

Business Guests Accommodation Selection: A Gender-Based Study on Factors Affecting the Selection of Star Category Business Hotels in Mumbai City

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Abstract

The guest rooms are the main revenue earning product for the hotel. A study was carried out to assess which in-room facilities were important for the business customers in the hotel. The study was carried out on 132 customers which included 91 Male Customers and 41 Female Customers in four-star and five-star hotels in Mumbai city. The various attributes considered by the researcher include Hygiene and Cleanliness, Services and amenities provided, Customized services, Quiet and private environment, Design and Décor, Ecological aspect (Eco Friendly Hotel), Updated technology/IT Amenities, Room category, e.g. Smoking rooms, Nonsmoking rooms, Rooms for disabled, Theme room.

It was observed that Hygiene and Cleanliness and Information Technology Amenities were ranked the highest important factors by both genders in the selection of a Business Hotel. The quiet and private environment was more important to Male customers compared to Female customers. The factors related to Services and Amenities provided, Customized services and Ecological aspect (Eco Friendly Hotel) were perceived important by the Female Customers while choosing a hotel.

Keywords: Amenities, Facilities, Business Trip, Customer Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality Industry's growth is one of the fastest among the other industries in the world. India has emerged as an attractive tourist destination and many multinational

hospitality companies are interested in investing in the Indian market.

There has been tremendous growth in the number of hotels every year in the city of Mumbai which includes all categories of hotels from 3 star to 5 star. The major part of the hotel's margin of profit comes from room sales. The hotel facilities and services are considered as important determinants for customer satisfaction and earning good revenue for the hotel.

The hotel business is highly competitive, especially as today the supply of rooms exceeds the demand in the market. The hotels provide a range of facilities and services to suit the tastes and pockets of the customer. The customers have wide alternatives within each class of hotels from which to select the place to stay. Guests' expectations of hotel amenities and facilities are affected by the type of the hotel and its sophistication level. It is important to fulfil the expectations of a guest when he pays to stay in a room. While the guest pays a fixed tariff, a lot of perks and privileges are offered in for 'free' with the hope that it would influence the customers to patronize the hotel again. The ability of a hotel to attract and retain customers is important for good revenue generation, higher occupancy percentage and better revenue per available room for the hotels.

The hotels depend largely on the business customer for the major share of their business. MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) segment is one of the fastest-growing segments within the Indian Tourism Industry and contributes to a large extent towards the

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hotel business. The business customer requires more service amenities, special equipment and attention from the hotel to ensure they did not lag behind in this time-is-money era. The business guests are a critical market to the hoteliers as they boost occupancy levels, especially during low seasons and weekdays. Hotel companies which have a wide-range of brands within their portfolio must distinctly position each one of them in the eyes of the consumer in order to maximize market share. The hotel brands are differentiated based on the attributes like the degree of luxury and comfort of the physical amenities, the ambience and location of the hotel, meeting rooms, business centre, restaurants, swimming pool and exercise facilities, quietness, safety, cleanliness and special rewards programs for frequent guests. The quality and range of services offered by hotel, the scheduling and speed of service, the caliber of the service personnel is the key criterion in differentiating the hotel brand. The prospective customers accurately perceive the position of the service on dimensions which are important to them in making choice decisions related to the selection of the hotel.

