Traditional Human Touch Services vs. Technology Based Self Service – Study on Guest Satisfaction in Hotels

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Abstract*: This paper aims to find out impact of Traditional Human Touch Services (THTS) and Technology Based Self Service (TBSS) on Guest satisfaction. The other objective it 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. 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. All hotels, small or big are creating their own Websites to help them reach a larger population of potential guest. Guests are positively impacted by the replacement of Human touch with Technology and want hotels to adopt innovative technology trends*

Keywords:. Technology, Traditional Human touch services, guest satisfaction

I. 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 longtime consuming manual process. This is 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.

II. 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

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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 el. (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 traveler & Business traveler 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 personthan 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; and18 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.

III. CONCLUSION

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.

All hotels, small or big are creating their own Websites to help them reach a largerpopulation of potential guest. 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.

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