CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This chapter is divided into three major sections. First, the contributions of this study are given, after which the limitations of the research are discussed. This is followed by suggestions for future research in complaining behaviour.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Though the area of complaining behaviour has been extensively researched, studies undertaken from the managers' perspective have been almost negligible. The present study gives an idea of the managers' viewpoint regarding complaints and complaining customers. If this study is understood against the background of research already done in the area of Complaining Behaviour from the customers' standpoint, it would provide a more balanced perspective of the whole issue.
A) Theoretical contribution:

The study confirms the **Expectations theory** where it is seen that when expectations of foreign customers are lowered, the consumers are pleasantly surprised, and give a good report of the hotel. When expectations are raised by the Domestic travel agents and these are not matched by the reality of the situation, it gives rise to complaints from customers who feel that they have been cheated.

This study also seems to validate **Hirschman’s theory of Exit, Voice and Loyalty**. It corroborates his argument that it is the loyal employee who speaks up and complains about the deteriorating work conditions in the hope of getting something done about the situation. In this study it was found that the foreigners are much easier to satisfy than customers of Indian origin, and among NRI and domestic customers, the domestic Indian tourists seem to be the ones who complain more and are more difficult to satisfy. Applying Hirschman’s theory, it seems that the domestic tourists complain more than others in the hope of turning around the situation. Studies have shown that the cost of voicing a complaint is usually greater than the benefit of the remedy desired. Hence while it would have been easier to just exit without any explanation, the loyal customer chooses to stay and complain, thus giving the organisation a chance to improve and give better service.
Andreasen and Manning's (1990) theory of vulnerable consumers also seems to be reiterated by this study, as the foreigners who are in a strange land and do not know the local language and customs, may be unable to voice their complaints when they are cheated and overcharged for the goods and services they buy. Hence it would seem that they are easier to satisfy than the customers of Indian origin who would not refrain from complaining when the occasion arises.

B) Managerial Relevance

This study brought to light the fact that the hotel service providers do not welcome complaints, even though theoretically they believe that complaints will benefit their organisation. It is found that managers perceive customers as belonging to particular groups – e.g. consumers coming through domestic travel agents, those coming through International travel agents, domestic Indian tourists, NRI customers and foreigners. The perceptions of managers may be colouring their attitude towards domestic customers and this may be influencing their behaviour towards such customers. This may go against the long-term interest of the hotel or the organisation, as it is a well-known fact that domestic customers are the high-spending tourists and it is good for the hotel to patronise them. A change of attitude is therefore the need of the hour.
The knowledge of the existence of different segments can be important to managers, because it can help marketers determine who might represent the most viable targets for the hotel offerings. Managers can become aware of these undiscovered segments with clearly identifiable needs that are not being met, due to which the hotel could be losing valuable business through exiting customers and negative word of mouth.

Routledge (2000) speaks of the Government of Goa’s emphasis on “high quality, low volume” tourism, differentiating between the foreign and domestic tourist markets. He reports of the contribution to the state revenues made by the small proportion of elite foreign and domestic tourists in luxury developments. In fact the debate on the distinct nature of the foreign and domestic tourist market has been going on for some years now. The differentiation lies in the requirements of foreign and domestic tourists, in their quality expectations as well as in the price they are willing to pay. The present research could have applicability to tourists in general, as there seems to be little literature on the discriminating behaviour of tourists. It may also have long-term implications for Goa.

The present study brought to light a number of findings, which could prove useful in understanding the behaviour of hotel guests and help in converting complaining customers into loyal guests of the organisation. An analysis of the case studies in this research indicates that effective solutions to complaints go
considerably beyond superficiality and apathetic gestures. Guests want a full explanation of why a problem arose and they want to know what is being done to prevent a recurrence. Guest Relations Executives furnished numerous examples of how a complaint situation in a hotel can be transformed into a recovery by proper complaint handling.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This study was primarily focussed on complaints and complainants as perceived by the service providers. The hotels had done no documentation of actual complaints received, because generally, there does not seem to be a practice of maintaining such records. Hence there is no physical evidence of complaints. The researcher was told that complaints were handled immediately without allowing small issues to be blown up into greater ones.

After the questionnaire was administered and the entire data collected, discussions with Department colleagues revealed that there might have been a flaw in the design of the questionnaire. Successive statements were opposites of each other, which might have generated bias in the responses, e.g. j) “Customers of International travel agents give a good report of the hotel to others” and k) “Customers of domestic travel agents give a good report of the hotel to others”. This might have created some contamination in the statistical analysis. A randomisation of the statements might overcome this possible limitation.
The limitation of the five-point Likert scale, viz. that there might be a tendency on the part of the respondents to choose the middle path and be on the safe side by selecting the “undecided” option also apply to this research.

The operationalisation of the three main hypotheses into statements that comprise each hypothesis was done on the basis of the interviews with the Guest Relations Executives, who usually handle complaints in the hotel. Whether the statements into which each hypothesis was operationalised truly embody the hypothesis has not been tested out anywhere, so the findings could be taken as true, subject to the statements really representing the hypotheses.

The respondents may not have understood the meaning of some words as the researcher intended – e.g. in Q5, statements g) and h)... “'play down' the hotel to the guests” may not have been fully understood by those who did not know English, and had to be given the explanation in the vernacular.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As may be evident from the discussion, the conclusions drawn from this study may not easily be generalised. Whether the same results would have been obtained for other services and in other contexts remains to be seen.
More studies could be conducted from the management perspective to gain a better understanding of complaining behaviour of customers. Other product as well as service industries could be chosen for research in this area with a restructured instrument. Further research could be conducted on the hypotheses that were not taken up for analysis for various reasons in the present study. Insights generated out of the present research may be compared with similar studies in other sectors like banking, health care, entertainment, etc.

Studying employees' perceptions offers insight into their knowledge of customer satisfaction. If employees incorrectly believe customers are satisfied, it is unlikely that changes will be made in product or service levels to attempt to satisfy customers. Likewise, if employees incorrectly believe customers are dissatisfied, changes in products or services that could adversely affect customer satisfaction could be implemented. This can be achieved by contrasting studies from the customers' point of view with that of the employees' point of view. Employee perception studies are, therefore, a crucial component of satisfaction programs that are geared to maximise long-term corporate profitability.