
“EXPLORING THE RELATIVE WORTH OF THE COMPONENTS OF COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE FOR STAY IN A HOTEL BY THE TEACHERS OF HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN BARAK VALLEY OF ASSAM.”

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to identify the components and sub-components of comforts and conveniences for stay in a hotel of the teachers serving in the institutions of higher learning in Barak Valley, Assam.

The study is based mainly on the primary data captured through a specially designed questionnaire for this purpose. The data have been collected from the teachers serving in the institutions of higher learning in Barak Valley of Assam in the year 2011.

The findings of the study reveal that the teachers serving in higher learning institutions in Barak Valley have assigned a higher priority to the components which are basic in nature than the components of ease and comfort.

The present study will lend a hand to the hospitality industry in developing and designing strategies for customer satisfaction by knowing the relative worth of the components of comfort and convenience (assigned by the respondents) for stay in a hotel.

One of the limitations of the present study is that it is circumscribed to the relative priorities of the teachers serving in the institutions of higher learning in Barak Valley of Assam only. Besides, in order to identify the components of comforts and conveniences for stay in a hotel only the ranking technique was taken into consideration.

Keywords: Service, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Hospitality Industry.

Introduction

Marketing of services constitutes enlarged share in the economy of many countries in 21st century as compared to earlier centuries. Out of a variety of services that the producers and marketers are offering, the services provided by hotel and entertainment industry are gaining more importance for the reasons of (apart from others) increased globalization, resulting in increased national and international movement for the purpose of business, tourism, maintenance of diplomatic relations,

health care and also for organizing community functions and feasts. To perform any of the above activity successfully the availability of hotel facility is a core one. In order to tap the greater potential of the market, the marketers try to compete with each other. In any economy, which is having the conditions of buyers' market, it is quite natural that while trying to attract more customers, the marketers will try to identify the areas of comfort and convenience of the customers and then to the extent possible they will try to cater to these identified needs of customers at a cheaper rate and in a way and at a time needed and preferred by them.

Since the audience of hotel visitors is becoming more and more heterogeneous because of globalization and other such reasons, the tastes and preferences of the customers are also varying greatly.

In the background of the above it was decided to **identify the components and sub-components of comforts and conveniences for stay in a hotel, more particularly a relative worth of these**. Keeping in mind that the concerns and conveniences of business representatives, tourists of various kinds and diplomats etc. have been probed well by many researchers, leaving the lot of teachers, it was decided to concentrate on the preferences etc. of the teachers serving in the institutions of higher learning, as there is every possibility that, they being a distinct class by virtue of their profession, nature, taste and personality etc., may have very different priorities.

Literature review

In order to get acquainted with the components of comforts and conveniences for stay in a hotel, literature on the concerned matter was reviewed. The excerpts of findings of some of the relevant literature that was reviewed in the process of the study are reproduced below:

LeBalnc, G. and Nguyen, N. (1996) in their study "An examination of the factors that signal hotel image to travelers" have found various hotel attributes such as room quality, reputation of hotel, helpfulness of staff etc. which are considered by customers as factors/attributes for evaluating hotel performance¹.

Dolnicar and Otter (2003) in their study titled "which hotel attributes matter? A review of previous and a framework for further research" have reviewed 21 studies undertaken over the period of 1984–2000 in relation to hotel attributes. From 21 journal articles Dolnicar and Otter (2003) extracted 173 hotel attributes including such factors as: Image, Service, Price/Value, Hotel, Room, Food and Beverage, Security and others².

Knutson (1988) in his study "Frequent travelers: making them happy and bringing them back" recognized that clean, comfortable and well maintained rooms, convenient locations, safe environment as well as prompt and courteous service were important components of customer satisfaction³.

Callan (1996) while summarizing a number of research projects found that among many of the components for stay in a hotel the standard of cleanliness was rated as the most important one⁴. The importance of cleanliness has also been identified more recently by Lockyer (2000)⁵ and Lockyer (2002)⁶.

