

## **Impact of Traditional Human Touch Services and Technology Based Self Service on Guest Satisfaction in Hotels**

**Ms. Rasika Shahane<sup>1</sup>**

**Asst. Professor AISSMS CHMCT, Pune**

**Ms. Anuradha Khare<sup>2</sup>**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Technology has advanced at a mind – boggling pace in the last decade and half. What was considered unattainable and futuristic, has now become a part of our everyday lives. From purchase of day to day needs to availing of several services, Technology has practically taken over our lives. Technology is being extensively used in the Manufacturing Sector for decades now. In recent years, its' application has spread to the Service Sector as well.

Like other constituents of Service Sector, Hotel Industry has also witnessed an impact on operations due to the advances made by Technology. Hotels comprise of major departments like Rooms Division Department (Housekeeping and Front Office) Food & Beverage and Food Production. While the House keeping Department is responsible for the cleanliness and upkeep of the front and back of the house areas, the Front office Department is responsible for welcoming and registering guests, allotting those rooms and helping guests to check out. The services include the concierge, bell desk, EPABX operations and other uniformed services.

The Rooms Division Department (Housekeeping and Front Office) which is considered as the 'Face of the Hotel' has especially seen this replacement/ substitution of Traditional Human Touch Services (here on referred to as THTS) by Technology Based Self Service (here on referred to as TBSS). For example, a simple exercise like Guest check – in on arrival was undertaken by personnel at Front desk. However, in recent times, Self-Check – In Kiosks take care of guest check – in. Similarly, taking feedback from guest on departure would entail a long time consuming manual process. This activity is today performed with the help of Internet (Email) where the feedback forms are mailed to the guest who can respond to the same at his own convenient time and place.

This has definitely had an impact on Guest Satisfaction two fold – cutting down of time required for certain activities and convenience in performing these activities. Yet at the same time, they are left with a feeling of loss of personal touch and payment of lip service on the part of the Hotel.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to the Journal of Business and Hotel management, “Front office has been described as the hub or nerve center of the hotel. It is the department that makes a first impression on the guest and one that the guest relies on throughout his or her stay for information and service. Its duty is to enhance guest services by constantly developing services to meet guest needs.” This highlights the importance of personal / human touch in the provision of services to ensure guest satisfaction.

Aihie Osarenkhoe, Jotham Mbiito et al. (2014) in their paper have addressed issues regarding the impact of increasing use of information and communication technology (ICT) in general and electronic means of interaction in particular on the process of creating value and the differentiation in service activities in the hospitality industry. Due to globalization of markets and production the actors in hospitality business sector adopt e-mail technology that enables their guests to book and/or to pay for a stay, thus bypassing travel agencies. However there are still large variations in the use of this interface across hotels categories. There can be significant dissimilarities in the response time when using e-mail to communicate with customers.

The Nuance’s Customer Experts blog dated December 2013, throws light on the ongoing trends adapted by the consumers while availing various services. Today’s consumer has accustomed to self-service across the range of products and services. But anything that comes across easy and quick need not be always helpful to the consumer. The technological advancement is failing big time while answering the queries arising in customer’s mind. The online search for the answer is not proving to be helpful which is pushing customers to ask a help from a person. Robert Weidman, executive vice president and general manager, Enterprise Division, Nuance feels that, ‘while consumers are willing to resolve issues and find answers to questions from their service providers online, the options available today just aren’t meeting expectations. “Enterprises are losing money as consumers abandon their Web sites out of frustration and turn to live agents for service and support” Furthermore, the customer is definitely looking at technology to avail faster better and accurate services but, after all it has its own limitations which ultimately proves that,

though the technology is making life little easy, it cannot replace the Human touch which is the key of the service Industry.

Nuance Communications conducted a survey in December 2013 to explore consumer attitudes and preferences for accessing service and support via the Web. The results pointed to clear frustration among consumers when it came to seeking, and finding, help online. Key findings from the survey included 58% of consumers were unable to resolve their issues on the web, despite their best effort. 63% of consumers who used the web ended up spending more than 10 minutes to find solution to their problem. Of the 63% of consumers, 71% gave up after spending more than 30 minutes attempting to find a solution. 49.5% of consumers reached out to live agent if they did not find solution from the company's web site. 59% of consumers were left feeling frustrated that they had to reach a live agent for assistance. 71% of consumers preferred to have a virtual assistant over static Web pages when it came to self-service.