The hotel carries out a market research in order to discover new markets, investigate the profile of customers in terms of their needs and wants, and obtain the required information to develop new products. The knowledge about effects of services for existing and potential customers on loyalty is a part of effective marketing. The programme allows the guest to tailor their stay to meet the individual needs and preferences. The member benefits and upgrading the rooms for regular customers include a dedicated check-in area, rooms on the higher floors, better view, corner rooms, special amenities, rooms on club or executive floors as identified by the brand of the hotel, late checkout, early check in, option to hold the room for certain hours during departure, 24 or 48 hours reservation guarantee. For Example a Business Customer tend to schedule tightly, but would like to do their regular workouts. In some hotels the guests do not have to leave their rooms to exercise, the gymnasium may be part of the room or customer-designed “Fit Kart” can be wheeled in to provide a complete workout.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the various in-room facilities offered by the star category business hotels.
- To study the in-rooms factors affecting the selection of hotel by the male and female business customers.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- The Hotels can make proactive changes which will focus more on customer preferences, quality and technological interfaces to stay in the competitive and dynamic environment. The customers choose those hotels that offer the best value proposition under existing budgetary constraints. Hotels can benefit from the implementation of service innovation.
- Employees working in the hospitality industry or aspiring to join the industry can make use of present study by knowing the kind of practices existing in the hotels, guest expectations and preferences, the importance of quality service in the housekeeping department of the hotel.
- The present study can be of help to academicians, and the students as the topics like guest satisfaction repeat business, brand loyalty, facilities and services are part of the curriculum for the Hotel Management studies. The research work can also be taken further by other academicians in doing sector-wise, region wise or period wise comparison.
- The study will help the researcher in learning the impact of in-room facilities and services on repeat business in various categories of hotels. It will help in developing insight and more understanding of the target market needs and delivering desired satisfaction more effectively than the competitors. The entire research experience would lead to a lot of learning in the mentioned subject.

PURPOSE

- Guestrooms in the hotel are like “Cash Cows”. Not only do such additional hotel amenities attract new guests but they also increase the occupancy rates and revenue earning for the hotel.
- Hotels of different categories provide a high level of guest services and hotel amenities to attract and sustain guests. Understanding the features that are perceived to be important by the customer for the choice of hotel helps the management to make optimal hotel development decisions and emphasize on those attributes.
- The function of Facilities and Services is to give a competitive advantage. It can be a differentiator for a hotel and establish its brand value and reputation in

the market. Housekeeping can be a differentiator for a hotel and establish its brand value and reputation in the market. It is imperative for any hotel company to set high benchmarks in housekeeping if it wants to attract new guests and repeat clientele.

- Facilities and Services in the guest room are important for the satisfaction of the guest leading to the repeat customer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have been carried out over the years to understand the needs of the business traveller. The hotel guest room attributes change over a period of five to ten years. Different brands provide the facilities for the business traveller under different heads. For example, Marriott hotels provide the business facilities as the “Room That Works” whereas the Hilton has “The Smart Desk”. The Starwood Property, Westin has the “Guest Office” and “Room 2000” for the business traveller, whereas Hyatt has “The Business Plan”. Technologically advanced facilities are the most important for a business guest in the hotel. Multiple studies from the literature review have suggested that business travellers do need internet access while they travel. All luxury hotels provide free internet services whereas few of the budget hotels provide such free services.

A thesis by Clare Jay (2011) tries to seek the reasons for the hotel’s choice of amenities and to what extent a hotel’s amenity selection provides the hotel with a competitive advantage. This research also seeks to understand the effects that the provision of guest amenities and facilities have on hotel front office and housekeeping staff.

A study by Fazuin Mohd. Yusoff (2011) identified hotel selection attributes for middle east customers as location, services, cleanliness and facilities. The guest staying at the three-star hotels expected basic facilities like the television and a good toilet, whereas the ones in five star expected larger size rooms, pleasant atmosphere, more comfort in general and internet facility.

“Reputation or brand image,” “Cleanliness,” “Complementary Parking,” “Room Rate” and “Convenient Front Desk System” rank high in importance in the survey done by Philips (2011) regarding 13 attributes in a business hotel and budget hotel. It also examined how well the hotels satisfy consumer expectations related to these

attributes along with the guests’ satisfaction level related to the revisit intentions.

Wouter Geerts (2014) has argued that the business travellers are not willing to put in extra effort in to carrying out environment-related practices while staying in hotels. Business travellers are often sent to unfamiliar locations and are expected to take on a high workload when at the destination. By comparing the uptake of environment-related practices at home and when away, it is argued that the strain of travelling negatively impacts the uptake of these practices.

