

NEW TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS WHICH AID HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY TO DEVELOP A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT DURING CHALLENGING TIMES

Dr. Seema Zagade

Professor, Maharashtra State Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology, Member BOS-Faculty: Hotel Management-SPPU, Research Guide-Faculty Hotel Management- SPPU, Pune.

Anandsingh Marwad

Assistant Professor Food Production/ Pastry Chef IHM-A, Aurangabad, Maharashtra. Research Scholar- Faculty Hotel Management SPPU.

Dr. Arun Sherkar

HOD Academics, Associate Professor, All India Shri Shivaji Memorial Society's College of HMCT, Pune.

Abstract

The world is on the threshold of recovering from the pandemic COVID-19. The pandemic has put the safety and security of the guests as a prime focus for every industry. The Hospitality industry is all geared up to welcome the guests while adapting to the newer technological trends which assure guest safety and security to handle crisis. The industry has realised the value of technology which acts as a catalyst in providing guest satisfaction while reducing the operational inefficiency. The Hotels which are quick to adapt to the technology would be ahead in the business as compared to the ones which are late. The reassurance of the technological applications at various touch points will add value and satisfaction from the customer's perspective. The industry has been quick to adapt strategies for efficient management of the crisis. Implementation of safe and hygienic practices to handle guests with inclusion of technology has increased. The staff has undergone systematic training sessions to handle any crisis situation. In this paper we would explore the new technological interventions which the Hotels have adapted to enhance value perception while assuring health safety and confidence. The adaption to the new technology is increasing the expectations of the guests and even the hospitality operators to add competitive advantage. The paper will carry a qualitative research to understand how the hotels adapt the new ways to deal with crisis which impacts the industry in the adverse manner. A study of literature from articles and papers in Scopus Journals, Web of science, Google Scholar, UGC Care journals, Previously publishes articles in leading Hospitality Magazines will be reviewed for the completion of the paper.

Keywords: Technology, Crisis Management, Hospitality, Competitive advantage, Pandemic, COVID-19.

Statement of objectives:

-To understand the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Hospitality

-To analyse the advancements of technology to provide touch less service and the use of technology for effective crisis management.

Hypothesis:

H₁. The Pandemic, COVID-19, has had an immense and adverse impact on the hospitality sector.

H₀. There has been no significant impact of the Pandemic, COVID-19 on Hospitality

H₂ Hospitality sector has adapted the technology for better service and experience of the guests.

H₀ Technology does not affect the hospitality sector as it works on the principles of human touch and technology hasn't developed in the sector.

H₃ Hotels have adapted technology in the testing times to manage crisis and also sustain the business.

H₀ Hotels have no clear strategy to handle crisis.

Research Methodology.

This study uses the evaluative research methodology to analyse the effectiveness of the technology in the crisis situations to make recommendations for the future of the Hospitality Industry. The basis of this paper is on the secondary data and the outcomes are qualitative in nature. Scholarly articles from reputed journals are reviewed and assessed for compilation of the data. The scholarly articles from reputed journals and authors from national and international repute have been reviewed. The work is also an outcome of articles and e newsletters published online. All the referred work is recent and most of the articles referred are published in the year 2020 which adds validity and recency to the work. A detailed questionnaire has been circulated to gain a clear understanding of the situation and the impact of technology in these crisis times. Responses from 45 industry experts and guests have been recorded and analyse for the purpose of this research.

Introduction:

In December 2019, the world woke up to a virus which actually changed human beings drastically. The disease was described as an infectious disease that is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (Adim, et al 2020). The spread of the virus was very quick and soon the virus had spread to 196 countries in the world. The disease has greatly slowed down economic activities across the world, with many countries coming under partial or total lockdown (Oruonye, & Ahmed, 2020). Human being is a social animal, it is really difficult for a human to not indulge in activity which includes his/her close people, be it family, friends. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the world's economy was shut down almost overnight (UNWTO, 2020). In only a few months, the coronavirus (COVID-19) impacted the world, both socially and economically. As the hospitality sector thrives on international and domestic tourism, got affected severely due to the lock down which was imposed by many countries. Hospitality businesses are expected to make substantial changes to their operations in the COVID-19 business environment in order to ensure employees' and customers' health and safety, and enhance customers' willingness to patronize their business (Gössling et al., 2020). This actually has paved a way for newer ways of service and bring the confidence in guest. History has shown that a crisis can bring about technological innovation and development (Colombo, Shikha, Hasanat, Arif & Hamid, 2016). Due to advances in artificial intelligence (AI), miniaturization, and other technologies, robotics have grown increasingly more viable in hospitality and tourism industry settings to provide concierge, housekeeping, food, and other service tasks (Yu, 2020). The service industries

have come to recognize their potential for delivering an automated service to increase productivity, service capacity, provide consistent service quality, improve competitiveness, to cut costs, and improve financial results (Belanche, Casaló & Flavián, 2019; Ivanov & Webster, 2019c). For example, after the current pandemic (COVID-19) people may desire to have physically distant service which may not be possible with receiving service from human employees. Thus, robotics may increasingly gain importance in terms of providing physically distant hospitality and tourism services (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). The hospitality industry is a dynamic environment in a constant state of movement and evolution. Through technology, the last several years have witnessed the industry change at an unprecedented pace (<https://tisoh.edu/>).

