

Gender Preferences for Guest Room attributes in 5- Star Business Hotels in Pune City

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KEY WORDS:

1. Amenities- The term amenity is commonly used to identify luxury items that a hotel gives away to its guests at no extra charge, although the cost of those items is often hidden in the room rate.
2. Facilities -All items that are provided in the hotels which are conducive to the guest's increased material comfort and convenience, it is a broader provision compared to amenities.
3. Business trip –It is defined as all non-discretionary trips which occur either explicitly for engaging in the work, or incidentally in the course of conducting work related activities.
4. Customer Loyalty is the intention to buy the product again based on the evaluation of their past experiences and understanding their future expectations
5. Customer Satisfaction- Customer satisfaction is a marketing term that measures how products or services supplied by a company meet or surpass a customer's expectation.

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 Indian market. There has been tremendous growth in the number of hotels every year in the city of Pune, which includes all categories of hotels from 3 star to 5 star hotels. The major part of the hotel's margin of profit comes from the room sales. The hotel facilities and services are considered as important determinants for the customer satisfaction and earning good revenue for the hotel. On 4th September 2013, the Department of Tourism in India renewed the guidelines for the classification of hotels. This move was aimed at ensuring that hotels in India meet the international standards in services and facilities. The star category classification in India is decided by the Tourism Department, Government of India.

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 fulfill 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 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 corporate accounts are the main source of business for the hotels. With proper management of corporate accounts the hotel can earn good revenue rather than trying to build direct relationships with each and every business customer. The frequency of business customer is much more compared to the leisure customer, even though the span is shorter. The business hotels provide the best conferencing venues, technology, cuisines, well trained service team and customize the services as per the clientele need. The business tourist may to be accompanied by family members and avail leisure facilities.

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.

The hotels can store huge amounts of information on the customer's preferences through the Guest Satisfaction Tracking System (GSTS) which are very useful each time the customer goes back to the same property or to the other properties of the same chain. They help the marketing department plan frequent-stay programs, special discounts, make managers understand the needs of the customers leading to guest satisfaction.

The guest rooms are the heart of the hotel. Unless its décor is appropriate, the air odour free and the furnishings spotlessly clean, the hotel may lose the guest as a potential repeat customer. The accommodation department is the highest revenue earning department in the hotel and contributes to the bulk of total revenue. Thus the hoteliers need to continually reassess the purpose and function of their hotel rooms as the core product. The physical aspects and tangible dimensions of the hotel room are important to the satisfaction of the guest and a prime consideration for return patronage. The guests give ratings for the hotel services, facilities and amenities they utilize based on the quality and their convenience. Both management and guests consider the keeping of the hotel clean and in good order, a necessity for the hotel to command a fair price and repeat business. The guest room attributes influence the decision of the customer to stay in the hotel.

Among the many factors the customer looks for in the hotel, the security factor is one of the most important one. Each and every staff member of the hotel is taught basic firefighting, handling hostage and terrorism situations. The house keeping associates owing to their proximity to the guests can provide valuable information and feedback about the guests which is critical for the security of the hotel. The advanced technology like the BMS (Building Management System), intrusion alarms, video surveillance within and around buildings and parking, crash rated barriers at the outer periphery-ray screening for all baggage, metal detectors for personal screening, clear signs for rooms and various areas, access control for floors and guest rooms, fire protection and life safety systems, have a central point of control for building and room access, monitoring and close circuit television (CCTV) or digital video systems have added immense value to the existing security and safety of rooms under the touch of a single button. Radio frequency identification (RFID) based access control system are mostly used by major chains in India.

The layout of the guest room in the hotel, the placement of furniture, the choice of multiuse furniture also play an important role in a customer choosing a particular hotel for his stay. The usual set of furniture in a guest bedroom is a bed, two bedside tables, a dressing table, a chest of drawers, a coffee table, chairs, a luggage rack and a writing table. Most economy guestrooms are primarily bedrooms with regard to their function. Traffic lanes around the bed should be clearly defined. Unless the room is very large, all furniture except the coffee table with its chairs and perhaps the bed are best placed against the wall. The contents of the guestroom can be categorized as furniture, fixtures and fittings, soft furnishings, carpets, accessories and guest supplies. The shape and size of the piece of furniture in relation to the human body is a paramount consideration for the comfort, and this science is called

Ergonomics. A well designed and ergonomically sound chair will consider the height and width of the seat and the back rest, the height of arm rests, and the angle of its various parts provide the maximum comfort for the average person to work or relax in. There are primarily four types of furniture found in the hotel guestrooms, based on the way they are placed, free-standing, cantilevered, built-in or fitted. It includes beds, luggage racks, nightstands, coffee tables, chairs, a writing table, a wardrobe, a dresser or drawers. Light weight and multiuse furniture is used in budget hotels to save space, as the room sizes are small. The common accessories include picture frames, decorative artifacts, sculptures, ornamental mirrors, lamps etc. They create focal points to give the eyes a pleasant resting place, holding the attention at the point of interest and impart a theme to the room.

