INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest contemporary challenges of management in service industries is providing and maintaining customer satisfaction.\(^1\) Overwhelming customer demand for quality products and service has in recent years become increasingly evident to professionals in the tourism and hotel industry.\(^2\) Customer satisfaction represents a modern approach for quality in enterprises and organizations and serves the development of a truly customer-focused management and culture. Customer satisfaction measures offer a meaningful and objective feedback about client’s preferences and expectations. Marketing and management sciences nowadays are focusing on the coordination of all the organization’s activities in order to provide goods or services that can satisfy best specific needs of potential customers.\(^3\) Hotels are one part of hospitality industry, which has evolved from the very modest beginning of families and landowners who opened their homes to travellers.

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Competitors prospering in the new global economy recognized that measuring customer satisfaction is the key. The basis of consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction lies in mankind’s ability to learn from past experiences – accordingly, consumer preferences are constantly being updated by way of the learning process”.\(^4\) Learning theory postulates “…. a given response is reinforced either positively or negatively to the extent that it is followed by a reward. Reward in turn, leads to an evaluation that the purchase was satisfactory…. and hence it can exert an effect on brand beliefs and attitudes. The probability of engaging in a similar buying act will be increased if there are positive consequences in the act of purchase and use and vice versa”.\(^5\)
Given the vital role of customer satisfaction, a variety of research has been devoted to investigating the determinants of satisfaction. In a competitive marketplace where businesses compete for customers, customer satisfaction is seen as a key differentiator and increasingly has become a key element of business strategy. Customer satisfaction is considered to be one of the most important outcomes of all marketing activities in a market-oriented firm. The obvious need for satisfying the firm’s customer is to expand the business, to gain a higher market share, and to require repeat and referral business, all of which lead to improved profitability. Studies conducted by Cronin and Taylor (1992) in service sectors such as: banking, pest control, dry cleaning, and fast food; found that customer satisfaction has a significant effect on purchase intentions.

1.1. The Concept of Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction refers to the extent to which customers are happy with the products and services provided by a business. The concept of customer satisfaction has attracted much attention in recent years. The involvement of the customer in the delivery process introduces an additional factor, which causes the service providers to have little or no direct control over the service experience. Services are generally described in terms of four unique characteristics, namely intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability. Due to the intangibility characteristic of services, the firm may find it hard to understand how consumers perceive their service and evaluate service quality. Hence the consumers’ input becomes vital to the quality of service performance. The quality of service can vary from producer to producer, from customer to customer, and from day to day.
1.2. Dynamic Nature of Customer Satisfaction

Several articles study satisfaction in a dynamic setting, which reveals the following three conceptual relationships: “1) satisfaction is a function of expectations, perceived performance, and disconfirmation; 2) intention to repurchase is a function of a customer satisfaction and switching barriers; and 3) choice is a function of expectation and intention to repurchase”. Kasper (1988) argues that if past research in consumer behaviour has neglected the idea that customer satisfaction can change over time, it may be a serious oversight, for satisfaction has been shown to be significant predictor of brand choice. Shan McQuitty et al (2000) claim, “the most obvious implication is that systematic variations in customer satisfaction can help explain changes in product choice, based on an initial degree of satisfaction and its rate of change. Such explanatory power provides a powerful tool for those interested in employing customer satisfaction as a predictor of profit, choice, repurchase behaviour, or market share”.

1.3. Hotel Attributes and Customer Satisfaction

Alpert (1971) termed those attributes, which directly influence consumer choice as ‘determinant’ attributes. Because of the intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability of services, consumers’ perceptions of satisfaction criteria may include contextual cues that they use to evaluate the services before. Wuest et al (1996) defines perceptions of hotel attributes as “the degree to which travellers find various services and facilities important in promoting their satisfaction with hotel stays.” Various studies have identified different attributes as criteria to measure the customer satisfaction. Challan (1996) identified 166 hotel attributes.
Most of the travellers would consider the following hotel attributes when making a hotel choice decision: cleanliness, location, room rate, security, service quality, and the reputation of the hotel or chain. Cleanliness of accommodation, safety and security, accommodation value for money, and courtesy and helpfulness of staff were the vital attributes in hotel choice selection. Wilensky and Buttle (1988) claim that personal service, physical attractiveness, opportunities for relaxation, standard of services, appealing image, and value for money were significantly evaluated by travellers. The study of Rivers et al (1991) shows that convenience of location and overall service received the highest ratings.

