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A JOURNEY INSIDE CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH HPTDC HOTELS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract

Himachal Pradesh, due to its tourist destinations has been one of the top tourist places in India. For that matter, the number of domestic and international tourist's visits is increasing from time to time. Looking at this potential of Himachal Tourism many people are venturing into the field of hotel business. This study was conducted to assess customer satisfaction with HPTDC hotels in Himachal Pradesh. To keep the customers happy it is important to understand the Expectations and experiences. The responses of the customers were taken for the purpose of analysis. It was found that though the staff is hospitable, the hotels are neat and comfortable, the taste of food is good and some services such as credit card facility is available in the hotels still efficiency in service, variety of food items, price of food and beverage, the landscaping, spaciousness of rooms and value for money are some burning issues which demand immediate attention by the HPTDC.

Keywords: *Customer Satisfaction, Hotels, Tourists, Importance-performance analysis*

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Introduction

In the era of increasing competition one of the biggest challenges is to maintain a good relation with the customers so that the long term interests can be protected. To make the customers special the formation of effective strategies which can differentiate the organizations from one another is necessary. Tourism and hotel organization in the present day is a method of life of all people. Hotel industry is considered as one of the central commercial ventures in India, as it gets around 465.6 million local and overall tourists every year (kent 2005, government of India 2008). For the most part in the tourism business, the interest for administration stays flighty contrasted with other administration commercial ventures, for example, instruction, account or social insurance. This is because of the difficulties faces by the tourism business, for example, the regular vacillations sought after

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which contains a dynamic and enduring condition of progress in industry. Some researches disagree that improving service quality alone does not achieve desired customer loyalty. Rather, improvement of overall customer satisfaction is what leads to greater loyalty and repeat customer (Rungting, 2004). For this reason research on guest loyalty focused primarily on guest satisfaction.

Tourism is economic movement having great impact on job creation, boosts employment, motivates production of food and local handicrafts and contributes to a better understanding of an area and given special status by nations in their development plans.

Himachal Pradesh is flocked with visitors most of the year. The state is endowed with natural beauty and is considered to be the land of Gods and Goddesses. Number of temples and the rich culture of the state along with deep valleys, rivers, flora and fauna creates a never to be forgotten experience for the visitors. Himachal otherwise has got two main tourist season i.e. summer and winter season. In Summer Season, tourism in Himachal offers trekking, para gliding, angling and fishing, vehicle safari, rock climbing and mountaineering, camping and visiting world famous places of Himachal.

There are several four star hotels located all around the state and many of them are quite new. There are afew heritage hotels that provide four star comparableluxuries as well. The towns of Shimla, Manali andDharamsala are the main tourist spots in town andthese have the most number of four star joints. Manyof these hotels provide impressive views of theHimalayas in Himachal Pradesh.To accommodate the huge number of tourists, and to give them a pleasurable and a satisfied experience Himachal Pradesh is having many private and government hotels. The government hotel chain is one of the biggest govt. owned hotel chains in India, known as HPTDC (Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation) and is having 57 hotels. (HPTDC, 2016)

Literature Review

In highly competitive industries, customer satisfaction has a positive impact on firms' profitability (Abbasi et al., 2010) and is essential for retaining customers.Client satisfaction is an important indicator of a company's beyond, current-day, and future typical performance and, consequently, has lengthy been a essential attention amongst advertising practitioners and scholars (Oliver, 1999). In modeling pride, two popular conceptualizations of pride exist in the literature: transaction-particular satisfaction and cumulative pleasure (Anderson

&Fornell, 1993; Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, &Zeithaml, 1993). Within the transaction-specific standpoint, satisfaction is brief: How happy is a purchaser with a products or services at a sure point in time (Cronin & Taylor, 1992).