In his article "Technology Base Self Service vs. Traditional Human Touch Service", Wan Chi Chen from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas says "Since it is hard for TBSS to express empathy in today's technology, consumers would still prefer to complain to an employee than a machine. Human employees can have a better understanding on another's feeling, such as anger frustration, sadness, happiness, excitement, etc." Building and maintaining a solid relationship with frequent traveller & Business traveller could be the factor that contributes to them coming back to the same hotel over others in the same vicinity. That is why one to one interaction is an important activity in the overall guest experience at the hotel. Having said that, the truth is use of technology is going to attract some and repel others from selecting a hotel based on their satisfaction level.

The same article brings out the relationship between Technology and the Hospitality industry. Information Technology was initially introduced into the hospitality industry in the 1950's. Since then it has substantially expanded and revolutionized. In today's world, technology has grown to be a part of our everyday lives. From computers to handheld devices, any information we are looking for is readily available 24/7 in the palm of our hands—as long as there is internet we have access to current, up-to-date information. In this day and age, there is a technologic device or software used by a device for every operation in the hospitality world, such as reservation systems, security cameras, point of sale systems, property management systems, mobile communication, meeting matrix, energy management systems, key card encoder, etc. By

incorporating the use of such devices into the workplace, it has changed the way we conduct business while saving time and money as it dismisses many time consuming tasks.

In his article, “Many Customers Aren’t on Board With Self – Service Trend”, Richard Adhikari (2016) highlights the findings of a research wherein 80 percent of respondents prefer human customer service interactions to digital ones; 83 percent believe that speaking to a customer service rep on the phone or in-store always will be important; 79 percent of consumers prefer the human touch to remain a part of customer service when engaging with brands and service providers; 68 percent of consumers believe they're more likely to negotiate a better deal in person than online; the more complex the customer service request, the greater the reliance on human interaction ; 34 percent of customers prefer to go in-store for complex inquiries and another 33 percent prefer to connect by phone; and 18 percent of respondents would renew products or services even if they weren't the least expensive option because of good consumer service in-store or on the phone; only 13 percent would do so after receiving good customer service on digital channels.

In the same article, Richard Adhikari quotes opinions of writers like Dave Capuano, global vice president of integrated marketing at Verint who says "People like to connect with people, ". Human interaction will continue "for a long time to come, whether it's dealing with complex issues or customer preference," noted Capuano. "Businesses get in trouble when they try to force a customer to engage in a way they don't want." While Denis Pombriant, managing principal at Beagle Research argues that the above survey is applicable to companies which sell products through a single transaction and not to companies which sell services by subscription.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

From the above review of literature, the primary objective to find out impact of Traditional Human Touch Services (THTS) and Technology Based Self Service (TBSS) on Guest satisfaction. The other objective is to find out the activities which can be performed by replacing Traditional Human Touch Services (THTS) with Technology Based Self Service (TBSS) or vice versa.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Simple Random sampling method was used to select respondents who had stayed in hotels across India for various reasons. Respondents were sent well-structured questionnaire using Internet.

Additional data was collected from and through students of Hotel Management College on mandatory training in Hotels in across India.

**Analysis and Interpretation:**

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

<b>Age</b>		
Below 20	04	3.63%
20 - 40	92	83.63%
40 - 60	14	12.74%
60 and above	-	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Social Status</b>		
Single	52	47.27%
Married	56	50.90%
Others	02	1.83%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
Undergraduate	21	19.09%
Graduate	28	25.45%
Postgraduate	60	54.54%
Other	01	0.92%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field Surve

Table 2: Hotel Stay

<b>Purpose of Stay</b>		
Business	23	20.90%
Leisure	83	75.45%
Other	23	20.85%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>129</b>	
<b>No. of times stayed in hotel</b>		
First Time	15	1.35%
Second Time	07	6.36%
Third Time	08	7.27%
More than three times	80	72.72%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Duration of the Stay</b>		
Less than a Week	90	81.81%
More than a Week	20	18.19%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field Survey

Table 3: Hotel Related Information

Observation in change in the methodology of offering service by the hotel

Change in Methodology	No. of Respondents	Percentage
From Traditional Human touch to Technology based service	95	86.36%
From Technology Based service to Traditional Human touch	07	6.36%
No change	08	7.28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Stage at which change was experienced

Stage of the above Change	No. of Responses	Percentage
Reservation / Booking a room	77	
Arrival at the hotel (Check in and allotment of a room)	53	
During the stay	44	
Checkout ( bill settlement )	52	

