

A study of Preferences of In- Room Facilities by Female Business Travelers in Hotels (with special reference to 5 star Business Hotels in Pune city)

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Received: January 10, 2019

Accepted: February 11, 2019

ABSTRACT: *The guest rooms are the main revenue earning product of the hotel. The hotels retain their customers by offering different themes, contemporary designs and some offer unique facilities and services. Hotels that can satisfy and retain customers are more likely to survive in the competitive market and will earn good revenue, higher occupancy percentage and better revenue per available room. Males and females have different preferences for selection of hotels. An increased awareness by management and staff of the needs of the businesswomen travellers will help to attract the customers. The factors which influence the Female Business Customers while choosing a hotel room are hygiene and cleanliness, updated technology, services and amenities, ventilation and air quality, bed and bedding, size of hotel room and division of areas in bathroom.*

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. *SLT-Single lady traveler*

Introduction:

A hotel survives on the sale of rooms and it accounts to almost 50% of the total sales of the hotel. Thus 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. The hotels retain their customers through the strength of their loyalty programmes, others 'wow' the guests by their unique themes and contemporary designs, and some offer unique amenities and services to their customers. 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 extend towards the hotel business. India has developed a reputation as a unique MICE destination, with its historical, cultural, architectural, wildlife, culinary, spiritual and therapeutic attractions. (Asia Pacific, Business and Technology Report, 2012). The business guests are a critical market to the hoteliers as they boost occupancy levels, especially during low seasons and weekdays. As the demand for rooms required by the business customers may be immediate depending on the work, there is a scope for flexible earnings for 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 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 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. 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 center, 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 guest rooms are the core revenue earning product of the hotel. The Physical attributes and Services in the hotel room are important to the satisfaction of the guest and a prime consideration for return patronage.

Most of the domestic as well as international hotel chains have their hotels in Pune city. There has been tremendous growth in the number of hotels every year which includes all categories of hotels from the 3 star to the 5 star deluxe hotels. The city of Pune has seen a tremendous growth in various sectors like medical tourism, information technology, automobile manufacturing, education and the hospitality industry. There are many 5 star and 5 star deluxe hotels, with a total room inventory of more than 5000, which includes hotels of all categories and the lodging industry as well. The business guests are a critical market to the hoteliers as they boost occupancy levels, especially during low seasons and weekdays. Female business traveler has become one of the major markets for the hotel and has been receiving special attention on their preferences of hotel facilities.

Objectives:

1. To study the various In-Room Facilities offered by the 5- star hotels.
2. To study the preferences of Female Business Customer (SLT) in the hotel.

Purpose:

1. 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 female customers for the choice of hotel helps the management to make optimal hotel development decisions and emphasize on those facilities.
2. The Facilities provided give a competitive advantage to the hotel. It can be a differentiator for a hotel and establish its brand value and reputation in the market.
3. 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 and hence the studies included for literature review are mostly within ten years and some important studies done in the previous years are covered. 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.

The single lady traveler or customer is a major market segment for the hoteliers and hence their needs should be taken care of. The single lady traveller is a fast growing, niche market and has tremendous potential in India. The female customers are slowly replacing the valued male guest and this can be seen in the hotels globally. Indian Tobacco Company (ITC Hotels) has 10 percent of their clientele as domestic or foreign women travellers. The most significant gender differences were with men scoring higher "Room Rate," "Location," "Reputation," and "Complementary Breakfast," and women scoring higher "Convenient Front Desk System," "Amenities," and "Health Facilities, Philips (2013).The hoteliers focus on those facilities and practices which are perceived important **by the customers creating customer value and loyalty.**

The results of a study of hotels in Malaysia suggest that women travelers placed importance on 'Cleanliness of hotel' and 'Friendly services of hotel staff' as well as 'Bathrobes and towels in bathroom' and 'In room temperature control' during hotel selection (Azizan Marzuki,2012).The study also suggests that women travellers prefer staying at hotels that provide quality services and facilities where the guests' comfort and safety were of top priority.

The rising number of women travellers over the world has made the Luxury Hotels create the special services for them. The Women Friendly Frills have become an international trend and since the last decade the hotels in India are also gearing up to tap this clientele. Some hotels have full- fledged floors, whereas others have single lady rooms. The ITC hotels were the pioneers in the services for the single lady traveller and have the special floor for the women. The other hotel chains also have special facilities for their women clientele and others are gearing up for it. Not many hotels cater to this gender preferred services. The

facilities for single lady traveller in India are catered by top-end hotels only; the midscale hotels offer very few women friendly facilities. According to Travel Industry Association the female clientele values luxury and security above all the other factors in the hotel. An interesting study by Judi Brownell, 2011 suggests that managers should focus on the combinations of services, amenities, and facilities to contribute to the desired experience by women traveller rather than focusing on individual aspect. In the study carried out by Ekaterina Berezina, 2010 it was found that the male customers consider high speed internet access, easily accessible electrical outlets and express check in and check-out as important, whereas the females considered high speed internet, accessible electrical outlets and guest control panel, while selecting a hotel. 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. 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. With more and more women pursuing careers, this segment is seeing a growth of 15-20 percent (Hotel and Food Service, 2004) every year.