Hotels are growing their investments to beautify carrier outstanding and the perceived cost for visitors that permit you to gain higher customer pleasure and loyalty, for that reason resulting in higher relationships with each purchaser. Courting best has a fantastic remarkable effect on lodge site visitors' behavior: it creates first rate phrase of mouth (WOM) commercial enterprise sports mainly in recent times' aggressive market (Lovelock &Wirtz, 2007).Consumer satisfaction performs a very vital position in organization management, not handiest because it has direct have an impact on on the general performance of the companies, however due to the fact it is particularly associated with the competitive advantages of the establishments and organizations inside the market (Greenland, Coshall, & Combe, 2006).

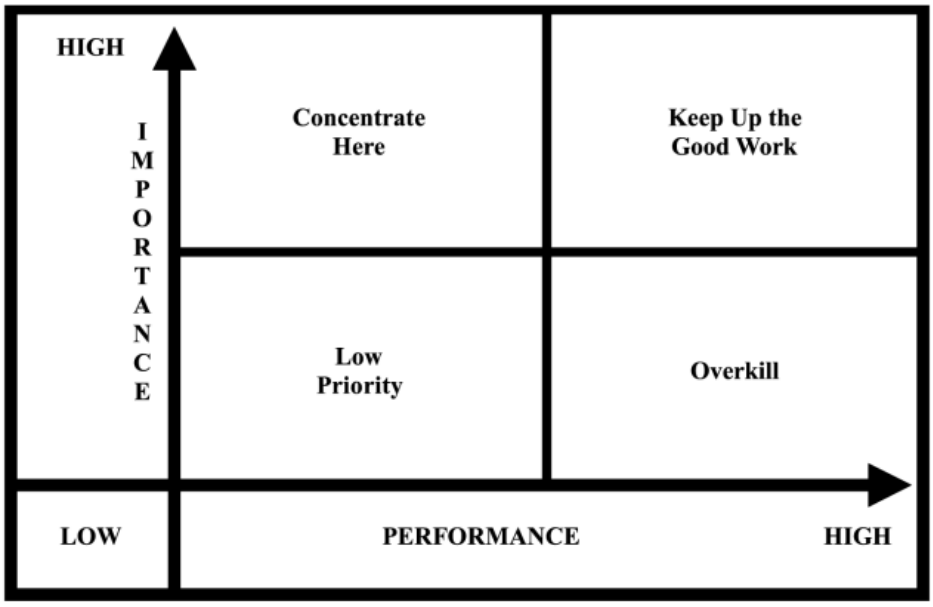
Customer satisfaction leads to repeat purchases, customer loyalty and positive brand advertising therefore, customers are the base for any flourishing business (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2001). According to Bowen and Chen (2001) a satisfied customer is not sufficient. It should be a highly satisfied customer. For building a sustainable competitive advantage building customer loyalty is no longer a choice but it is the only way to do so (Bansal and Gupta, 2001).

For marketing managers and intellectuals customer satisfaction for long has been an important pointer of company's past, current and future performance (Oliver, 1999). The key concept of customer satisfaction is based on Lewin's (1938) expectancy–disconfirmation theory, which affirms that "satisfaction judgment is based on comparisons between expectations held a priori and the perceived performance post hoc by a customer with an evaluative norm". According to the theory customer satisfaction is a function of subjective disconfirmation under various circumstances (Churchill &Surprenant, 1982). It can be said that if performance exceeds customers' expectation (a positive disconfirmation) then the customer is satisfied and if performance falls below expectations (a negative disconfirmation) then he is dissatisfied (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Characteristics of hotel products which customers say are important have been examined by a number of studies. For example, according to Choi and Chu (2001) the quality of staff,

quality of the rooms and the value you get for a price are the top three factors in determining guest satisfaction. Others authors state that it is quick service, convenience of location, comfort, employees' behavior, timeliness. Atkinson (1988) found that the purity, safety, "value for money" and friendly staff determine the degree of satisfaction of hotel guests.

