



Creating a sustainable business environment through customer satisfaction in hotel industry

Dr. Sasmita Mohanty

Assistant Professor, Hospitality & Tourism Management, School of Hotel Management, SOA - Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

Abstract

In order to sustain and grow in the competitive business environment, attracting new customers is the end. In hotel industry, customer satisfaction mainly depend upon a host of factors that have been taken under the study such as service quality, value for price, attitude of staff, accommodation, food quality, security, parking and cleanliness. The main purpose of this study is to investigate how the customer satisfaction ends in loyalty which in turn helps in sustainable business advantage in hotels in Odisha. A purposive sampling method has been used to collect data from 100 guests from various classified hotels in Odisha. Based on the objectives of the study, the data was analysed using statistical tools such as descriptive statistics and factor analysis. Based on the findings, appropriate remedial measures are suggested to enhance customer satisfaction in the hotels.

Keywords: customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, hospitality & tourism, competitive advantages

Introduction

Tourism in Odisha happens to be one of the most prioritized sectors in terms of potential employment & revenue generation, foreign exchange earnings and value addition to the State economy due to its natural resources and sound ecological balance. More than 92 thousand direct employment and 2.77 lakh indirect employments in the ratio of 1:3 in Odisha are generated by hospitality sector. The hotel and tourism industry are intertwined, wherein, development in hotel industry will ultimately lead to development of tourism industry. Of late, high priority has been given to the development and promotion of tourism as well as the hotel industry sector in Odisha. (Source: Odisha Economic Survey 2014-15).

In the globalised market characterized by cut throat competition and increased customer expectations, it is important to offer products or services that enable sustainability in the hotel industry. Moreover, it is pertinent to know the profiles and histories of guests patronizing the hotel. Sriyam (2010) explained that “guest satisfaction in the hotel industry is the highest priority for owners and managers competing with hundreds of others, because personal services are at the top of the travelers list of the most important things when considering a hotel to stay in”.

Anticipating and catering the needs and demands of the guests will go a long way towards long-term sustainability, satisfaction and loyalty creation efforts. Quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty have in fact become the buzz-words in the present business scenario and hence the customers have become the cynosure of all businesses whether small or large. However, due to increased competition and the rising expectations and needs of the guests, it is difficult for the management to strike a balance between retaining the customers and managing the business at a profitable level.

Customer satisfaction is the key in any business set up. It creates a value proposition for customers by anticipating their needs and expectations. According to (Gronoos, 1990; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988) ^[21, 43], the critical factors for any hospitality business is the quality of service and satisfaction of the customers. As Valdani (2009) ^[51] explained that “enterprises exist because they have a customer to serve”. Shemwell *et al.*, (1998) ^[49] opined that “the key to achieve sustainable advantage lies in delivering high quality service that results in satisfied customers”. According to (Blanchard & Galloway, 1994; Heskett *et al.*, 1990; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990) ^[4, 23, 55], service quality and customer satisfaction are key factors in the battle to obtain competitive advantage and customer retention (Barsky & Nash, 2003) ^[2].

Managers in the hospitality industry are faced with enormous challenges to provide excellent customer satisfaction by offering them good service and quality products (Lam & Zhang, 1999; Yen & Su, 2004) ^[31, 54]. Good relationships with the guest happens to be a strategic move by organisations for sustained customer satisfaction (Gruen *et al.*, 2000) ^[22].

According to destination (Poon and Long, 2005) “satisfying customers during their first visit and prolonging their stay can help develop customer loyalty and thereby encourage the desire to revisit the hotel”. Similar views were voiced by Otto *et al.* (2004) ^[37] and Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) ^[56] on customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction in the hotel industry has been viewed as a rigorous marketing tactic in creating a difference from its competitors and therefore a clear and focused understanding of a guest preference and total worth will enhance a guest experience and maximize hotel revenue for the overall sustainability of business. Against this backdrop, the researcher felt the need to study the factors responsible for enhanced customer satisfaction in hotel industry in Odisha.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the various determinants of customer satisfaction of the hotel industry in Odisha.
- To find out the determinants that are responsible for creating customer satisfaction.
- To suggest appropriate measures to enhance customer satisfaction and create competitive business advantage.

Review of Literature

According to (Buhalis, 2008) ^[6] “the tourism as an international industry and as the biggest provider of jobs on the planet boasts a greater array of heterogeneous stakeholders than many other industries”.