The study by Roger J. Callan and Gabrielle Kyndt (2001) identifies the following as the most important attributes: “Security 93 per cent; reservation reliability 89 per cent; quietness of room 87.2 per cent, physical condition of the hotel 83 per cent, and location 81 per cent. Mehta and Vera (1990) identify four important attributes viz. clean rooms and other areas (94.4 per cent); hotel security (92.4 per cent); overall hotel service (90.2 per cent); convenient location (90 per cent); and finally, check-in service (87.8 per cent). Salesh and Ryan (1992) found that clean rooms (97 per cent); comfort of bed (958 per cent); quiet stay (95.2 per cent; safe hotel (92.4 per cent); and convenient location (91.2 per cent) as the major attributes to measure the customer satisfaction.

The success or failure of a restaurant revolves around several variables and their interplay with each other.
1.4. Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

Customer satisfaction and loyalty occurs since customers find each company to be more responsive and more in touch with their specific needs so customer will come back again. Customer retention is good for both business and customers. For business it is cheaper to keep existing customers happy than to attract new ones. Dickie (2003) stated that five per cent increase in customer retention results in a 25 to 95 per cent increase in profits. Increasing loyalty, in turn, has been found to lead to increases in future revenue. Furthermore, a number of empirical studies indicate a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. On the other side, for a customer, loyalty to one organization reduces the risk of service availability, allows for the development of social rapport with the provider, and the customisation of services to his/her specification.

Getty and Thomson (1994) studied relationships between quality of lodging, satisfaction, and the resulting effect on customers’ intentions to recommend the lodging to prospective customers. Their findings suggest that customers’ intentions to
recommend are a function of their perception of both their satisfaction and service quality with the lodging experience. The study concluded that there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.\textsuperscript{35} Guests perceive satisfaction with housekeeping to be more important than satisfaction with reception, food, and beverage, and price when deciding whether to return, recommend, and demonstrate loyalty to the hotel.\textsuperscript{36}

Vavra, T.G. (1997)\textsuperscript{37} claims, “Organizations today are interested in maximizing customer retention and loyalty. But not all those who are satisfied, or those who purchase will be loyal. The consequences of satisfaction are indeterminant”. Further states, “There is ample proof that satisfied customers are not always the most loyal customers and vice versa.”

1.5. Image and Loyalty

Image of an organization is an important factor that influences the marketing activities. Image is considered to have the ability to influence customers’ perception of the goods and service offered.\textsuperscript{38} Image is considered to influence customers’ minds through the combined effects of advertising, public relations, physical image, word-of-mouth, and their actual experiences with the goods and services.\textsuperscript{39} Groenroos (1983) concludes that service quality in an important determinant of image.\textsuperscript{40}

Various research studies also point out that organization’s image is a major determinant to influence customer loyalty towards the organization. Hotel image is an important factor to maintain a relatively high score rating among loyal customers.\textsuperscript{41} “Image is positively associated with customer satisfaction and customer preference in luxury hotels. This indicates that a desirable image leads to customer satisfaction and
customer preference, while an undesirable image may lead to dissatisfaction”. Image of the location, employee attitude, facilities, and services of a hotel constitute important factors in determining customer loyalty.

When hotel image and customer satisfaction with reception, housekeeping, food, and beverage, and price were tested, hotel image and customer satisfaction with housekeeping were the only significant factors identified. This finding indicates that hotel image and customer satisfaction with housekeeping are the most important factors considered by customers in their discussion to repurchase, recommend and exhibit loyalty.

### 1.6. Importance of Customer Satisfaction

The importance of customer satisfaction is unarguable. The principal purpose of a business is to create satisfied customers. Customer satisfaction has direct and indirect impact on business results. Customer satisfaction positively affects business profitability. Increasing customer satisfaction has been found to lead to higher future profitability and higher levels of customer retention and loyalty. Organizations need to retain existing customers while targeting non-customers. Service quality has emerged as an issue of paramount importance for the hospitality industry. It has been identified as one of the most effective (albeit difficult) means of building a competitive position and improving organizational performance. The hotel industry is experiencing increased globalization, competition, higher customer turnover, growing customer acquisition cost and rising customer expectations, meaning that hotel’s performance and competitiveness is significantly dependent on their ability to satisfy customers efficiently and
effectively. In today’s hospitality environment, the true measure of company success lies in an organization’s ability to satisfy customers continually. The key to sustainable competitive advantage in today’s competitive environment lies in delivering high-quality service that result in satisfied customers. Service quality has a positively related to customer retention and customer loyalty, service has a direct effect on company profits.