Review of Literature

The outbreak of the new coronavirus infection, COVID-19 was initiated from the Hunan seafood market in Wuhan city of China in December 2019, and within a couple of months it turned out to be a global health emergency (Adim, et al 2020). This caused the countries to call a nationwide lock down, close national and international borders. As the situation is still recovering, travel restrictions are being observed at national and international levels. These travel bans, border closures, events cancellations, quarantine requirements and fear of spread, have placed extreme challenges on tourism and hospitality sectors (Gössling et al., 2020a, b). Air travel, for instance, has been regarded as an amplifying and accelerating factor for influenza (Browne et al., 2016) and this segment has witnessed significant curtailments as the need of personal safety and survival has become pivotal (Nicola et al., 2020). Social media is playing a huge role in today's world to connect with the guest and provide a clear and up to date information about their favourite brand, and the status of operations. The hotels are also using live promotions in many live streaming platforms to help their guests to get reliable, timely, accurate and reliable information about the hotel. The experience of the Covid-19 pandemic shows that robotic technology could be efficiently and effectively used for cleaning, disinfection, delivering food and medicines, or providing information related to the pandemic to people (Yang et al., 2020), as robots are not affected by the virus. The service of the food or any small housekeeping requirements can be delivered by robots to curb any contact of the human being and to spread the feared virus. To provide a suitable example, in February 2020 the food delivery giant Meituan Dianping introduced robots in some of its partners' restaurants in Beijing that helped in taking food from kitchens to delivery employees and customers waiting for takeout orders (Toh & Wang, 2020). If a guest is infected and is obliged to remain under quarantine in the room, a hotel may use robots to deliver food, linen, and other items, without risking the health and safety of the staff (Ivanov and Webster, 2018; Webster and Ivanov, 2020; Yang et al., 2020). In the post-viral world, the use of robotics may be widespread as people would be more concerned about their safety; safety and security may be one of the main factors that influence tourists' choice of a destination and particular tourism/hospitality service provider (Hall, Scott & Gössling, 2020). Hotel operators are beginning to pay closer attention to the potential benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) and its applications, such as robotics, in hotel management practices (Zabin, 2019). Although the hospitality industry is known for its human touch, such a development in technology will take some time to actually come in to existing at least in Indian business situation. The robotics would also require a huge investment from the Hotels end to be fully operational. Apps, such as Hilton's Digital Key app, allow hotel guests to choose their guest room, check in, and unlock their door using their mobile device (Comcast Business, 2018) Such apps can be developed to increase guest convenience and confidence.

Data Analysis

According to the survey conducted for the specific research to understand the technological interventions in the Hospitality Industry, the respondents believe that the Technology does play a major role in the Industry.

The Impact of the Corona Virus has been one of the longest in the History of other infectious viruses which has made the world to come to a standstill.
45 responses



A total of 45 respondents participated in the survey and almost 70 percent of the people feel that COVID-19 has been one of the longest pandemic in the History of other pandemics in the world. There have been other Pandemics like the Plagues, SARS etc. but Corona has been one of the longest which has affected many lives across the world.

The Pandemic's Outbreak has been highly Impactful for the Hospitality and Tourism Sector.
45 responses



One of the most severely affected industry by the COVID-19 is clearly the Hospitality Industry. As this industry is clearly dependent on the domestic and international tourism, the lockdown and travel ban due to the Pandemic. Also the hospitality industry mostly depends on human beings for much of the service part. With number of people involved the risk of the infection is much higher and hence the industry had to pause its operations to ensure the virus does not spread due to the industry's characteristics of Human Touch.

Hospitality, being one of the most Human oriented Industry, has been taking more cautious efforts to bring the business back on track.
45 responses



It is very clear that the industry must be very cautious in resuming the business and bringing it back on track due to the nature of the Industry. The Industry has always been known for its service and human touch, and hence it becomes more important for the Hospitality to be more careful to resume business.

Technology will be one of the key factors for Hospitality Success post Pandemic.
45 responses



Even though the Hospitality thrives on the Human touch and services offered are personalised, the technology has started playing a major role in the hospitality. Many of the services are now technologically enabled and provide a better option for the sector to decide the exact nature of the service which is required or would be required for the guests. This will further become necessary post the pandemic as many of the services required would be touch less, to add value addition and safety for the guests.

The Hospitality industry has been taking every possible precaution to ensure guest safety and health.
45 responses



Strongly Agree
Agree
May be
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

The change in service delivery from manual to digital is slowly taking place in the Hospitality sector, which allows the sector to provide assurance of safety and security to the guests availing the services. The industry is taking steps to adapt technological interventions wherever possible. Self-check ins, check out kiosks, chat bots, smart key cards, access through guest mobiles are some of the key examples of the touch less precautions taken by the industry.