According to International Labour Organizations (2010) ^[26], “tourism industry accounts for more than 235 million jobs globally, an equivalent to 8% of the overall number of direct and indirect jobs”.

According to World Trade Organization (1985) ^[53] customer satisfaction “is a psychological concept that involves the feelings of well-being and pleasure resulting from gaining what a person hopes for and expects from a product and /or service”.

The Centre for Study on Social Policy (2007) ^[8] states that “it is the customer’s fulfillment response to consumption experience, a highly personal assessment that is greatly affected by customer expectations and experience and is linked to both the personal interaction with the service provider and the outcome experienced by the service users”.

Dominici *et al.* (2010) ^[17] observed that in order to achieve customer satisfaction, it is important to recognize and to anticipate customers' needs and to be able to satisfy them.

Some of the major concepts that have been studied to explore the true nature of services are Service Quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985; Gronroos, 1988; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; O'Neill, 1992; Oliver, 1997) ^[42, 13, 39, 36], Satisfaction (Oliver, 1993 & 1997; Wirtz & Bateson, 1999; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000) ^[36, 38, 52, 56], Loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1997; Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Heskett, Sasser & Schlesinger, 1994; McMullan & Gilmore, 2003; McMullan, 2005) ^[15, 36, 5, 47, 24, 33, 32].

Service quality leads to higher profitability (Gundersen *et al.*, 1996) ^[20] and customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1997) ^[36]. Furthermore, a number of empirical studies indicate a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000; Dimitriadis, 2006; Chi and Qu, 2008; Faullant *et al.*, 2008) ^[27, 16, 11, 18], as well as between customer satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth (Söderlund, 1998) ^[48].

According to (Akm, *et al.*, 2011) ^[1] “service quality has a direct and positive impact on customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers are less price sensitive and are more likely to tell other people about their favorite experience”.

Chotivanich (2012) ^[12] opined that “customer satisfaction also affects customer loyalty. Further service quality also has a direct impact on customer loyalty. So the service quality is related to repeat purchases, and positive word of mouth”.

According to Hu (2009) ^[25], customer satisfaction can be defined as “a cognitive or affective reaction to reply the delivered services. This can be specified in hotel industry as the reaction of customers in response to services which are

given by the hotel”.

Bearden and Teel (1983) ^[3] argue that, customer satisfaction is important to the marketer because it is a determinant of repeat sales, positive word of mouth and customer loyalty.

Desai and Mahajan (1998) ^[14] also assumed that retained customers are, in fact, satisfied, and not retained simply because of habit, indifference or inertia. This is supported by Anderson and Sullivan (1993), which states; the more satisfied the customer, the greater their retention (Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003) ^[46].

Parayani *et al.* (2010) demonstrate that the hospitality industry has involved in the increasing competition for high service quality and customer satisfaction. Previous empirical study found a strong positive relationship for customer satisfaction and customer retention such in goods and service (Taylor and Baker, 1994), and businesses interaction (Patterson and Spreng, 1997).

According to Chand (2010) ^[10] “satisfied customers potentially are loyal customers and this has two separate benefits for the company. Firstly, loyal customers will again consume the services and also suggest them to other clients”.

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2006) “loyalty is won through delivery of consistent superior customer service, it means providing them with services that are so good such that there is little chance of not meeting up to their expectations and requirements”.

Schulz (2012) said that “retaining loyal customers for hoteliers is essential and a core factor in keeping the industry in shape and competitive enough to measure itself up to the changing trends of the industry”.

Kotler and Armstrong (2006) saw loyalty as a factor of consistent superior customer service, they found out that five percent increase in customer retention yielded seventy five percent increases in the net present value of a firm.

Cvent (2013) found that in today’s era of customer-oriented business strategy, the 80/20 rule has proved to be one of the fundamental business effects; this is where 80 percent of profitable revenues come from just the 20 percent of the organizations’ clients.

Carson Research Consulting (2013) indicate that “loyal customers are those who purchase from an organization repeatedly, will do so even in the face of certain challenges, that they are twenty six to fifty four percent more likely to positively refer the organization to others”.

Kapiki (2012) ^[28] explained that “excellent services quality by hoteliers’ results in to better customer satisfaction and loyalty”.