Salah and Ryans (1992) in their study of 30 hotel attributes for customers' selection of hotels found that clean, spacious rooms, comfortable bed, the availability and quality of food, friendly staff and efficient service, convenient parking as well as interior decoration and exterior aesthetics were the important components while selecting a hotel⁷.

Research methodology

In order to identify the factors of comforts and convenience for stay in a hotel of the teachers serving in the institutions of higher learning in Barak Valley the investigation was carried out in the following ways:

After the identification of the area of the study a literature review was carried out, partly for getting acquainted with the text and partly to identify the specific and pinpointed components and sub-components of comforts and convenience for stay in a hotel by the customers. Unfortunately such components and sub-components were not available systematically and in a listed manner in the literature. These were rather available in a stray manner in some write-ups. These then, as a binding, had to be developed on our own. A tentative list of these components and sub-components was then prepared to probe the matter. At this stage it was decided that it will be more apt to have the views of the target audience to know the correctness of the components and its sub-components proposed to be used for the study and also enlarge the list of these if so required. This list was then served to some selected teachers, hotel managers and doctors. The results were amazing. This exercise of pilot survey helped a lot in amending and enlarging the list of components specially the sub-components. Finally a questionnaire was developed and administered with such components and sub-components which were considered more important on the basis of the reporting by the respondents through pilot survey. The main components such selected for inclusion in the final questionnaire were thirteen (13) along with certain number of sub-components of each of these thirteen main components, which varied, from component to component. The thirteen important and relevant components which were taken into consideration in order to elaborate a structured questionnaire include Reception, Staff Service Quality, Cleanliness, Water supply in the toilet, Food and Beverages, Entertainment facility, Lift service, Medical facilities, Conference and Meeting facilities, Car Parking facility, Communication facility, Safety and Security services and Others.

The idea of putting sub-components in the questionnaire was based on a desire to attain a satisfactory level of objectivity in the findings of the study, as these sub-components were considered inherent and inseparable to each of the main component selected for the present study.

The respondents in the study are from the three purposively selected institutions of higher learning located in Silchar town of Barak valley of Assam. Even though there are many institutions of higher learning in Barak Valley, only three of these namely the Assam University, National Institute of Technology and Silchar Medical College constitute the population of the present study, largely for the reason that the teachers from these three institutions move more and quite often go to other places and stay in hotels.

The technique to choose the sample was non-probabilistic based on the ease of access and is more commonly known as convenient sampling. The questionnaire was administered to forty respondents. The raw data was then processed in an Excel Sheet and finally simple averages of all the components were calculated in order to determine the relative priority of each of the components and the sub-components of comforts and conveniences for stay in a hotel. The criteria to know the relative worth of both the components and their sub-components is the same. The value obtained from the averages of each of the component and their sub-components is the basis to determine the order of rank for each component and sub-component. The smaller is the value of a component the higher is the priority given to that component and vice-versa i.e., the highest priority is given to the component with the smallest value and the least priority is given to the component with the highest value.

Profile of the Participants

The study sample consists of 40 respondents (teachers) serving in the institutions of higher learning in Barak Valley, Assam. Of the total participants 77.50 per cent were male and 22.50 per cent female. In case of Age of the respondents 25% fall in the age group of 25 to 35 years, 32.5% fall in the age group of 36 to 45 years, and 32.5% fall in the age group of 46 to 55 years and the remaining 10% fall in the age group of above 56 years. When divided on the basis of institutions the respondents belong to the picture emerges as follows. A majority of them i.e., 67.5% belong to Assam University, 10% to National Institute of Technology (NIT) and the remaining 22.5% to Silchar Medical College (SMC). The profile of the participants has been shown in Table 1.

Results and discussions

The order of priority derived against each of the components and sub-components of comforts and convenience for stay in a hotel are shown on Table-2.

The average priority of the component Cleanliness is 1.65. This average priority is the smallest of all the components and hence the order of priority assigned to this component is the one with the highest rank i.e. 1st. This means that the teachers serving in higher learning institutions in Barak Valley consider cleanliness as the most important component for selecting a hotel to stay in. Among the sub-components of cleanliness the teachers (serving in the higher learning institutions of Barak Valley) prefer Cleanliness in the room first, then Cleanliness in the toilet, Cleanliness of the corridor/reception place and lastly Cleanliness inside the lift. Such a conclusion has been derived on the basis of the average priority and the order of priority evaluated from the responses of the teachers.