To enhance profitability and guest satisfaction, hotels must now-a-days focus on implementing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies that aim to seek, gather and store the right information, validate and share it throughout the entire organization and then use it throughout all organizational levels for creating personalized, unique guests’ experiences. Failure pay attention to influential attributes in choice intention may result in a customer’s negative evaluation, and may lead to unfavourable word-of-mouth.

2. HOTEL INDUSTRY

The word ‘hotel’ derives from the French word hôtel (the root word is hôte, which means ‘host’) – usually referred to a ‘townhouse’ with frequent visitors. The word ‘inn’ has been in use since about 14th Century and it was not until 18th century, that ‘hotel’ became fashionable.

The Hotel Industry is a large and highly diverse industry that includes a wide range of property styles, uses and qualities. The industry covers the spectrum of small, medium, and large enterprises and makes a significant contribution to national and international economies.

The hotel industry today has been recognized as a global industry with producers and consumers spread around the world. The use of hotel facilities such as:
room, restaurant, bar, nightclub or health club; is no longer considered a luxury. For many people these services have become an integral component of lifestyle.63

The hotel industry is particularly complex for a number of reasons. Firstly, the industry is structurally complex with there being a large number of categories. These categories encompass hotel quality (e.g. luxury, first class, mid-range, and economy); hotel location (city centre, rural, seaside); hotel style (traditional, resort, all-suite hotel, limited service hotel).64

Secondly, the industry is made complex by both the affiliation and management structures. In terms of affiliation hotels can be operated as independent properties, franchised to a branded hotel company or as members of a marketing consortium. In addition hotels can be owner-managed, managed by independent hotel management companies or managed by a national or international branded hotel company.65

Thirdly, the industry is also highly fragmented, with most hotels independently owned and operated although there is a higher level of concentration in certain key quality sectors such as the luxury and first class sectors and the limited service sector. The perceived level of fragmentation is also lower when measured by the number of bedrooms rather than the number of properties.66

2.1. Historical Evolution of Hotel Industry

The development of the hotel industry can be traced as far back as the druids and the Romans who have left the earliest recorded examples of the provision of hospitality. The history of the industry can be traced through the ages from the emergence of the inn, the tavern, and the ale-house.67 In medieval Europe monasteries rationally offered hospitality to the travellers. Hotel industry has
followed path of travellers from time they travel. Inn keeping is believed to be started in 1200 years age. In 1650 Mr. Pascal opened café in Paris and coffee house in London. Hotel de Henry was one of the first European hotels build in 1788 with capacity of 60 rooms.68

The first American hotels were built in the cities of the Atlantic coast in the 1790s, when elite urban merchants began to replace taverns with capacious and elegant establishments of their own creation.69 In 1950, new concept as motels, boatels, and floatels, rotels were built. In 1970, the hotel industry experienced the start of construction boom, and since then the hotel industry is progressing.70

2.2. Growth of Indian Hotel Sector

Prior to the 1980s, the Indian hotel industry was a slow-growing industry, consisting primarily of relatively static, single-hotel companies, and growth in demand for hotels was particularly high during the early 1990s following the initiatives taken to liberalize the Indian economy in the Financial Year 1991, as per the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).71 The development of the Indian hotel and resort sector has occurred as a result of tourism trends in the country.72 The historical development of much of India’s hotel sector has relied on key entrepreneurs who had a vision of how the accommodation sector could be developed and used to underpin rapid tourism development.73

As of December 2005, according to Ministry of Tourism, Government of India74 there is following number and category of hotels.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Star Category</th>
<th>No. of Hotels</th>
<th>No. of Rooms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-Star Deluxe</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Star</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>11,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Star</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>9,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Star</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>31,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Star</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>19,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-Star</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>2,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be classified</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5,127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Tourism, GOI

The changing scene of the Indian hotel industry has meant that the customer of hotels has changed over recent years with a growing number of business guests, particularly in the major metros of India. Domestic and foreign business travellers contributed a major part of the business for the five-, four- and three-star hotels in India. The domestic business traveller was also an important customer for the two- and one-star hotels in India. Four- and five-star hotels had high levels of both domestic and foreign guests. The sector grew at a rate of 8.4 per cent in 2006 and is expected to grow by 8 per cent per annum, in real terms, between 2007 and 2016.