The results of a survey carried out by Anuraag Jhavar, (2012) illustrate the lack of consumer knowledge regarding eco-certification programs for the hotels, especially in terms of what they are and how they function. Although consumer awareness is low, the interest in eco-certification in the hotel industry is growing and most of the hotels are taking green certification seriously.

The research by Millar (2008) says that one of the most influential factors for choosing a hotel for the guest is its green hotel certification. There was a slight difference between the choice of facilities for the business and leisure travellers on points like the preference for green hotel and some eco-friendly amenities.

An increasing number of consumers demand a safe and secure environment while patronising a hotel. The study by Choosrichom (2011), suggests that ‘Security and Safety’ have been identified as the most influential in determining customers’ selecting the hotel. Most of the literature suggests that security is one of the most important factors for the single lady business traveller while choosing a hotel during her stay for work.

Most of the literature suggests that security is one of the most important factors for the single lady business traveller while choosing a hotel during her stay for work. The 4-star hotels identified “security and safety of room” as their most important factor in hotel selection Ahmed Fawzy (2010). The security seemed to be a primary factor while choosing a room by the traveller (Chu 2000). The preferences or inclination for facilities and amenities differ according to gender. Hotels are catering to the female clientele by providing various women-friendly services and facilities.

Technology can be the totality of the means and knowledge used to provide objects necessary for human

sustenance and comfort. Generation Y customers will expect free Wi-Fi access, hotel rooms that can hook up to and be controlled by their mobile devices, areas within the hotel to socialize in, personalized experiences that give them choices over every possible option the hotel can offer, and the newest technology available for them to use Kelley (2012).

Another paper by Too Chee Wah (2010) refers to the various types of technology and devices adopted by hotels for their guestrooms to meet the ever-increasing demand and expectations from the guests leading to increased occupancies in the hotel. In addition to the other hotel factors as one of the general amenities, technology amenities are now integral to a hotel stay.

The factors that evoke a sense of “luxury” for the customer could be the commodity being expensive, and time is devoted for the activity and the “wow” factor, which is an aggregation of number significant factors. A fascinating comparative case study is done by Linda Nubani (2001), where the researcher has done a comparison between the old world charm hotel Ritz-Carlton, Paris and the new age luxury and world-class Burg Al Arab hotel, Dubai. It emphasises what is luxury in hotels. These two hotels are the epitome of luxury in their respective ages and attract customers from all over the world. The author says that shift of the meaning of luxury from the past to the present represents a transformation to a modern world where technology enhances all levels of life. The important factors that satisfy the customers and guarantee to return of travellers are that their personal needs and preferences are met, there are attentive service and advanced technology. The luxury hotels attract guests as they offer an experience that is memorable and cannot be mimicked by other hotel types. They guarantee guests an environment that is hygienic, functional, safe and beautiful. They offer creatively designed surroundings that may not be found at home.

Fu and Parks (2001) findings were that friendly service and individual attention were more important factors than tangible aspects of service in influencing elderly customers’ behavioural intentions.

As far as the facilities in the guest room are concerned, it includes the appeal of soundproofed guest rooms, premium quality bedding and linen, hotel frequent-stay points, suggesting that they no longer provide the degree of service or product differentiation and are expected by

the guests. The heightened involvement is due to their demand for higher-value wherever they are staying. In a study by Morten Heidi (2009) distinctiveness of the hotel was rated as important variable to create an exceptional hotel atmosphere. Attaining a distinctive atmosphere has become a pivotal concern for hospitality managers since the atmosphere is perceived as an essential factor to attract and satisfy guests. The study identified four stable and robust factors of atmosphere, namely, distinctiveness, hospitability, relaxation, and refinement. Distinctiveness was found to be the main factor in the atmosphere; consequently, it is reasonable to assume that a certain degree of distinctiveness is a prerequisite for creating atmosphere.