Water supply in the toilet has been ranked second since the value of average priority of this component is next to Cleanliness i.e. next in the ascending order of priority. The value of the average priority of this component is 2.875 which mean that respondents (teachers) have ranked this component as their second priority for selecting a hotel to stay in. The order of priority of the sub-components of the component Water in the toilet is Purity of water, Regularity in water supply and Performance of the geyser. In

other words the teachers look for Purity of water first, then Regularity in supply and lastly the Performance of the geyser.

The Food and Beverages is the third component in the order of the priority with an average priority of 3.85. Like the Cleanliness and Water this component is also one of the basic components the customers look for during their stay in a hotel. However, the Food and Beverages has been ranked by the teachers next to the Cleanliness and Water supply in the toilet for selecting a hotel to stay in. There are five sub-components that have been considered under the Food and beverages. These are Quality of food, Timely or otherwise delivery of the food ordered, Prices of Food, Room service and Variety of food available. Among these sub-components the Quality of the food (with average priority of 1.725) has been considered as the most important by the teachers serving in the higher learning institutions of Barak Valley. Next to the Quality of the food and Beverages is the Time taken for delivering the order made by the customers, the average priority of which is 2.925. Price of the food (with average priority 3) has been considered as the third important sub-component by the teachers followed by the Room service facility (average priority 3.625) and the Variety of the food and beverages available (average priority 3.725).

The average priority of the component 'Reception' is 4.675 and is placed in the 4th priority after the Food and beverages. Reception thus is considered as another creamy layer component of the comfort and convenience for stay in a hotel. The first sub-component in the order of priority on the basis of which Reception has been considered by the teachers as an important one is Warmness and humbleness of the staff. The Flexibility in rules to accommodate the customers' likings/requirement in food and allotment of rooms is the next sub-component that has been considered as important under Reception by the teachers. Last but not the least the Information about the product/service/package has been considered as important by the teachers serving in the higher learning institutions of Barak Valley. The average priorities of the three sub-components are 1.375, 2.1 and 2.525 respectively.

Staff service quality has been ranked fifth since the value of the average priority of this component is next to Reception i.e. next in the ascending order of priority. The value of the average priority of this component is 4.95 which mean that most of the teachers have ranked Staff service quality as their fifth priority for selecting a hotel to stay in. The above table also reveals that as far as the staff service quality is concerned Timely response of the attendants to the calls made by the customers is the most important element. This element has got an average priority of 1.7. The service of the Attendants at the time of check in and checkout has been considered as the next important element by the respondents followed by Acquaintance briefing by the attendants.

Security for staying in a hotel is also one of the basic components associated with the hotel industry. Customers always prefer safe and secured hotels for stay. This component has got an average priority of 6.15 and has been placed in the 6th position in the ascending order of priority by the respondents. The sub-components of Security include Security inside room and Security in relation to the other aspects. However Security inside room has been found more important by the teachers than the Security in relation to other aspects.

The lift service of the hotels is the 7th component in the order of priority of the respondents. The average priority of this component is 7.75. Among the sub-components of the Lift service, Operating hours of the Lift service has been considered as the most important one with an average priority of 1.9. Next to the Operating hours of the Lift service is the Lift service to all the floors (2.175) followed by Attendant service (2.875) and Spaciousness (3.05).

The Entertainment facilities have been ranked 8th in the order of priority by the teachers (serving in the higher learning institutions in Barak Valley) for selecting a hotel to stay in. Under the Entertainment facilities Performance of television set has been ranked first in the order of preference by the teachers. Light music facility is the second with an average priority of 2.875. Next to the Light music is the Sports and recreation facilities with an average priority of 2.875. The Children specific entertainment facility with an average priority of 3.775 has been ranked fourth in the preference order by the teachers followed by the Exhibition and outer decoration (4.025) and Bar/Card room/Disco (5.275).