According to Cvent (2013), word-of-mouth is non official way of communication between people regarding a product of service.

Natuhwera (2011) opined that “a satisfied customer is the one whose expectations are met, and that the benefits from positive word of mouth is an important factor in the hotel industry because with excellent customer satisfaction, customers are more likely to recommend such high services to their friends, relatives and colleagues and this will consequently make the hotel business thrive on credible and positive image”.

Kohlmayr (2012) ^[29] explained that “to inspire long term loyalty among guests, hoteliers must not only identify who

their most valuable guest is, but also put strategies in place to make them feel welcome and most valued”.

Enhancing customer satisfaction in hotel industry: A sustainable business strategy

Today, the customer is in charge, is very knowledgeable and has the power, hence, they demand the best and will not settle down for anything less. To understand and realize the importance of effective customer satisfaction, the hotel industry must endeavor to work towards gathering more and more information on how to improve their services to their customers.

Providing high quality services and improving customer satisfaction are widely recognized as fundamental factors boosting the performance of companies in the hotel and tourism industry (Dominici, 2010) [17]. In their contributions Onyango *et al.* (2012) [40] found out that the hotel industry has experience enormous growth in business volume thereby making them larger and more complex to manage and meet challenges of customer demands. With the increased bargaining power consumers are obtaining, hotel corporations are realizing that the key to their success will be to foster

strategic relationship marketing efforts, particularly through the usage of loyalty measures (Gordon, 2006). Service quality leaders understand that the little things matter and that if left unattended will turn into larger more complex things that will negatively affect service quality (Zeithamal, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990) [55].

Critics argue that customer satisfaction is not enough anymore, and that customer loyalty is the key (Michael, 2013) [34], yet without the right attitude of service, the customer will not feel valued nor welcomed. Therefore, the management of hotel and employees need to strive hard to uphold the spirit of engaging customer satisfaction which is highly personalized assessment of a services experience (The Centre for Study on Social Policy, 2007) [8] that can impact a company’s bottom-line in innumerable ways especially in the hotel industry.

Data collection and research methodology

The design of this study encompassed descriptive and exploratory research. The target population was 100 guests of classified hotels in Odisha. This research study incorporated factor analysis through SPSS in efforts to gather the necessary information and to meet the overall objective of this study.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Value for Price	100	4	5	4.82	.386
Service Quality	100	3	5	4.76	.495
Friendly and Courteous staff	100	2	5	4.84	.443
Security	100	4	5	4.24	.429
Food Quality	100	2	5	4.08	.464
Accommodation	100	2	4	3.74	.676
Cleanliness	100	1	4	3.91	.452
Reception	100	2	4	3.67	.711
Parking	100	2	4	3.65	.730
Timeliness in Problem Solving	100	4	5	4.10	.402
Valid N (listwise)	100				

In the first attempt, the analysis was made on the variance of impact of determinants of customer satisfaction by using the mean and standard deviation. Table-1 illustrates the mean and standard deviation of the 10 determinants of customer satisfaction taken under the study. The descriptive statistics show that the respondents belonging to various classified hotels in Odisha have considered Value for Price, Service Quality, Friendly and Courteous Staff and Security as important determinants of Customer Satisfaction with the mean values of 4.82, 4.76, 4.84 & 4.24 and standard deviation of .386, .495, .443 & .429 respectively. The results of the mean values and standard deviation suggest that these four determinants are important as far as the sustainability of hotel business is concerned.

Factor Analysis

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with a varimax rotation was performed on 10 factors to outline the determinants of customer satisfaction.

Table 2: Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
Value for Price	1.000	.412
Service Quality	1.000	.691
Friendly & Courteous Staff	1.000	.771
Security	1.000	.751
Food Quality	1.000	.449
Accommodation	1.000	.691
Cleanliness	1.000	.447
Reception	1.000	.808
Parking	1.000	.845
Timeliness in problem solving	1.000	.340
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		

Table-2 presents the output of communalities to find out the common relationship among variables.

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

From the table – 2 it is found that a wide range of

communalities exist between .340 to .845. Since each variable share with other variables is significant. It is clearly understood that all the indicators relating to the determinants

of customer satisfaction are commonly associated and there is a strong interrelationship among the variables.