During the financial 2006-07 revenues of Hotel and Restaurant industry in India was Rs.604.32 billion. With tourism industry showing excellent performance, in terms of foreign tourists arrival and demand outpacing supply the hospitality industry, is poised to grow a faster rate and reach Rs.826.76 billion by 2010. It is estimated that over the next two years 70,000 – 80,000 rooms will be added across different categories throughout the country. According to tourism ministry, 4.4 million tourists visited India last year and at current trend, demand will soar to 10 million in 2010 – to accommodate 350 million domestic travellers.

According the analysis carried out by the Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), post Mumbai terrorist attack combined with the
global slowdown, have severely impacted the bottom line to the extent of 64 per cent of the Indian hospitality sector.\textsuperscript{79}

The Chennai hotel industry is expected to see a steady growth in terms of room supply predominantly in the business traveller segment. The rise in hospitality standards demanded in the city has led to the need of properly managed and better organised hotels to increase their efficiency and provide better quality. According to 2008 survey there are 3,462 rooms available in the city and the growth trend had been 24 per cent.\textsuperscript{80}

2.3. Factors of Growth

Historically, hospitality industries in different countries have emerged from varying degrees of domestic or institutionally based provision.\textsuperscript{81} However, virtually all commentators agree that the forms of early, non-commercial hospitality and the varieties of commercial hospitality that have evolved over time, were stimulated by developments in transportation, trade, and destinations.\textsuperscript{82} The degree of urbanization, and the volume of economic surplus in the form of discretionary income available to the population both generally and locally are of particular importance.\textsuperscript{83}

2.4. The Challenges

The Indian hotel sector is faced with many challenges with regards to improving the profitability of operations and exploiting the new opportunities that have arisen due to the growth in the economy and the changing nature of tourism in India. It is clear that an effective marketing strategy is needed to incorporate
ambitious marketing plans and branding strategies. It seems that the week internal markets that were identified in China are mirrored in India.

Jauhari (2006) argues that the type of strategic hotel development illustrates one response by a company in answer to the critical factors that are considered necessary if a hotel is to grow and become effective in the changing Indian market and suggests the following as the critical factors necessary for the growth of hotels in India: Customer orientation, Outstanding service, Flawless operations management, Well-thought out marketing strategy – positioning, marketing, and media, Cost management – energy, marketing costs, attrition costs.

2.5. Classification of Hotels

Historically, hotel classification systems were formed to ensure safe and reliable lodging and food for travellers at a time when very few such trustworthy establishments existed. World Tourism Organization (WTO) and International Hotel & Restaurant Association (IH&RA) (2004) widely use the star as the graphical symbol in hotel classification. The star classification system is a common one for rating hotels. More number of stars indicates more luxury.

Raina (2005) writes that the present system of classification by 1 to 5 star is based on facilities available in the concerned hotels. The Department of Tourism had constituted a committee, ‘Hotel and Restaurant Approval and Classification Committee’ (HRACC), which inspects the Hotel (the applicant hotel) to assess its suitability, or otherwise for awarding the star category it has applied for. There are five such committees – the Central Committees and four Regional Committees. The classification of 4-star, 5-staf and 5-star deluxe hotels is handled by the Central
Committees. The classification and reclassification of 1, 2, 3-star and regional committees do heritage hotel and approval of restaurants.\textsuperscript{90}


The Hotel and Restaurant Approval and Classification Committee (HRACC) inspects and assesses establishments based on the facilities and services they offer. The broader classifications offered are: The premium luxury sector (5-star); The budget sector (4 to 1-star); Heritage hotels – palaces and forts; Resorts and clubs – located on the outskirts of a city; Restaurants – food chains and outlets; and Serviced apartments – a new concept in India.\textsuperscript{92}

\textbf{2.6. Heritage Hotels}

The concept of Heritage Hotels was introduced with a view to converting the old palaces, havelies, forts and residences built prior to 1950. The scheme is aimed at ensuring that such land markers of the country’s heritage are not. These Heritage Hotels are sub-classified in the following categories: Heritage, Heritage Classic, Heritage Grand, and Heritage Renaissance.\textsuperscript{93}

\textbf{3. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY}

The importance of customer satisfaction has become an essential business issue as organizations have realized the significant outcomes achieved when
providing effective customer service. For hospitality and tourism, satisfaction has always been important.\textsuperscript{94}

With regard to other industries different researchers and institutions have undertaken a lot of scientific and detailed studies. But, Indian hotel business with reference to customer satisfaction has not been able to draw the attention of researcher to any noticeable extent. Hence, this study examines and analyses the satisfaction level of customers with reference to “Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar” Group of Hotels at Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The study would help firms to employ the outcome to develop appropriate customer satisfaction policies.