Hotels are using the social media to pass timely information to the guests, which will help the Hotel to bring back guests and even create a positive impact during testing times.
45 responses



Strongly Agree
Agree
May be
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Social media has been playing a major role in today's world. The Hotels too, are using these social media platforms to inform the guests about the timely updates of the protocols guided by the local governments, the social distancing practices being practiced at the hotels, the hygiene and sanitation measures taken, the common areas of the hotels, adaption of technology, special rates etc. The social media influencers too have a role to play in these times as the ones who have already witnessed the services by a specific hotels may put information about the hotels efforts to ensure safety and security may also help the hotels in big way.

Application of Technology in these times would assure guests about the precautions taken by the hotel for guest safety through touch less service, e.g. self-check in, check outs, menu scanning on personal gadgets, sensor lightings, virtual tours etc.
45 responses



Strongly Agree
Agree
May be
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

The technology would only add value when it comes to guest satisfaction and security. The guest would become more confident when the technological interventions would help him enjoy a seamless, happy and safe stay.

Technology can be very useful in providing seamless guest services.
48 responses



● Strongly Agree
● Agree
● May be
● Disagree
● Strongly Disagree

Technology will add confidence in guest to avail services in a hotel in the post pandemic world.

Digitization of the process will help the hospitality organizations to manage their resources well and help maintain costs.
48 responses



● Strongly Agree
● Agree
● May be
● Disagree
● Strongly Disagree

Digitization of the processes will also help hotels to manage their own resources effectively and help maintain the costs. Technological advancements like sensor motion lights, temperature control enables the hotels to save energy.

Technology allows the hotel to provide convenience to the guests.
48 responses



● Strongly Agree
● Agree
● May be
● Disagree
● Strongly Disagree

The guest services can be customized and can be served at the guest's convenience and need. The guests can use their own gadgets and use them whenever they need the services.

More innovations in the technology will ensure develop better features and services which will add value to the guests even post the pandemic.
48 responses



● Strongly Agree
● Agree
● May be
● Disagree
● Strongly Disagree

Addition of technological interventions will only add value to the guest service. The hospitality sector will gain more advantage of security, safety and control with the advancements of technology. The advancements which are applicable in these testing times, will continue providing better experiences and guest safety even in the post pandemic world as the guests would become habitual to the technology.

Investment in the technology can add service quality and value for the hotel to keep ahead in the market segment.
44 responses



● Strongly Agree
● Agree
● May be
● Disagree
● Strongly Disagree

The hotels which adapt technology at a faster rate will remain ahead in the market as compared to the ones which do not adapt the technology as the services will become redundant and will need a upgrade.

Technology adds advantage of custom made facilities as they may be chosen by the guest on their own comfortable time and what exactly is expected.
45 responses



● Strongly Agree
● Agree
● May be
● Disagree
● Strongly Disagree

Information can be used to develop better service and deliver satisfaction to the guest.
45 responses



● Strongly Agree
● Agree
● May be
● Disagree
● Strongly Disagree

The information received by the guests can actually help the hotel to design the services as needed by the guests. It also becomes important that this data is carefully used to share information about the hotel and the upcoming events and offers etc. Providing guest satisfaction by anticipation of the service need would actually be easy through technology.

Technology would be used for effective decision making with less and precision to deal with crisis handling.
45 responses



● Strongly Agree
● Agree
● May be
● Disagree
● Strongly Disagree

The technology can be very useful in handling crisis where human beings can do little. Touch less services, sensor lighting, robot concierge, mobile and gadget apps will enable the seamless service and will be able to sail through the crisis situations. Decision making through artificial intelligence would ensure accurate and effective measures are undertaken by the hotel, to assure safety and security for the guests and also for the staff of the hotel in testing times.

The pandemic has had severe impact on the hospitality services. The hospitality has been quick to realise the need for the technological interventions for providing seamless guest service and deliver satisfaction. The technology also helps curb costs and allow the managers to take a better control of the crisis situations as and when they arrive.

Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic has certainly affected the world. The Hospitality industry was the worst hit the tourism industry came to stand still and the operations became close to zero. With the hope of the vaccination, the hospitality started the operations with domestic guests. Technology was actually not new to the hospitality industry, but in this crisis situation, it became necessary for the hotel operators to adapt to newer trends in technology with clear intention of bringing the customer confidence back. In the past decade, the technology has evolved and has played a key role in the development of the hospitality and tourism sector. Adaption of technology has become mandatory due to the pandemic

and there have been many innovations and development in the technology. Along with the value addition, technology also adds sense of security and confidence. Technology has proved to be efficient, and accurate to provide guest service. Touch less services were introduced, to ensure reduced human touch. The customers' expectations also increase as the newer technologies evolve and this clearly create a demand for new innovations in the field of technology in hospitality sector. The customer is now dependent on virtual services and requires a higher bandwidth, a simple Wi-Fi system is no more sufficient and the hotel must invest in a good broadband bandwidth to suffice the load it would carry due to the virtual services. The menus are now easily accessible from guest mobiles or tablets enabling them to order directly. The trend will just keep growing with more additions and newer ways of contact less service. This pandemic has changed many things and people will have to now start living with the newer ways of life. The technology not only help tackle crisis but also improve and create new guest experiences that anticipate and meet evolving guest expectations.

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