The provision of Medical facilities in the hotel has been ranked by the respondents in the 9th position with an average priority of 8.125. Under the Medical facilities, the First aid facility has been ranked 1st by the respondents followed by Doctors' service and Provision for an ambulance.

Provision for communication facilities such as Availability of telephone in the room, Intercom, Internet and Fax etc., have been ranked 10th in the ascending order of priority by the teachers. This component has got an average priority of 9.725. Among the sub-components of the communication facilities Availability of telephone in the room has been ranked 1st followed by the Intercom, Internet and Fax services.

Provision for car parking facilities with an average priority of 9.925 has been assigned as the 11th priority by the teachers serving in higher learning institutions in Barak Valley. Under the provision for Car parking facilities Night service has been ranked 1st, whereas Coziness 2nd, Attendant assistance 3rd and Charges for car parking as 4th.

The Provision of conference and meeting facility in the hotel has been ranked 12th by the respondents with an average priority of 10.575. Under the Provision for conference and meeting facilities Cleanliness, arrangement and decoration of the conference/meeting hall have been ranked first by the teachers with an average priority of 1.4 followed by Public address system (2.175), Community dining hall (3.025) and finally Children recreation with an average priority of 3.4.

The component 'Others' with average priority of 12.8 has been placed by the teachers in the bottom in the order of the priority for stay in a hotel. They regard this component as the least important one than the other components included in the present study. The sub-components of 'Others' include various other facilities ordinarily offered by a hotel. Most of the facilities included under this component are the value added services offered by hotels in order to satisfy the customers better than the others. Among all the sub-components under this category the Behavior of

the employees has been ranked first with an average priority of 2.55, followed by Credit/debit card facility (3.175), Helpline service (3.4), Silence (3.65), Liaisoning with tourist agency (3.75) and finally Discount/rebate (4.475).

Conclusion and Implications

The primary objective of this study was to identify the relative priority of the components of comfort and convenience for stay in a hotel by the teachers serving in the higher learning institutions in Barak Valley. The findings of the study reveal that the teachers serving in higher learning institutions in Barak Valley have assigned a higher priority to the components which are basic in nature than the components of ease and comfort which reveals their preference on the basis of their tastes and likings. Among the basic components, which are deemed important for the respondents, 'Cleanliness' has been identified as the most influential component for them for selecting a hotel to stay in, followed by 'Water in the toilet', 'Food and beverages', 'Reception', 'Staff service quality' and 'Safety and security service'.

Among the components of ease and comfort for selecting a hotel to stay in, 'Lift service' has been considered as the most influential component by the respondents. The components next in the ascending order of priority under this heading include- 'Entertainment facility', 'Medical facility', 'Communication facility', 'Car parking', 'Conference and meeting facilities' and 'Others'.

Customer satisfaction, which is considered as an emotional outcome, results from the customers' desire fulfilment response. Such a desire fulfilment response can be achieved through fulfilling the needs and expectations of the customers. Since the hotels which are the prime component of hospitality industry have been facing a fierce competition and, therefore, seek customers' desire fulfillment response, **selection of the right type of products and services for each target group** therefore turns out to be very essential in order to achieve a superior performance than others. In case of service industry (because of the intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability of services) [Parasuraman et al, 1985] the degree of customer satisfaction depends on the customers' perceptions of service attributes and facilities. In hospitality industry, in order to enhance customer satisfaction, the tastes and preferences in relation to the hotel attributes should be considered as an important determinant. Once the tastes and preferences of the target customers are known to the marketers alongwith the relative priority of these by the customers of each segment, they (marketers) would be able to generate and design more apt strategies for satisfying their target customers of each segment better than others. Thus the present study will lend a hand to the hospitality industry in developing and designing more appropriate strategies to attract and satisfy the customers for stay in hotels.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

Although this study provides significant insight into the matter relating to the components of comfort and convenience for staying in a hotel yet it is important to note that the study has been carried out under certain limitations. Since one of the limitations of the present study is that it is circumscribed to the relative priorities

of the teachers serving in the higher learning institutions in Barak Valley of Assam only further studies can be performed to elicit the relative worth of the components of comfort and convenience in view of other groups of the society. Further, since in order to identify the components of comforts and conveniences for selecting a hotel to stay only the ranking technique was taken into consideration, for more objectivity and worthy results the study with the same universe can also be conducted by applying advanced statistical tools and techniques.