The value of the hotel is perceived higher when the beds enhance the sleep experience of the guest, therefore hotels all over the world are refurbishing their beds. The beds in the hotel are custom designed, from expert suppliers. The quality of the air is another important factor to be considered while maintaining quality guest rooms. Hotel air quality is a prevailing consumer concern: four in ten consumers list indoor air quality as a highly important factor in their selection criteria.

The hotel rooms offer Spa facility, massage chairs or personal gymnasium to their guests. The shift towards “wellness tourism” provides the potential for hotels to attract new guest segments. It is considered as the top trend in enhancing the guest experience. Some of the suites in the hotel have in-room Spa facility for the relaxation of the guest. Spa bathrooms are investments for health and wellbeing of the guest. They transform the daily rituals into sensational experiences. The massage and other ayurvedic treatments are provided by the specialized personnel. The spa bathroom has a two person infra-red sauna with CD player or a radio. Some suites may have massage chairs, personal gymnasium equipments and similar facilities.

Business travelers 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:

1. To study the various In-Room Attributes (facilities) offered by the 5- star hotels.
2. To study the preferences of the Male and Female Business Customers in the hotel.

Scope of the Study:-

1. The Hotels can make proactive changes which will focus more on customer preferences, quality and technological interfaces in order to stay in the competitive and dynamic environment. The customers choose those hotels that offer best value proposition under existing budgetary constraints. Hotels can benefit from the implementation of service innovation.
2. Employees working in 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, importance of quality service in the housekeeping department of the hotel.
3. 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.
4. 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 about 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 traveler. The hotel guest room attributes change over a period of five to ten years. Different brands provide the facilities for the business traveler 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 traveler, 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 travelers 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 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 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, where as the ones in five star expected larger size rooms, pleasant atmosphere, more comfort in general and internet facility.

“Reputation or brand image,” “Cleanliness,” “Complimentary 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 the 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 hotel for the guest is its green hotel certification. There was a slight difference between the choice of facilities for the business and leisure travelers on points like the preference for green hotel and some ecofriendly amenities.

An increasing number of consumers demand a safe and secure environment while patronizing a hotel. The study by Choosrichom (2011) suggests that ‘Security and Safety’ has 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 traveler 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 traveler 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 traveler (Chu 2000). The preferences or inclination for facilities and amenities differ according to the gender. Hotels are catering to the female clientele by providing various women friendly services and facilities, Sourav Sarkar, 2007.

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.

Many studies have compared the hotel attributes preferred by the male and the female business customers. The article by Alanna Peet, 2006 states that Women travellers have specific amenities in their minds when they are travelling and the hotels are changing and updating in order to attract more women travellers. The study indicates that women business travellers' value security and luxury above all the other factors while selecting the hotel, even though they appreciate all the feminine services offered to them in the hotels.

The factors that evoke a sense of "luxury" for the customer could be the commodity being expensive, time being devoted for the activity and the "wow" factor, which is an aggregation of number significant factors. A very interesting 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 on 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 returning of travellers are that their personal needs and preferences are met, there is 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.

The study by Evita Yung, (2002) is related to the customer satisfaction and hotel services and other factors. It states that the Business center encounters had the greatest effect on customer satisfaction, whereas rooms have the least one. The findings suggest that hotels should pay more attention towards peripheral services, to give the customer overall satisfaction and repeat business. 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' behavioral 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. (Peter Yesawich, 2012). The author also says that the customer is much more informed and engaged in selection of accommodation than they were previously. The heightened involvement is due 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 atmosphere is perceived 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 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:

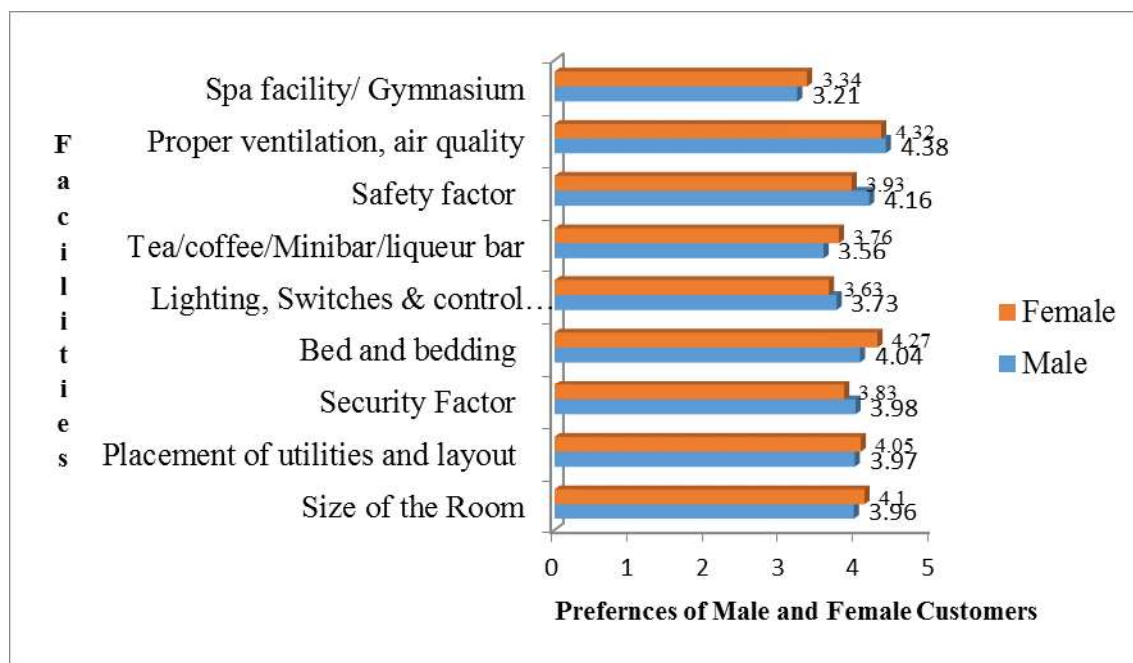
Type of Research: In this study researcher was interested in knowing which in-room facilities in the guestroom are important for the Male and Female customers in the Business Hotel. Descriptive research was used to study the various in-room facilities in the hotels.

