

Expectations of Generation Y Hotel Guests: An Exploratory Study

KEYWORDS

Generation Y, Indian Hotels, Guest Satisfaction, Segment, Expectation.

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Generation Y as hotel guests are growing in to be a major market segment not just in India, but globally. There is a sudden need to understand the requirements of this growing section. In order to have quality service and provide "Guest Satisfaction", the hotel chains everywhere are in the process of getting to know Generation Y well which is young but influential at the same time. There is an evidence transformation in demographic profile of Indian Hotel Guests, those born during the early 1980s and early 1990s, are the new influential segment stipulating a transformation in the service order. This research will study the available literature to understand the characteristics of Gen Y hotel guests and shall evaluate the expectations Gen Y has from the hotel industry. Some efforts by the Indian Hotel Industry in this regard are also dealt with. The study will be formative in nature giving a direction to further study on this topic as there is a dearth of noteworthy research concerning the trends and changes this generation will bring to the hospitality industry. This study is important because there is an urgent need of such studies in Indian scenario, and the hotels need to understand this particular segment well in order to serve them impeccably.

Introduction

The fast changing trends influencing the hotel guests' expectations are a challenge for the industry. By the time a trend sets in and industry accommodates it, it is on its way to get obsolete. The young guests of the hotel which are constantly growing and replacing the older generations are the users of new trends, technology and expect their needs to be attended to while travelling. The hotel industry does not have a too much time left to study the Gen Y and react to their requirements as they have already arrived with full gusto, not just in India but globally.

A few researches conducted a few years earlier refer to Gen Y as people born approximately between 1980 and 1990 (Erickson, 2008; Fenich et al., 2011; Josiam et al., 2007; Tulgan, 2009). Generation Y has also been referred to as the millennial generation (Erickson, 2008; Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010). In the present times, Gen Y are those human beings that have their year of birth in the range of 1980s to early 1990s, and belong to the age group extending from the age of 12 to early 30s.

The present study has been taken up to understand characteristics of Gen Y hotel guests and to evaluate the expectations Gen Y has from the hotel industry. It is a common knowledge that the Millennial generation is tech-savvy and they do not prefer to travel in the same style as previous generations to which their parents belong to, there has been a dearth of noteworthy research concerning the trends and changes this generation will bring to the hospitality industry. It is therefore imperative to get a clear understanding of this generation which is going to be the biggest spenders in the near future. Touted as the next biggest segment, a quick review to understand the peculiarities and needs of theirs should be the topmost priority for the industry. This gives the present study all the more reason to be carried out further as it is formative in nature. The present study is exploratory in nature and it is an attempt to understand the characteristics Generation Y as hotel guests in India and their expectations from the industry. The study attempts to collect information through secondary data using review of literature. If we need to study what the future of hospitality and travel may look like, do not look beyond Generation Y who are the first truly digital natives. Businesses will not be efficacious without considering Generation Y's preferences (Bremmer, 2013).

Greenleigh (2012) stated that Millennials are hyper-social, continuously glued to social media, are extremely curious about activities of others, purchasing, and revelling – strangers as well as

friends. They are marketing savvy and ad averse. According to McIver (2013), this gebneration is fastest growing demographic, both as consumers and workforce. As per Agarwal (2009), Gen Y present huge marketing prospects since the Baby Boomers, and soon they will replace the Baby Boomers as the biggest purchasing power.

Objective:

- To understand characteristics of Generation Y hotel guests.
- To evaluate the expectations Generation Y has from the hotel industry.

Research Methodology:

The present study is formative in nature and it is an attempt to understand the characteristics of Generation Y as hotel guests in India and their expectations from the industry. The study attempts to collect information through secondary data using review of literature. Books, journals, articles from websites, newspaper articles were used for collection of secondary data.

Literature Review:

Defining generation Y

The name Gen Y has been derived from their preceding generation X. They are also known as echo boomers, as they are born out of baby boomer generation. Some other names of this generation are millennials, internet generation, iGen, net generation . They are touted as the fastest growing segment of today's work force and business travellers. They are on their way to turn out to be the largest consumer segment. There are numerous studies, which attempt to understand the characteristics of generation Y, such as a self-centred vision (Tulgan, 2009). Generation Y is now growing into its peak earning years – prime time for travel brands looking to capture not only their hard-earned cash but also their loyalty (Vivion, 2016).

As Generation Y enters the workforce and begins a career, the exposure to hotel brands and types will increase. Luxury hotel stays are becoming more financially reachable to these Generation Y guests because of their career advancements (Fields, 2013).