Importance-Performance evaluation has been related as a compelling technique for assessing a business enterprise's competitive role inside the market, distinguishing exchange possibilities, and dealing with key arranging endeavours (Hawes and Rao, 1985). importance overall performance evaluation, to start with provided by way of Martilla and James (1977), distinguishes which item or provider attributes a company must focus on to improve client success. usually, records from consumer achievement reviews or carrier quality overviews (utilising SERVPERF version) with pre-devouring estimation of provider credit score importance are used to construct a two-dimensioned matrix in this matrix, carrier assets significance is delineated along the x-pivot and carrier trait performance (achievement or service nice) is portrayed along the y-hub. Carrier feature importance is measured utilising some type of self-expressed importance (e.g., rating scales, consistent complete scales, and so forth.) or definitely inferred importance (e.g., multiple regression weights, structural equation modeling weights or fractional connection weights. The method for overall performance and significance, normally used by and by means of, gap the matrix into four quadrants.



The original IPA framework adopted from Martilla and James (1977).

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Quadrant I- Attributes are supposed to be very important to respondents but performance levels are fairly low. This indicates that improvement efforts should concentrate here.

Quadrant II-Attributes are supposed to be very important to respondents, and at the same time, the organization seems to have high levels or performance on these activities. The message here is to keep up the good work.

Quadrant III-(overall performance and importance are low) Attributes are minor weaknesses and do now not require additional effort. The management scheme for this quadrant is "low precedence."

Quadrant IV –(performance is high and Importance is low) Attributes located in Respondents are satisfied with the performance of the organization, but managers should consider present efforts on the attributes of the cell as being over utilized.

Tourism Growth in Himachal Pradesh

Tourism is playing a very crucial job in the socioeconomic development of the state of Himachal Pradesh.The booming tourism industry in Himachal Pradesh is an engine to economic growth of the state. The natural scenic beauty, architecture, fair and festivals, clean environment, snow-capped peaks, lakes, rivers, glaciers, adventure sports, temples of the region have emerged as the main tourist attractions. The main tourist centers such as Shimla Kullu-Manali,Chail, Chamba, Dalhousi, Dharamshala, Kinnour and LahualSpiti are the main tourist destinations in the state.Gupta, S.K. at el (2010) found that the tourism has potential for the overall development of the area and community and it is tool for the community prosperity. It has potential to create occupational and employment opportunities for the locals.

Number of Tourists visited Himachal Pradesh (in lakhs)

Year	Indian Tourists	Foreigner Tourist	Total
2005	69.28	2.08	71.36
2006	76.72	2.82	79.54
2007	84.82	3.39	88.21
2008	93.73	3.77	97.50
2009	110.37	4.01	114.38
2010	128.12	4.54	132.66
2011	146.05	4.84	150.89
2012	156.46	5.00	161.46
2013	145.86	4.14	150.00
2014	159.25	3.90	163.14
2015	171.25	4.06	175.31
2016	179.98	4.53	184.51

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(Source: Tourism Department, Himachal Pradesh)

The number of visitors in Himachal Pradesh is increasing every year. Tourism industry in Himachal Pradesh is emerging as a major contributor to the gross state domestic product. It is clear from the table that 184.51 lakhs tourists visited in the state during 2016 as compared to 175.31 lakhs recorded in 2015. The number of foreign tourists also increased 4.06 lakhs to 4.53 lakhs over the year.

Statement of Problem

Himachal Pradesh receives a number of international tourists every year due to its numerous attractions. Looking at this potential of the state many people are venturing into the field of hotel business. However, it needs to be examined whether this mushrooming growth of hotels is able to cater tourists in a satisfactory manner or not. If the hotels are able to satisfy the guests they will come again which will not only be profitable for the hotels in terms of revenue generations but as well as for the Govt. because of taxes. Additionally, it will also help in creating a good image of Himachal tourism. Himachal Pradesh is having number of accommodation facilities. These facilities are owned by both govt. and private sector. HPTC are having 58 hotels in Himachal Pradesh. The questions that arise are what are the typical expectations of customers while staying in HPTDC hotels? Are the HPTDC able to satisfy the customers on all the fronts? Where are the HPTDC lacking and what can be done to give impeccable customer satisfaction?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this research are important for both existing and upcoming hotels as well as for Tourism offices and other administrative bodies of the Himachal Pradesh. HPTDC will benefit from the findings of this research as high customer satisfaction with HPTDC hotels is highly essential to create a positive experience to tourists, and to build a good image of the state.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

• To see if there is a gap between customersatisfaction and customer experience at the HPTDC hotelstaken up for the study?

