



Guest Satisfaction: A perspective of Hotel Staff and Management

KEYWORDS

Guest Satisfaction, Expectation, Perception, Deliverables, Tools

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ABSTRACT

The Indian hospitality industry has emerged as one of the key industries driving the growth of the services sector and thereby, the Indian economy. Guest Satisfaction is the most important factors in determining the success of a hotel. Providing and maintaining guest satisfaction is also one of the most challenging and daunting tasks for a hotel. Long-term customer relationships are created when a company manages to serve its customers impeccably and provide them satisfaction. This research was undertaken to examine determinants of Guest Satisfaction from hotel employees' perception of 5 Star Deluxe Hotel Category of New Delhi. The study explores the perception of quality and satisfaction with regard to service and product. Results of the survey reveal the beliefs of employees about the guest expectations and actual deliverables. The study also explores tools used by Hotels in Delhi to assess and improve Guest Satisfaction currently.

Introduction

Within Tourism Industry, Hotel Industry is one of the most important sectors providing service. Hotels improve and expand the tourism industry thereby developing economy. In present times, Customer Satisfaction is the required for improvement of service centred organisations like hotels to be profitable. Therefore an understanding of measurement and evaluation of Customer Satisfaction (Guest Satisfaction) is the most important aspect of improving quality.

For the hotel industry to survive in the present scenario where there is a tough competition amongst various national and international brands, it is not sufficient to conduct guest satisfaction surveys alone. The need of the hour is also to scrutinise the hotel employees' understanding of what the guests consider important and how close are employees in their performance to those expectations. Getting to know the knowledge of the employees on what services are of importance to guest stay and what is their performance against it will lead to better management of guest services leading to Guest Satisfaction.

In hotel industry customer satisfaction is largely dependent upon quality of service. A management approach focused on customer satisfaction can improve customer loyalty, thus improving the revenue. Hence, exploring the mind set of hotel employees and management is indispensable. It is very important for the hotel employees to understand the requirements of guests during their stay at the hotels which would provide the anticipated satisfaction.

This study evaluates the understanding of employees about the degree of importance hotel guests give to various factors determining their satisfaction against the actual performance of providing the service and products. This actual performance is the moment of truth. The research also finds out the popular approaches used in hotels to measure Guest Satisfaction.

Literature Review

Customer satisfaction has been a well accepted subject in marketing practice and academic research since Cardozo's (1965) first study of customer effort, expectations and satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is characteristically defined as a post consumption evaluating decision in relation to a specific service or product (Gundersen, Heide and Olsson, 1996).

It is the result of an evaluative process that contrasts pre purchase expectations with perceptions of performance during and after the consumption experience (Oliver, 1980).

Guest satisfaction could also be understood as a summary psychological state experienced by the consumer when confirmed or disconfirmed expectations exist with respect to a specific service transaction or experience (Thompson, 1994).

It is the disconfirmation approach which is used in most of- ten to represent guest satisfaction as it relates satisfaction to the variation between a customer's pre purchase expectations and post purchase perceptions of the actual service performance (Ramaswamy, 1996). The starting point for providing customer satisfaction is providing services those customers prefer.

To know what services customer prefers, a relatively easy way to determine is simply to ask them. According to Gilbert and Horsnell (1998), and Su (2004), guest comment cards (GCCs) are most commonly used for determining hotel guest satisfaction.

In an investigation carried out by Dolcinar (2002), to find out the expectations and disappointments of Business Travellers' of five star hotels, it was found that the guests more often anticipate good service, a good location, pleasant atmosphere, comfort and internet availability. The study also established the fact that for the guests in lower hotel categories, fundamental hotel components were of priority concern, whereas luxury business travellers laid emphasis on the intangible aspects more.

Hotels are increasing their investments to improve service quality and the perceived value for guests so as to achieve better customer satisfaction and loyalty, thus resulting in better relationships with each customer (Jones and Taylor, 2007).

It is the level of satisfaction which a guest derives from the selected hotel product that decides upon the next selection of hotel product (Đeri et al, 2007).

To assess the satisfaction levels of hotel guests, researchers have used diverse variables like price, service quality, cleanliness of rooms and public areas, security, employee skills, pleasant staff, reception speed, image of hotel, etc. (Saleh, 1991, Haemooon, 1999, Mey et al, 2006, Dragičević, et al., 2010, Blesić, et al., 2011, Dunjić, et al., 2012).