Most of the Generation Y populations, born during the 1980's and 1990's, are the children of the Baby Boomers (Pendergast, 2010). Generation Y boasts higher levels of education along with experience of a range of diverse cultures, in comparison to previous generations. These characteristics articulate the open-mindedness and profligacy of diverse lifestyles (Huang & Petrick, 2010). Various researchers have discovered that youth are making more than before travel plans and

visiting more areas of the world (WYSE, 2007). This 'internet generation' is also making use of the Internet to make travel plan arrangements (Spark, Martin, & Stamper). The increase in travel related bookings done with the help of the internet is prodigious, with an estimation of over 80% of young travellers choosing the web to perform research on the travel products before making a reservation (WYSE, 2007).

Numerous researchers have attempted to explain generation Y (Erickson, 2008; Josiam et al., 2007; Tulgan, 2009), researchers usually discuss observations prompting our understanding of the perception (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). These observations discuss the visible behaviour of generation Y, how generation Y perceives working professionally (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman and Lance, 2010; Tulgan, 2009) and thought process of generation Y (Erickson, 2008).

Considerations from researchers and authors on these dimensions emphasize generation Y's predisposition to self-centredness (Ng et al., 2010; Twenge et al., 2010; Tulgan, 2009). Regardless of the previous discussions, the literature is not able to put forth clear definitions, but rather explicates general behaviour which sets them apart from the rest.

Yang & Lau (2015) indicated that Generation Y likes to have high standards of quality for hotel room and services both, they are very particular about security, and satisfaction does not guarantee their loyalty. Generation Y were also found to be more conscious and gave importance to upscale quality related features.

Some Characteristics of Gen Y:-

- 1. Technologically advanced: Dorsey (2010), has pointed out that it is not correct to know Gen Y as technologically advanced as they are rather technologically dependent. They may not know the technology that well, but cannot function without it. From socialising, to daily necessities, information generation, commuting, communication, recreation, bookings etc are all done through technology and the smart phones are being used most to fulfil these requirements. From a hotel's perspective this would relate to having user friendly apps, in-room gadgets, restaurants reinventing their technology in placing orders or viewing dishes. According to Chin (2016), with explosion in the usage of mobile devices such as personal digital assistants (PDAs), laptop computers, portable DVD players, MP3 music players, smartphone devices, the Gen Y travels with various gadgets. The modern family that checks in requires a lot more switches for charging their devices. The bedside table does not really need to look like old fashioned anymore with lamps finding a place at headboards, rather should have enough plug points to charge devices and dock stations. In lieu of the technologically advanced demands, the hotels must be able to integrate these devices with inroom hotel systems to ensure an improved guest experience. According to Vivion (2016) they are digital natives, in the sense that they do not travel without omnipresent access to the Internet or digital devices henceforth. They are vested to figure out their own personalized itineraries, know that is best for them.
- 2. Always On-line/ wired: Providing complimentary digital newspaper and magazine service on any device connected to hotel's Wi-Fi. Using texting to make demands from housekeeping, room service or any other area should be worked upon. A social media concierge to provide details on local area and activities. Apps that can connect to fellow guests at hotels. Most of these younger guests at the hotels are surfing and making online reservation, therefore it is a must to have a presence there, including brand engagement on social media tools like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc. Equipped with smartphones they are linked at all times throughout the day-seven days a week. This generation prefers to be connected virtually instead of face-to-face communication. They communicate easily through email, text messages, and social media, and as these are at their fingertips and available easily. They have the capability to select

through piles of information and draw out those that are of importance. Their expectations are obviously instant connectivity, and availability of information on the run enabled through the Web and smartphone-enhanced content (Vivion, 2016).

Emerging economies have yet to embrace online travel fully, but have significant potential for growth over the next five years. China, India, Russia and Brazil are all expected to become major online travel markets, with healthy online travel value compound annual growth rates (CAGRs) between 10% and 20% over 2012-2017. Technology is one of the primary drivers shaping travel behaviour. Brands should develop a strong multi-channel strategy. Investing in new platforms such as mobile and tablets is a necessary step for brands to keep pace with connected consumers, regardless of age, sex and income (Bremmer, 2013).

- 3. Personal travel experience seekers: Gen Y seek out personal travel experiences, also they are not as loyal. Other than a clean bed, Wi-Fi is the foremost requirement Millennials seek in a hotel. Other than the essentials, Millennials also expect for that "extra something" from a hotel as they do not wish to share a boring photo of a room with their friends on social network. Looking for the "cool factor" and individualistic aspect in their travels, they want to save their experiences wishing to share their story when they go home or with friends and family.
- **4. Team Players:** According to Mettler (2015) Millenials are interested in collaboration and social interaction as that is how they were educated and grew up, therefore they appreciate the prospect of going out of their rooms and be with other people or at least have that option available. Millennials are social creatures online and offline.