Source: Field Survey

Table 4:

Opinion regarding preferred form of methodology at above mentioned stages

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	TOTAL
I don't like to use technology while staying at hotel when I can deal with a person directly.	25	22	25	18	20	110
Using technology is time saving instead of dealing with a person	53	36	13	3	5	110
I feel comfortable giving my personal details while reserving a room through Hotel website rather than a Hotel agent.	48	24	24	13	1	110
My money is safer when	25	31	38	9	7	

check in is done through a kiosk rather than dealing with Front desk person						110
For in house services provided by the hotel, I prefer to communicate with a person than using a machine.	44	31	25	5	5	110
For other than Hotel related services, I prefer to take help of technology rather than a person	34	38	23	13	2	110
Complaint handling is faster when dealt by a person than technology.	65	25	10	6	4	110
While checking out, using a kiosk is faster & convenient than dealing with Front desk personnel	41	30	21	12	6	110
Using technology while giving a feedback is time saving instead of dealing with a person	56	30	12	6	6	110
I prefer dealing with a person because I am not techno savvy	13	16	34	18	29	110

Source: Field Survey

Table 5:

Impact of replacement of THTS with TBSS on Guest Satisfaction

Impact	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Positive	73	66.36%
Negative	16	14.54%
No change	21	19.10%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

Table 6:

Areas with services offered more by Technology than Human touch or vice versa to enhance or improve guest satisfaction

Stage of the above Change	No. of Responses
Reservation / Booking a room	23
Arrival at the hotel (Check in and allotment of a room)	14
During the stay	40
Checkout ( bill settlement )	29

Source: Field Survey

### Findings:

1. 80% of respondents are graduates and above and lie in the age group of 20 – 40 years.
2. Leisure has been the main purpose of stay with more than 70% respondents having stayed in hotels more than three times for less than a week. This indicates that they have closely experienced the changes that the hotels have adopted to offer services i.e., from Traditional Human Touch to Technology based.
3. 86% of respondents have said that they have seen replacement of Traditional Human Touch services with Technology based Self Service in the hotels that they have stayed in.
4. Reservation/ Booking of Room is the stage where maximum no. of respondents have experienced the shift in methodology followed by Arrival & Check out. Technology has also been applies for the services offered during the stay.
5. Respondents prefer certain services to be provided by human touch only safety of Money, provision of In house services and handling of complaint.
6. Respondents prefer use of Technology for while sharing personal information during reservation, giving feedback and during Check out.
7. Hotels are using technology for Reservation, Check in & Check out more than using personal touch. Many respondents want hotels to also start using technology in place of people during their stay like F&B Service order taking, Car rentals, Laundry services & Servicing of room.



### **Conclusion:**

1. Overall, the study shows that Guests are welcoming the replacement of Technology with Traditional Human touch as they are techno savvy and technology is saving their time but at the same time they do not want technology to completely replace people.
2. All hotels, small or big are creating their own Websites to help them reach a larger population of potential guest.
3. Guests are positively impacted by the replacement of Human touch with Technology and want hotels to adopt innovative technology trends like The do-it-all remote (room personalization), Self Service Concierge, Smartphone keyless room entry, In room iPads/ tablet devices, Digital Door Viewer and LED touch screen panels being followed by certain hotels presently.

### **References:**

Raghubalan, G & Raghubalan S. (2015) Hotel Housekeeping Operations and Management. pg12

### **Web References:**

1. Technology-Based Service Encounter—A Study of the Use of E-Mail as a Booking Tool in Hotels Aihie Osarenkhoe<sup>1</sup>, Jotham Mbiito Byarugaba<sup>2</sup>, Mabel Komunda Birungi<sup>2</sup>, Abednego Feehi Okoe<sup>3</sup>, Az-Eddine Bennani Journal of Service Science and Management, 2014, 7, 419-429 Published Online December 2014 in SciRes.  
<http://www.scirp.org/journal/jssm> <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/jssm.2014.76039> accessed on 30th April 2017
2. Journal of Business and Hotel Management Home page  
<https://www.scitechnol.com/scholarly/rooms-division-management-journals-articles-ppts-list.php> accessed on 2nd May 2017
3. Nuance's Customer Experts Blog on WordPress.com  
<https://kylaboulin.wordpress.com/category/technology-based-self-service-vs-traditional-human-touch-service/> accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2017