Research Methodology: The instrument for data collection was Questionnaire. Likert's 5 point 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. Number of samples collected was 132 customers which had 41 Female and 91 Male business traveler from 8 five star hotels in Pune city.

Secondary data was collected from various trade magazines, books, internet and other relevant records. Various hotel selection factors related to choice of 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 Size of the room, Placement of utilities and layout, (eg. bed area, sitting, dressing & bath design), Security Factor (eg. video phones), Bed and bedding (e.g. type of bed, pillow menu), Lighting, Switches & Control panels, Tea/coffee/Minibar/liqueur bar, Safety factor in the room (e.g. Smoke detectors, Water sprinklers), Proper ventilation and Spa facility/ Massage chairs/Personal Gymnasium in the guest rooms of the hotel.

In- room Facilities preference by Male and Female Customers



In- room Facilities preference by Male and Female Customers

Factors influencing the choice of In-Room Facilities	Male		Female		Rank difference
	Mean Score	Rank	Mean Score	Rank	
1. Size of the Room	3.96	6	4.1	3	3
2. Placement of utilities and layout, eg.bed area, sitting, dressing & bath design	3.97	5	4.05	4	1
3. Security Factor eg.video phones	3.98	4	3.83	6	-2
4. Bed and bedding e.g. type of bed, pillow menu	4.04	3	4.27	2	1
5. Lighting, Switches & control panels	3.73	7	3.63	8	-1
6. Tea/coffee/Minibar/liqueur bar	3.56	8	3.76	7	1
7. Safety factor in the room eg. Smoke detectors, Water sprinklers	4.16	2	3.93	5	-3
8. Proper ventilation, air quality	4.38	1	4.32	1	0
9. Spa facility/ Massage chairs/personal Gymnasium	3.21	9	3.34	9	0

Observations: The following were the observations of the study carried out in the 5-star hotel regarding the choice of in-room facilities-

- Proper ventilation and air quality was ranked by Male and Female Customers as the first and the most important factor which influence the choice of in-room facilities.
- The second important factor ranked by Male Customer was Safety factor in the room. The Bed and bedding factor was ranked second important by the Female Customers while deciding on the factors influencing the choice of hotel room.
- The third important factor chosen by Male customers was Bed and bedding, whereas the Female choose Size of the hotel room.
- The Placement of utilities and layout, Tea/coffee/Minibar/liqueur bar ,were ranked with a less difference, whereas Security Factor, Lighting, Switches & control panels and Safety Factors were ranked with a higher difference by the two genders.
- Spa facility/ Massage chairs/personal Gymnasium were ranked last by both the type of customers.

Findings:

The following were the findings of the study carried out in the 5-starhotel regarding the choice of in-room facilities. In the research it was found that the Male and Female customers assess In-Room Facilities differently. Certain factors were more important when analyzed gender wise.

- Proper ventilation and air quality was important for both genders in the hotel room. The hoteliers need to pay more attention on the design and layout of the guest rooms to satisfy the needs of the customer.
- The Safety and Security factors were perceived differently by the Male and Female Customers while choosing a hotel. The Male Customers put more emphasis on the safety and security factors than the Females.
- Size of the room and Placement of utilities and layout (eg.bed area, sitting, dressing & bath design) was chosen as an important factor by the Females compared to the Male Customers.
- The other facilities were not very important while deciding on the in-room facilities for both the genders.

Conclusion:

- 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 the 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 other 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:

1. The respondents in this study were Male and Female Customers from the 5 star hotels of Pune city only. A survey may be carried out in other cities of India, as preferences of the Customers may vary in different cities.
2. The study was limited to 5 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.
3. 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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