• To identify the factors which need improvementso that customer satisfaction can be maximized inHPTDC hotels?

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Research Design

An understanding of what the tourists, wants will not only help the existing and upcoming hotels to grow their business in a manner which is sustainable, but would also take care that this does not end in a mad rush which can leave a number of negative impacts commonly associated with tourism. As most of these customers prefer to stay in good hotels and in good location therefore, three superiorhotels were chosen for study.

Primary data for the study was collected from participants by questionnaires which measured the items on a five pointLikert scale. Twenty nine hotel attributes were selected based on their frequency of inclusions in hospitality researches.Hotel managers and experts from the industry were consulted to provide comments on the draft questionnaire. A pilot survey was also conducted on 10 international tourists who stayed in hotels under study in order to test reliability of each item of the instrument. Only the people who are well-travelled, and were above the age group of 18 years were considered as the respondents in the research.

Analysis and Discussion

The twenty-nine variables used as input for theimportance performance matrix are presented in tableand figure 1 and 2. These variables were chosen forthe study after a detailed study of hotel and customers.

Expectation and Experience means of HPTDC Hotels

Sr. No	Attributes	Importance/ Expectation	Performance/ Experience
1	**Reservation system**	3.74	3.28
2	**Tariff structure**	3.45	2.71
3	**Packages offered**	3.57	2.17
4	**Front office staff**	2.66	3.21
5	**Location of the hotel**	3.62	3.73
6	**Competence of the housekeeping staff**	2.64	3.24
7	**Room furnishing**	3.76	3.07
8	**View from the Room**	3.58	3.16
	Baby sitter facility	2.52	00
	Safe deposit facility	2.52	00
9	**Heating Facility**	3.76	3.11
10	**Pest control**	2.57	2.63
11	**Laundry services**	3.85	3.54
12	**Restaurant and bar service**	3.26	3.29
13	**No of Menu items**	3.12	3.16
14	**Quality of Food**	4	3.43
15	**Price of food**	3.42	2.86
16	**Beverages**	3.22	2.92
17	**Public area**	2.79	3.19
	Cloak room	1.37	00

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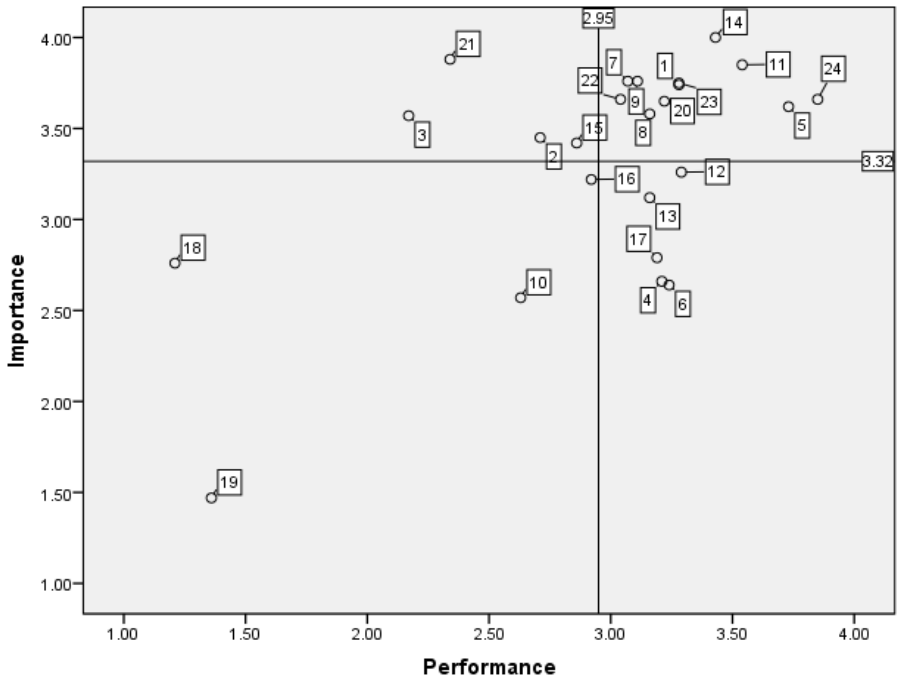
	Fitness club	1.87	00
18	**Activities**	2.76	1.21
19	**Gift shop**	1.47	1.36
20	**Travel facilities**	3.65	3.22
21	**Guest safety**	3.88	2.34
22	**Hygiene**	3.66	3.04
	Money exchange counter	2.25	00
23	**Waiting Time for billing**	3.75	3.28
24	**Parking Facility**	3.66	3.85
	Total	**79.84**	**71**
	Grand Mean	3.326666667	2.958333333