Any improvement, increase in competitiveness, any re-design of the existing hospitality offer or those created through discontinued change, can be objectively assessed only through the understanding of the perception of the service value by the customer (Vukosav et al, 2009).

The analysis of key variables is importance to hotel operators for improvement of service quality. This method also helps to understand the preferences of different guests (Parul Gupta, 2011).

It was also found by Lockyer 2002 that managers tend rate those items highly which they influence on daily basis than potential guests, who rate the guestroom and its tangible and intangible facilities more highly.

It was suggested by Pallet et al. (2003) that quality has to be envisioned, initiated, constituted, planned, delivered, supervised and maintained. They recommend a common "People and Quality" strategy to deal with quality problems and key staff issues in hotels which involved placing customer needs as the focal point of the entire process; inquiring implications form staff; building corporate quality and people philosophy; training and empowering staff; benchmarking and reviewing (Pallet et al., 2003).

The objectives of this research are:

To understand the perception of employees about the guest expectations and actual deliverables in order to provide Guest Satisfaction.

To find out the tools used by Hotels to assess and improve Guest Satisfaction currently.

Research Methods:

Universe of study: The universe for study is three 5 Star Deluxe Hotels in Delhi.

Sample for the study: A convenience sample was collected from sixty Managers/ Supervisors/ Executives of 5 Star Deluxe Hotels in Delhi.

Tools for Data Collection: Primary Data - Study has incorporated Questionnaire Method/ Interview Schedule Method as instruments in studying guest satisfaction.

Secondary data sources were mainly books, journals, web sites, online library resources.

Questionnaire Construct: The questionnaire comprised of four sections. Section one asked hotel employees about various features of Rooms Division, Food and Beverage Service which guests consider important while selecting a hotel. Section two evaluated of how the hotels performed in the opinion of hotel employees, as per the listed features of Rooms Division, Room Service and Food and Beverage outlets. Section three gathered the information on the methods of measuring guest satisfaction, names of

online feedback sites guests commented upon and some facilities that guests were particularly fond of in the hotels. Section four accumulated demographic details in terms of experience, department, gender and age from the respondents (hotel employees). The study used a Likert scale of 1 to 7, where 7 corresponded to highest importance or agreement with the statement and 1 represents lowest importance or unacceptable level of service offered. A sample of 60 participants resulted over a period of almost three months (October to December 2014). Rooms Division (comprising of Front Office and Housekeeping departments), Room Service and Restaurant were chosen for the study as being areas with maximum guest contact representing maximum moments of truth opportunities with the guests.

The Findings:

Most important services or features:

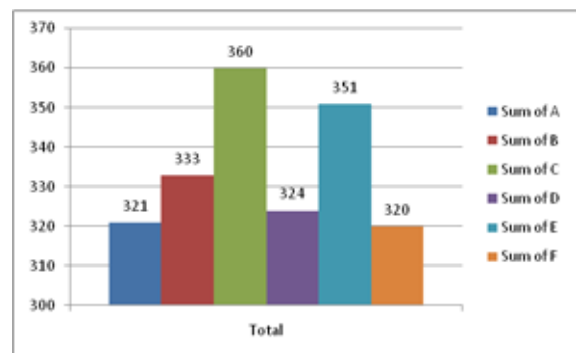


Figure 1

- A- Ease of making reservation and getting a confirmation - 16%**
- B- Smooth check-in and check-out procedures - 17%**
- C- Cleanliness, furnishing and comfort of the room - 18%**
- D- The internet, business centre and conference room facilities - 16%**
- E- Prompt round the clock room service with variety of items on the menu - 17%**
- F- The ambience and menu variety at the restaurants - 16%**

The figure 1 denotes that employees give almost equal importance to all features with marginal difference. The employees consider "cleanliness, furnishing and comfort of the room" having the highest value (18%) as the most important feature for guest while choosing a hotel, followed by "prompt round the clock room service with variety of items on the menu" (17%) and "smooth check-in and check-out procedures" (17%). "Ease of making reservation and getting a confirmation" (16%), "the internet, business centre and conference room facilities" (16%) and "ambience and menu variety at the restaurants" (16%) were the last to follow.