Table 3: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.350	23.500	23.500	2.350	23.500	23.500
2	1.501	15.006	38.506	1.501	15.006	38.506
3	1.294	12.936	51.442	1.294	12.936	51.442
4	1.060	10.596	62.038	1.060	10.596	62.038
5	.989	9.888	71.926			
6	.817	8.173	80.099			
7	.758	7.583	87.682			
8	.668	6.675	94.357			
9	.462	4.623	98.981			
10	.102	1.019	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Factor Analysis, Eigen values, Variance

Table-3 represents the output related to the Eigen values, and variance percentage. The ten factors are classified as value for price, service quality, friendly & courteous staff, security, food quality, accommodation, cleanliness, reception, parking, timeliness in problem solving. Out of ten factors, four factors viz., value for price, service quality, friendly and courteous staff and food quality with Eigen values equal to or greater than 1 explained almost 75 per cent of variance in the dataset.

Factor 1 (Value for Price): Factor 1 i.e, value for price with an Eigen value of 2.350 (Table-3) that is accounted 23.5 per cent of total variance. The relatively large proportion of variance explained by this factor suggests that value for price is an influential determinant of customer satisfaction. It may further be explained that the first factor signifies that guests give importance to value for price when it comes to choosing a hotel.

Factor 2 (Service Quality): Factor 2 i.e, service quality with an Eigen value of 1.501 (Table-3) that is accounted 15.006 per cent of total variance and a cumulative variance of 38.506. The relatively large proportion of cumulative variance explained by this factor suggests that service quality is also an influential determinant of customer satisfaction. The second factor signifies that service quality is one of the major differentiating factors for guests deciding to stay in a hotel.

Factor 3 (Friendly & Courteous Staff): Factor 3 i.e, friendly & courteous staff with an Eigen value of 1.294 (Table- 3) that is accounted 12.936 per cent of total variance and a cumulative variance of 51.442. The relatively large proportion of cumulative variance explained by this factor suggests that friendly & courteous staff is a significant determinant of customer satisfaction. The intangibility nature of this factor further elucidates the fact that the attitude and behaviour of staff plays a major role in a service driven organisation such as hotel in retaining guests and building fruitful relationship.

Factor 4 (Security): Factor 4 i.e, security with an Eigen value of 1.060 (Table- 3) that is accounted 10.596 per cent of total

variance and a cumulative variance of 62.038. The relatively large proportion of cumulative variance explained by this factor suggests that security is a significant determinant of customer satisfaction. The result of the factor suggested that proportion of variance is relatively good and guests are always concerned about their security in terms of personal security and the ability of the hotel to deal with the crimes like thefts, terrorist attacks, etc.

Suggestions

Following are the suggestions on how to enhance customer satisfaction in hotels:

- The hotels need to take care their customers by providing them customized services targeting specific customers in terms of their likes, tastes, preferences, etc. Initiatives in form of discounts, complimentary schemes and customer loyalty programmes for enhanced customer satisfaction and retention need to be the top most priority.
- Customers need to be categorized as per their frequency of stay and patronization. Regular and important customers/guests need to be pampered with special services such as rooms as per their choice and location, added amenities in the guest rooms, birthday and anniversary celebrations during guest stay in the hotel and striving for excellence to attain customer delight.
- Providing personal assistance services to make guest feel they are valued and also offering them with special concessions on various categories to make their trip a memorable one.
- Demonstration of excellent skills and hospitality by the hotel staff such as simple courtesy, remembering guests' names, and their preferences will always keep the guests happy and satisfied and in turn make them truly loyal.

Conclusions

The hotel industry is going a through major shift in maintaining and retaining customer base where the importance of customer satisfaction cannot be ignored. And, to achieve customer satisfaction, it requires hotels to constantly understand, create and innovate to the rising needs and expectations of its customers. The ten factors viz., value for

price, service quality, friendly & courteous staff, security, food quality, accommodation, cleanliness, reception, parking, timeliness problem solving were considered as important determinants of customer satisfaction taken under the study. Out of ten factors, four factors i.e., value for price, service quality, friendly & courteous staff and food quality accounted for high customer satisfaction in classified hotels in Odisha. Hence, the findings of the study suggest that the above mentioned four factors are the deciding elements as far the guest retention is concerned in hotel industry. Apart from the outcome of the study, it is generally believed that customer satisfaction has positive impact on overall business sustainability of any service-centered organization.

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