According to Lee (2013) although there has been an apprehension that this generation may not have interpersonal skills since they are more dependent on texting and other forms of communication, Generation Y does, in fact, connect with their peers, in the new age manner which previous generations are still not thorough with like texting, Instagram, Facebook, Chatting, WhatsApp, Snapchat, etc. Gen Y desires to share its current activities, engagements, location and opinions with others, and this becomes their method of interaction giving them a much broader reach than previous generations. Additionally, Millennials are sociable offline as they are a generation that enjoys traveling with others, whether or not they have met previously belonging to their age brackets. Hotels in USA have started to embrace this idea by incorporating the social lobby and Bar with a much younger and a carefree vibe that appeals to Millennials and lures them to mingle in the lobby rather than their rooms. Apps have started to surface that encourage hotel guests to meet and greet fellow guests. Millennials while working alone on individual laptops or phones prefer doing it in a public area. It is the development of technology and sociability which will lure Millennials wishing to interact and socialise, a lifestyle they have become accustomed to.

- **5. Love instant gratification:** The need for 'immediacy' can be linked to the use of electronic devices, such as email and texting, as a primary means of communication for generation Y (Eisner, 2005; Erickson, 2008; Tulgan, 2009).
- **6. Well-Travelled:** Every generation while growing up has an influence from the social and economic opportunities, advancements in the tourism and travel industry. Generation Y has had much more exposure in travel than the older Generation X, and Baby Boomers and this is the reasons why have traveling habits that differ from previous generations. Many of the individuals from Generation Y are knowledgeable travellers because they had travelled with their parents since childhood on different pretexts. The amount of services and facilities in hotels, tours and travel activities for this market segment is rising due to Gen Y's awareness of travel opportunities and habits Benckendorff, P., Moscardo, G., and

Pendergast, D. (2010). This generation grew up prosperous and many choices offered to them, 'gap years and extensive travel are the norm' for them (Asthana, 2008).

- 7. Prefer modern structures and art: Wheeler (2013) points out, Millenials prefer open and communal spaces instead of traditional lobby. They do not mind sharing tables and working separately. A bobby with front desk, bar, lounge, restaurants integrated together appeals to Gen Y more. A large screen TV, high speed internet at a place like this makes millennials more at home and comfortable. The art work liked by millennials in hotels is more colourful, modern and abstract
- 8. Fitness buffs: According to SIS International Research (2016), Millennials are highly health-conscious, not only work hard, but also understanding the importance of work-life balance. The financially secure Gen-Yr's are more likely to spend their money on fitness, leisure enjoyment, and vacations. Millennials love pools, lounge areas, fitness centers, sun decks, on-site security, etc.

Expectations of Gen Y guests from Hotels:

- 1. Free Internet: Multiple sources of reservation: Other than a hotel's website, a Gen Y traveller wants to use multiple surces to make reservation or to take an informed decision like Online Travel Agents (OTAs), e-channels and other social media sites. An active engagement with GDSs (global distribution systems) and being available on real time inventory on different reservation channels will help hotels cater to millennials better (Jyoti, 2014). Gen Y is the "Net Gen" growing up with the Internet and technology has defined who they are as a generation. As a whole, Gen Y is a very sociable, confident, well-informed, and open-minded demographic (Agarwal, 2009). Free Wifi to access the Internet so guests can use their devices must be standard with the expectation that speed, bandwidth and functionality of this service must meet the customers' standards, because their consumption of data will only increase (Amadeus, 2010). Gen Y expects their Wi-Fi enabled devices 15 to work seamlessly throughout the hotel and be available anytime/anywhere." (Agarwal, 2009).
- 2. Variety of food 24 hours: young adults' pronounced frustration with eating out operators' perceived lack of flexibility. This dislike for inflexibility is clearly related to a desire for personalisation, and speaks to the high expectations of today's young adult consumer. Overall, the most important feature of this generation for hospitality operators is their enthusiasm for going out to eat, suggesting that the communal experience is at least as important as the food on the table. Live sharing of the experience through messages and photography through social media is also vital for many in this age group.
- **3. Self-service check-in/out:** In India, just like various airports, it's no longer necessary to stand in a queue to check in, hotel guests are expecting the same kind of easy, technology-driven check-ins at hotels as well. Guests want to be able to do everything from checking in at a venue's automated kiosk to ordering room service with a digital device instead of standing in queues and moving around the hotel premises to order food (Siddiqui, 2016).
- 4. Hotels with individual personality and a distinctive 'sense of place': Since the Millenials need to post pictures and the social networks and share their stories with friends they want something unique in the hotel that matches their personality. They need something different that is appeals to them. This can be done with a special amenity such as local potato chips and beer in the mini-bar or a unique design aspect such as distinctive local artwork in each room, or a special event such as a deejay spinning on the hotel's rooftop bar. There must be something unique that draws the Millennial traveler in that they can't find at another property (Lee, 2013).