Ranking Descriptive Analysis:

Feature	Mean	SD
Cleanliness, furnishing and comfort of the room	6.00	0.00
Prompt round the clock room service with variety of menu items	5.85	0.36
Smooth check-in and check-out procedures	5.55	0.50

The internet, business centre and conference room facilities	5.40	0.92
Ease of making reservation and getting confirmation	5.35	0.66
The ambience and menu variety in the restaurants	5.33	0.66

Table 1

The survey participant (hotels' employees) graded services (Table 1) in order of importance for guests in selecting a hotel using a six point scale with 6 being the most important and 1 the least important. Table 1 lists the responses in order of the mean. It was noted all these features were very important for guests in choosing a property with Cleanliness, furnishings and comfort of the room with highest mean = 6; followed by prompt round the clock room service with variety of menu items with mean = 5.85.

Hotel Features' Scores for Importance:

The Rooms Division Features' score for importance demonstrate that as per employees (respondents) 15 out of 20 items were considered important by the guests as their mean score was above 6 from maximum possible score of 7. These features are: First contact with the staff; Courteous and helpful staff; First impression of the hotel; Check-in and check-out procedures; Cleanliness of Guestrooms; Cleanliness of Bathrooms; Comfort of bed; Guestroom amenities; Guestroom furnishings; Quality of fixture and fittings; Access to internet/ wifi; Cleanliness of public areas; Maintenance of swimming pool; Dealing with complaints, Value for money of hotel.

The employees (respondents) considered important all six features listed in the Room Service with mean score of above 6. These features are Prompt response from the order taker; Skills of the order taker; Delivery and service of food; The variety of items on the menu; Overall selection of the beverages; The value for money of the room service.

The employees (respondents) considered important all the nine features listed in Food and Beverage Outlets with mean score of above 6. The features listed were Ambience of restaurants; Appearance of staff; Quality of service; Product knowledge of staff; Quality and taste of food; Portion size of food; Presentation of food; Dealing with complaints; Value of money of the outlets.

Importance Performance Analysis:

The sets of importance and performance questions were total thirty five in number of which mean, standard deviation on each of importance and performance were calculated. Paired sample t-test was used to establish the difference if there was any, between importance and performance as per the employees. (Table 2)

Rooms Division: It was found that no significant difference exists between importance and performance of factors that guests experience at the hotel in the view of employees in Rooms Division comprising of front office and housekeeping department. The employees consider that the services provided to the guests are equal to their expectation.

Room Service: It was found that no significant difference exists between importance and performance of factors that guests experience at the hotel in the view of employees in Room Service department. The employees consider that the services provided to the guests in Room Service are

equal to their expectations.

Food and Beverage Outlets: It was found that no significant difference exists between importance and performance of factors that guests experience at the hotel in the view of employees in Food and Beverage Outlets. The employees consider that the services provided to the guests in Food and Beverage Outlets are equal to their expectations.

The importance (expectation) and performance are equal, resulting in guest satisfaction.

Importance Performance Analysis Table - 2

	Importance		Performance		Mean difference	t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Ease of making reservation	5.93	0.73	6.17	0.74	0.23	0*
Receiving Prompt Reservation	5.72	0.76	6.15	0.78	0.43	0*
First contact with the staff	6.3	0.62	6.32	0.57	0.02	0.84*
Courteous and helpful staff	6.38	0.49	6.62	0.49	0.23	0*
First impression of the hotel	6.27	0.45	6.72	0.45	0.45	0*
The check in & check out procedures	6.28	0.45	6.42	0.5	0.13	0*
Concierge services	5.93	0.69	6.22	0.61	0.28	0*
Business Services	5.95	0.85	6.17	0.74	0.22	0*
Cleanliness of guestrooms	6.88	0.32	6.95	0.22	0.07	0.04*
Cleanliness of bathrooms	6.88	0.32	6.95	0.22	0.07	0.04*
Comfort of the bed	6.83	0.38	6.7	0.59	-0.13	0.04*
Guestroom amenities	6.57	0.62	6.65	0.48	0.08	0.02*
Guestroom furnishings	6.12	0.72	6.27	0.66	0.15	0.03*
Quality of fixture and fittings	6.05	0.67	6.28	0.67	0.23	0*
Access to Internet/ wifi	6.25	0.57	6.3	0.59	0.05	0.37*
Features and channels on television set	5.95	0.75	6.13	0.68	0.18	0.03*
Cleanliness of public areas of the hotel	6.62	0.49	6.63	0.61	0.02	0.74*
Maintenance of the swimming pool	6.5	0.5	6.45	0.62	-0.05	0.18*
Dealing with complaints	6.78	0.42	6.78	0.42	0	0.03*
The value for money of the hotel	6.8	0.4	6.8	0.4	0	0.05*
ROOM SERVICE						
Prompt response from the order taker	6.83	0.38	6.88	0.32	0.05	0.08*
Skills of the order taker	6.78	0.42	6.88	0.32	0.1	0.01*
Delivery and service of food	6.82	0.39	6.93	0.25	0.12	0.01*
The variety of items on menu	6.53	0.62	6.85	0.36	0.32	0*