Quadrant I: This quadrant demonstrates high significance for the customers and low execution of the hotel. As per the reaction of HPTDC hotel customers feel that tariff structure, the cost of food guest safety and package offered are imperative. They ought to focus on the tariff structure and bundle offered so that the inhabitancy rate of customer could be upgraded. Sensible cost ought to be charged so that more customers can be pulled in to the hotels.The most surprising thing which attracts the attention here is the guest safety. Himachal Pradesh is otherwise considered to be a very peaceful state with very good law and order still customers are concerned with safety and security. The reason perhaps is not the safety and security at the hotels but the tourists might have got scared from the commission agents of different hotels who chase them to go to their preferred hotels thereby earning huge commissions.

Figure 1: Importance performance Matrix of HPTDC Hotels



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Quadrant II: This quadrant indicates high significance for the customers and elite of the hotel. In the primary quadrant variables demonstrates the quality of the hotel. These traits ought to be utilized as a USP for the hotel. It is clear from the quadrant that travel facility, sitting time for billing, reservation framework and the area of the hotel is up to the sign of customers and customers are exceptionally fulfilled. The stopping facility, warming facility, room furnishing, laundry service and quality of food are the variables which are accessible in the hotel as indicated by their craving level of the customers.

Quadrant III: This quadrant demonstrates low significance for the customers and low execution of the hotel, the message from this quadrant is low priority. As the customers do not expect a lot from the attributes falling in this quadrant therefore, the hotel management should not be concerned much about it. However as this also has been rated low in experience therefore, a slight boost to the attributes will be enough. As clear from this quadrant the attributes are pest control, beverages, Activities and gift shop. However, the possible reason for these attributes to be rated low in expectation and low in experience was that they did not matter much to the customers.

Quadrant IV: This quadrant demonstrates low significance for the customers and superior of the hotel. These are the variables which are not imperative for the customers and here hotel is performing exceptionally well. The capability of housekeeping staff and front office staff, no. of menu items, restaurant & bar service and public area are the characteristics which hotel is performing exceptionally well however customer rates them low. So hotel ought not to contribute much here rather it ought to concentrates more on the variables which are available in quadrant second.

Conclusion

Himachal Pradesh is a famous tourist hub. It boasts of many natural and cultural attractions within and around and thus receives many domestic and international tourists every year. The hotel sector is fast to respond to this growing demand. However, it is pertinent to know about the limitations of these organizations so that they can improve upon their deficiencies and cater to their customers in the best possible manner.

HPTDC hotels are located at best locations in Himachal Pradesh, but we conclude that they are not capable to achieve the growth. This gives an indication that there might be certain loop holes in the management and services provided by these hotels. The Results of the study

specifies that certain factors are more important than others in case of customer satisfaction. The results have implication for determining how HPTDC should allocate their efforts and resources. Hotel managers should provide the best facility their customers with the service quality and meet their expectations. Customers of HPTDC hotel feel that tariff structure and the price of food and beverage are on higher side if the hotel decreases the rates, the occupancy percentage of customer could be increased.

There are some attributes with which customers are not having any high expectations however to keep them at the same level would be a strong strategy. Every business would have some good and not so good points, therefore HPTDC should try to highlight the positive points and overcome the negative ones.

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