Table-1: Profile of the participants

Age(years)	Number of respondents	Percentage
25-35	10	25
36-45	13	32.5
46-55	13	32.5
56 & above	4	10
Gender		
Male	31	77.5
Female	09	22.5
Institutional Background		
Assam University, Silchar	27	67.5
National Institute of Technology, Silchar	04	10
Silchar Medical College	09	22.5

Source: field survey.

Table-2: Table depicting the Average Priority and Order of Priority of the components of comfort and convenience for stay in a hotel.

Sl. no.	Components	Average Priority	Order of Priority
1	Cleanliness	1.65	1st
a.	In the room.	1.3	1 st
b.	In the toilet.	1.95	2 nd
c.	In the corridor/reception place.	2.975	3 rd
d.	Inside lift.	3.775	4 th
2	Water supply in the toilet	2.875	2nd
a.	Purity.	1.35	1 st
b.	Regularity in supply.	1.725	2 nd
c.	Performance of geyser.	2.925	3 rd
3	Food and Beverages	3.85	3rd

a.	Quality.	1.725	1 st
b.	Timings.	2.925	2 nd
c.	Price.	3	3 rd
d.	Room service.	3.625	4 th
e.	Variety.	3.725	5 th
4	Reception	4.675	4th
a.	Warmness/humbleness by the staff	1.375	1 st
b.	Flexibility in rules to accommodate the customers' likings/requirements in food and allotment of rooms.	2.1	2 nd
c.	Information about the product/service/package.	2.525	3 rd
5	Staff service quality	4.95	5th
a.	Attendant at call.	1.7	1 st
b.	Attendant helping at the time of occupying the room and also check out.	1.9	2 nd
c.	Acquaintance briefing.	2.4	3 rd
6	Safety and Security services	6.15	6th
a.	Room related.	1	1 st
b.	Others.	2	2 nd
7	Lift service	7.75	7th
a.	Operating hour.	1.9	1 st
b.	Services to all the floors.	2.175	2 nd
c.	Attendant service.	2.875	3 rd
d.	Spaciousness.	3.05	4 th
8	Entertainment facilities	7.925	8th
a.	Performance of television set.	1.525	1 st
b.	Light music.	2.875	2 nd
c.	Sports and recreation facilities like badminton court.	3.525	3 rd
d.	Children specific (at the time of family stay).	3.775	4 th
e.	Exhibition and outer decoration.	4.025	5 th
f.	Bar/card room/disco.	5.275	6 th
9	Medical facilities	8.125	9th
a.	First aid facility.	1.275	1 st
b.	Doctors' service.	2.125	2 nd

c.	Ambulance.	2.6	3 rd
10	Communication facilities	9.725	10th
a.	Telephone-room service.	1.975	1 st
b.	Intercom facility.	2.4	2 nd
c.	Internet facility.	2.425	3 rd
d.	Fax.	3.2	4 th
11	Car parking facility	9.925	11th
a.	Night service.	2.275	1 st
b.	Coziness.	2.35	2 nd
c.	Attendant assistance.	2.45	3 rd
d.	Charges for car parking.	2.925	4 th
12	Conference and meeting facilities	10.575	12th
a.	Cleanliness, arrangement and decoration.	1.4	1 st
b.	Public address system.	2.175	2 nd
c.	Community dining hall.	3.025	3 rd
d.	Children recreation (occasion like birthday parties).	3.4	4 th
13	Others	12.8	13th
a.	Behavior of employees.	2.55	1 st
b.	Debit/credit card facility.	3.175	2 nd
c.	Helpline service.	3.4	3 rd
d.	Silence.	3.65	4 th
e.	Liasoning with tourist agency.	3.75	5 th
f.	Discount.	4.475	6 th

Source: Field survey.

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