Overall selection of beverages	6.57	0.65	6.77	0.46	0.2	0.01*
The value for money for room service	6.65	0.63	6.85	0.4	0.2	0.01*
FOOD & BEVERAGE OUTLETS						
Ambience of restaurants/bar	6.53	0.72	6.98	0.13	0.45	0*
Appearance of the staff	6.73	0.45	6.93	0.25	0.2	0*
Quality of service	6.92	0.28	6.93	0.25	0.02	0.71*
Product Knowledge of the staff	6.92	0.28	6.93	0.25	0.02	0.71*
Quality & taste of food	6.78	0.42	6.85	0.36	0.07	0.04*
Portion size of food	6.43	0.72	6.92	0.28	0.48	0*
Presentation of food	6.62	0.61	6.97	0.18	0.35	0*
Dealing with complaints	6.92	0.33	6.97	0.26	0.05	0.08*
Value of money of the outlets	6.57	0.74	6.9	0.35	0.33	0*
*t-test two-tail probability <0.01						

Methods Measuring Guest Satisfaction in Hotels:

The popular methods that are used in hotels for measuring guest satisfaction in order of popularity are (figure 2) Guest Comment Cards (88.33%); Online feedback forms (81.67 %); Staff feedback (25 %); Travel Portals (13.33 %); Social Media (11.67 %) and Mystery Guest (6.67 %). Trip Advisor was most popular Travel Portal on which the guests posted reviews or feed backs of hotels.

Demographic Details of Respondents:

The respondents were employees of three 5 Star Deluxe Hotels of New Delhi from (Figure 3) Food and Beverage Service Department (60%); Front Office Department (20%)

and Housekeeping Department (20%) with gender ratio (Figure 4) being Male 80% and Female 20 %. 43% of respondents were in the age group of 21 – 30 years; 30% were in age group of 31 – 40 years; 15% were in age group of 41 – 50 years; 12% were in age group of 51 - 60 years (Figure 5). 25 % of respondents had less than 5 years of experience; 50 % had 5 to 10 years of experience and 25% had more than 20 years of experience.

Conclusion:

The study has been able to identify perception of employees about the guest expectations and actual deliverables in order to provide Guest Satisfaction. The research has identified the most important features for providing guest satisfaction being "cleanliness, furnishing and comfort of the room" and "prompt round the clock room service with variety of items on the menu". It was found that there was no significant difference in perception of hotel employees between factors considered important and their performance at the moments of truth, this shows that the guest satisfaction rating at the concerned three 5 Star Deluxe Hotels under study would be exemplary. The results have been authenticated by trip advisor ratings which consider 73 % ratings for these hotels as excellent, 17% very good, 6% average and 3% poor and 1% terrible. The implications of this study are that staff and management of hotels were fully aware of guests' perception of service quality and they must continue their efforts to grow and learn through ongoing trainings to attain even better standards.

The popular tools used by Hotels to assess and improve Guest Satisfaction currently were found to be Guest Comment Cards, Online feedback forms, Staff feedback, Travel Portals, Social Media and Mystery Guest. Trip Advisor was most popular Travel Portal on which the guests posted reviews or feed backs of hotels.

Further study of guests from 5 Star Deluxe Hotels on the same parameters will further add to the knowledge pool.

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