data sources, utilising repeated testing methodologies, and discharging sophisticated logical documents to strengthen the relevance of the discoveries. Despite the significance of these factors, there is still a lack of research in this field. More research is essential to understand how competition and special events affect hotel pricing policies.

In conclusion, choosing hotel prices is a complex process impacted by many diverse variables. Hotels can enhance their sales and profits and maintain competitiveness in the dynamic travel world by devising more comprehensive pricing strategies that understand these influences.

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