In a study by Skogland (2004) the chief factors that engaged guest’s loyalty were hotel design and amenities. Moreover, the factor that caused guests to be most involved in the purchase decision was its employees. Bendall-Lyon and Powers (2002) found that the satisfaction of female customers declined faster than male customers.

Research Design

Type of Research: In this study, the researcher was interested in knowing which in-room facilities in the guestroom are important for the Male and Female customers in the Business Hotel. Descriptive research was used to study the various in-room facilities in the hotels.

Research Methodology: The instrument for data collection was Questionnaire. Likert’s 5 points rating numeric scale was used for the research, (where 1 = Least important & 5 = Most important). Primary data was collected from customers staying in the hotel. A number of samples collected were 132 customers which had 41 Female and 91 Male business customers from 3, 4, 5 and 5-star deluxe hotels in Mumbai city.

Secondary data was collected from various trade magazines, books, internet and other relevant records. Various hotel selection factors related to the choice of the hotel room, in-room facilities and its amenities were considered for the study.

A study was carried out to assess which In-Room Facilities were important for the customers in the hotel. The various attributes considered by the researcher include Hygiene and Cleanliness, Services and amenities provided, Customized services, Quiet and private environment,

Design and Décor, Ecological aspect (Eco Friendly Hotel), Updated technology/IT Amenities, Room category

e.g. Smoking rooms, Non-smoking rooms, Rooms for disabled, Theme room.

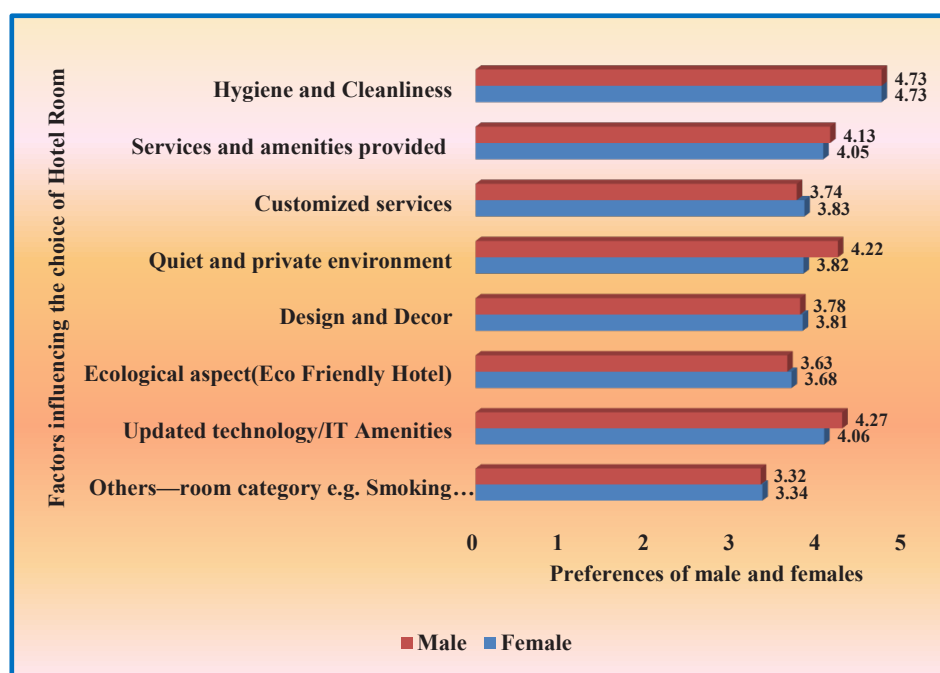


Fig. 1: In-Room Facilities Preference by Male and Female Customers

Table 1: Hotel Room Facilities Preference by Male and Female Customers

Sr. No.	Factors Influencing the Choice of Hotel Room	Male		Female		Rank Difference
		Mean Score	Rank	Mean Score	Rank	
1	Hygiene and Cleanliness	4.73	1	4.73	1	0
2	Services and Amenities provided	4.13	4	4.05	3	1
3	Customized services	3.74	6	3.83	5	1
4	Quiet and private environment	4.22	3	3.82	6	-3
5	Design and Decor	3.78	5	3.81	7	-2
6	Ecological aspect (Eco Friendly Hotel)	3.63	7	3.68	4	3
7	Updated technology/IT Amenities	4.27	2	4.06	2	0
8	Other factors-room category e.g. Smoking rooms, Non-smoking rooms, Rooms for disabled, Theme room	3.32	8	3.34	8	0