- 5. Multi-use lobbies that encourage guests to socialise: Further compacted by the Internet, Gen Y is the "...first global generation and the first daycare generation." (Sherman, 2008) which has led to more interaction with people different from themselves. The increased use of technology and the Internet will not only transform how hotels market and interact with Gen Y, but it will also change the hotels themselves. The new innovation that many hotels are investing in is a visually dynamic, operationally effective, customer-centric design for the hotel (Amadeus, 2010). This can already be seen with the increased number of social lobbies and renovated hotel space that is currently occurring in many hotel properties. Social lobbies can be described as a public area which is adjacent to the main lobby which is open for use by the public. These lobbies offer amenities and services like free Wi-fi, comfortable chairs to sit in, waiter service, a bar, and coffee shop. They also offer the ability to change the mood of the lobby by changing scent, music, and colour (Taulane, 2007).
- **6. Health and fitness facilities:** Jyoti (2014) emphasised that the hotels are expected to operates a 24-hour workout fitness studio equipped with fitness gear such as running shoes, socks and, gym outfits are lent out to guests at minimal rentals allowing guests to travel light. The Gen Y known to be fitness enthusiasts consider such facilities to be very important for a comfortable stay. According to Mettler (2015) health and exercise are important to millennials, and both hotels must take notice, focussing on their fitness programs and facilities. Many properties in the USA have started to offer house bikes that guests may borrow to explore the area. Providing yoga mats in every room would also be appealing to the Millenials.

Hotel Industry gearing up for Gen Y

Hotels are increasingly looking to connect with young travellers through mobile channels. Not only are they building mobile websites and apps for booking rooms, but are even launching gaming and concierge apps. Hotel companies are also rethinking rooms by incorporating technology, design, sustainability and localisation to respond to consumer demands. Even marketing strategies have pivoted to reach this generation which is sceptical of traditional marketing.

Special attention needs to be paid to the Millennial guests who are health-conscious not wanting to miss out on their healthy diet or fitness regime even while travelling. Westin, has made changes and incorporated these special fitness needs by having a 24-hour workout fitness studio equipped also providing fitness gear such as running shoes, socks and, gym outfits are lent out to guests at minimal rentals. Also, they have superfood menu in which nutritionists have developed with twenty-six dishes rich in nutritional value (Jyoti, 2014).

Holiday Inn Express revived its Stay Smart campaign in June 2013 and updated it for Generation Y by creating the website StaySmart.comforuser-generated content.

Hotels like Marriott found that social media is an effective channel to target Generation Y and Generation X travellers. Social media pages on Twitter and Facebook are monitored by their teams seven days a week. It acknowledges posts and aims to resolve any negative issues within 12 hours.

In June 2013, Marriott also unveiled a new, simplified brand identity by a single letter "M", followed by the tagline "Travel Brilliantly". The main objective of the campaign was to target a new web-savvy generation of travellers .

According to Rosenbloom (2013), there is a shift in the guests' needs as many vacationers who are even from older generations no longer want to be out of touch with their offices and families.

Hilton Worldwide offers guests the ability to check in and out, select their room, check maps and make extra requests or purchases all from their smartphones. And soon smartphones will also function as room keys.

Discussion: The study has been taken up to understand characteristics of Gen Y hotel guests and to evaluate the expectations Gen Y has from the hotel industry. A few interesting characteristics have emerged in the study which are peculiar to this generation.

Conclusion

For the hospitality industry, "a guest experience that appeals to Gen Y'ers must have connectivity at its core." (Agarwal, 2009). As a result of their sociability and use of internet and technology, Gen Y'ers also poses many problems to the hospitality industry. "...having a virtual world of information at their fingertips has made Gen Y the most impatient, advertising-skeptic, buyer-aware public we've ever known. For them, corporate reputation and brand are less important than peer recommendations and viral forms of marketing. Price is generally secondary over convenience." (Agarwal, 2009). This means that Word of Mouth (WOM) and Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) are extremely important to Gen Y, placing personal recommendation from a peer over clever marketing or branding. As the Indian hotel industry continues to evolve and embrace the changes brought on by a younger generation of guests, and improving technology and service levels, a lot more research, action and work is needed in this segment.

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