Bendall-Lyon and Powers (2002) found that the satisfaction of female customers declined faster than male customers. The hotel managers are expected to focus on individual attributes and amenities to provide an experience that exceeds the expectations of the single lady traveller.

Scope:

1. The Hotel Owners and the Management can make proactive changes which will focus more on Female customer preferences, quality and technological interfaces in order to stay in the competitive and dynamic environment.
2. The Hotel designers can utilize the study while designing for the in-room facilities in the hotel.

Limitations:

1. Non availability of contact person from the hotels.
2. Inadequate response from respondents.
3. Hesitation in sharing information related to facilities and services.
4. Most of the hoteliers are very busy in operations and cannot find time to fill up questionnaires and a constant follow up is required.
5. Non availability of secondary data from records.

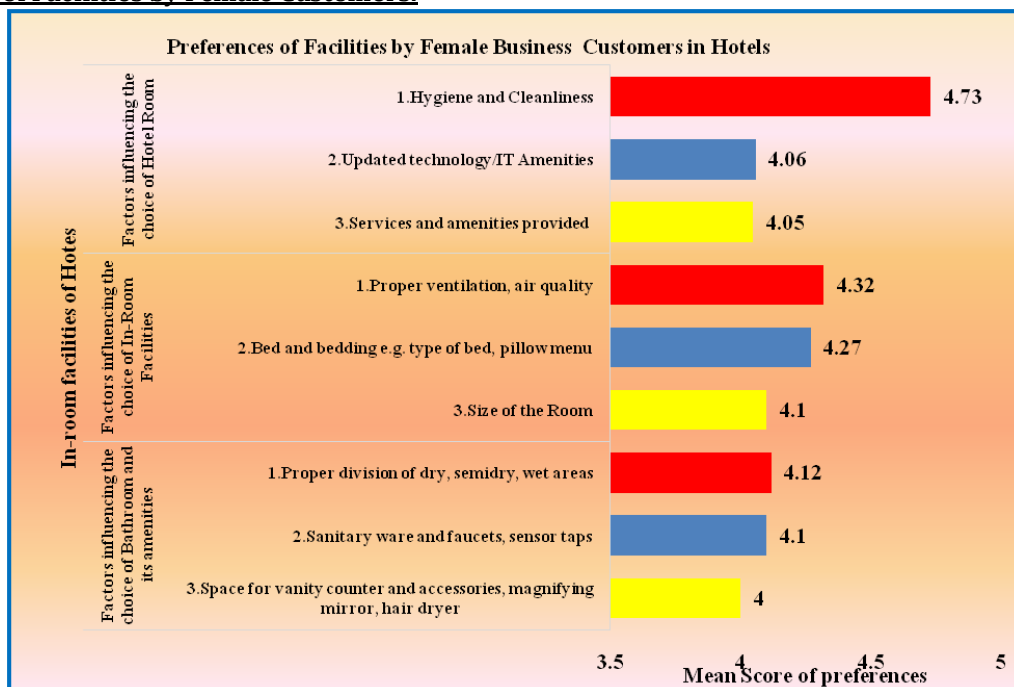
To overcome these difficulties and to complete the study, sincere and timely efforts have been put.

Research Design:

Type of Research: In this study researcher was interested in knowing which in-room facilities and services in the guestroom are important for the customer in the Business Hotel. Descriptive research was used to study the various in-room facilities and services leading to repeat business and included survey.

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 who have had repeated the visit in the same hotel in the last 3 years. No. of Samples collected was 41 Female Business Traveller 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 bathroom and its amenities were considered for the study.

Preferences of Facilities by Female Customers:



Findings:

- The factors which influence the Female Business Customers while choosing a Hotel room are Hygiene and Cleanliness of the room as the most important one, followed by Updated technology, Services and amenities provided.
- The factors related to In-room facilities are Proper ventilation and air quality as the most important factor, followed by Bed and bedding and Size of the hotel room.
- The factors related to Bathroom and its amenities are Proper division of dry, semidry, wet areas, followed by quality of Sanitary ware and faucets, sensor taps and lastly the Space for vanity counter and accessories.
- Single Lady Traveler (SLT) is an important segment for the hoteliers and hence special attention needs to be given towards their needs and preferences.

Conclusion:

- The results presented within the study should impress upon the hoteliers that the preferences of woman business customers need special attention. It is a niche and growing market and the hoteliers can tap this market.
- Hoteliers should accordingly formulate appropriate business strategies to attract the female clientele.

Suggestion and Recommendations:

- Customization of services related to the guests in the hotel needs to be further investigated as it is the key strategy to improve hotel guest experience.
- 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.

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