OBSERVATIONS

To check whether Male and Female Customers have the same line of thinking related to factors influencing the choice of Hotel Room, here Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient was found out, the calculated value is found to be $R = 0.95^{**}$, which is significant for 7 degrees of freedom at 0.01 level of significance.

- Hygiene and Cleanliness were ranked as the most important factor for selection of rooms by the Male and Female customers in the business hotels.

- The second important factor ranked by the Male and Female Customers was Updated Technology provided in the hotel.
- The quiet and private environment was ranked third important by the Males, whereas Services and Amenities provided by the Female Customers while selecting rooms to stay in the hotel.
- Customised services, Services and Amenities provided and ecological aspect of the hotel were ranked with a less difference, whereas Quiet and private environment and Design and Décor were ranked with a higher difference. By the male and female customers

in the hotel.

- The facility of different room categories with Themes and other options was ranked 8th by both the genders.

FINDINGS

- The Factors which affect the Male Customers while choosing the hotel room are Hygiene and Cleanliness of the room as the most important one, followed by Updated technology, Quiet and private environment, Services and amenities, Design and Décor, Customised services, Ecological aspect of the hotel and different room categories respectively.
- The factors which influence the Female Customers while choosing the hotel room are Hygiene and Cleanliness of the room as the most important one, followed by Updated technology, Services and amenities provided, Customized services, Quiet and private environment, Design and Décor, ecological aspect of hotel and different room categories respectively.
- Hygiene and Cleanliness were most important for both the genders in the hotel room. The hoteliers should emphasise this factor and keep the guest rooms clean and hygienic at all times.
- The updated technology was selected as the second most important factor by both genders. The customers in Business hotels need updated technology for the smooth functioning of their work.
- Quiet and private environment is more important to Male customers compared to Female customers.
- The factors related to Services and Amenities provided, Customized services and Ecological aspect (Eco Friendly Hotel) were perceived important by the Female Customers while choosing a hotel.

CONCLUSIONS

- The results presented within the study should impress upon the hoteliers that the preferences of Male and Female business customers differ to some extent and need special attention.
- Hoteliers should accordingly formulate appropriate business strategies to attract customers.

SUGGESTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After conducting this research and getting insight from the relevant research, the researcher would like to recommend the following:

- Added research on the same concept can be carried out on another type of hotels than just Business hotels. It may yield interesting insights related to the role that Facilities and Services play in getting a repeat customer.
- Customization of services related to the Male and Female Customers in the hotel needs to be further investigated as it is the key strategy to improve hotel guest experience.
- The researcher recommends that in future similar research can be carried out on current trends and innovations in the various departments of the hotel, which are relevant to that particular period, as every five years new trends emerge and the concept of customer experience gets evolved.
- The research could be broadened to include factors other than in-room facilities and housekeeping services which are responsible for customer satisfaction in the hotel.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The respondents in this study were Male and Female Customers from the 3, 4, 5 and 5 star deluxe hotels of Mumbai city only. A survey may be carried out in other cities of India, as preferences of the Customers may vary in different cities.
- The study was limited to star business hotels with limited attributes related to guest rooms. Different category of hotels may be surveyed with more attributes included in the study for the Male and Female Customers.
- The study only focuses on measuring customer satisfaction related to guest room attributes. There could be other reasons for a customer to select a hotel for his stay, which can be studied.

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