4. AIM OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to examine, analyse, and evaluate the customer satisfaction and management schemes in “Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar” group Coimbatore, in Tamil Nadu. The primary objective is to understand guests’ needs, gather their opinions and comments, most importantly, assess guests’ satisfaction with the services provided at “Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar” group of hotels.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study intends to pursue the following specific objectives with reference to “Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar” group, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu:

1. To identify the level of customer satisfaction towards various hotel attributes like, quality offered, quantity provided, varieties available, interior decoration, parking
facility, drive-in facility, neatness and cleanliness, amenities, price, taste and waiters’ service.

2. To seek out the customers’ order of preference towards the various hotel attributes

3. To make a comparative study of hotels of high esteem with the target hotel “Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar” group.

4. To identify the customer’s choice of cuisine and branch

5. To appreciate customers’ gourmet and suggest various strategies to be implemented in order to make customer-oriented surfeit.

6. HYPOTHESIS

   In order to achieve the study objectives, the following research hypotheses are posed:

1. Customer satisfaction on the attributes of hotel like quality offered, quantity provided, varieties available, interior decoration, parking facility, drive-in facility, neatness and cleanliness, amenities, price, taste, and waiter service is moderate.

2. The customers equally assessed and ranked the attributes under study

3. The customers moderately ranked Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar Group of Hotels compared with other hotels.

4. All the food items (breakfast and lunch) and branches are equally preferred by the customers.

7. STUDY PERIOD

   The study was carried out from January 2008 to December 2009 (Two years only).
8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

8.1. Coverage

The universe of the study is the hotel customers in Tamil Nadu State. The study sample frame covers 10 branches of Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar Group of Hotels at Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The customers of this hotel constituted the source of data. The sample size is 300 customer respondents from the 10 branches of Group of Hotels at Coimbatore. The sampling is equally distributed by 30 respondents from each of the group’s branch.

8.2. Questionnaire Design

A careful and serious attempt has been made in drafting the questionnaire in a simple, yet comprehensive manner. Sufficient care has been devoted to draft the questionnaire to enable the respondents to express their opinions freely and frankly. The questionnaire is of closed type and same questions are put to all of them.

8.3. Pre-Test

A pre-test was carried out to check the reliability of the questionnaire. A sample of 30 respondents was selected for this purpose. On the basis of the findings modifications were made in the questionnaire to check the shortfalls.

8.4. Data Collection

The study contains both primary and secondary data. Judgement sampling method was adopted for the primary data collection. Primary data collection was
done through scientifically prepared questionnaire to measure the tangible and intangible attributes of hotel industry. Totally 300 questionnaires were distributed to the customers who had visited the target group of hotels at least 5 times the branch based on the recommendation from the Supervisor and Waiters of Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar Group of Hotels. The branches were divided into North Zone and South Zone where North Zone includes Gandipuram, Saibaba Colony, Lakshmi Complex, Cross Cut Road, Mettupalayam, Ramakrishna Hospital (6 Branches with a sample of 180) and South Zone comprises of Raja Street, Arts College, Townhall and Peoples Park (4 Branches with a Sample of 120). Among the 300 distributed questionnaire only 280 (i.e. 166 from North Zone & 114 from south Zone) were found to be fit for further analysis (where 14 from North Zone and 6 from South Zone were not fit for further analysis), which satisfied the sampling size calculated, based on sampling proposition. Articles of various researchers and authors from different sources viz. books, periodicals, journals, dissertations, thesis, working papers, and websites are the sources of secondary data.

8.5. Data Analysis

To begin with, the collected data were coded, edited, consolidated and then entered into the master table. Then, sub-tables were prepared from the master table. The statistical package SPSS (11 version) was used for analysis and interpretation tasks. The outputs from SPSS (11 version) viz. Simple Percentage Analysis, Chi-Square Test, Cross Tables, ‘Z’-Test, Garrets Ranks and Multiple Regression Analysis, ANOVA, Correspondence Analysis were shown in the study.
9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was confined only to the 10 branches of Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar Group of Hotels in Coimbatore. Hence the customer sample does not reflect all segments of the population.

- Since the study was conducted during a particular period, the outcome may not reflect the dynamic nature of level of satisfaction and the sample size was also limited.

- Judgement sampling method was used for this study.

- All the findings and observations made in this study are purely based on the respondents’ opinion and therefore there is a possibility for personal bias.

10. PREVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The broad framework of the study is organized according to the following chapter schema:

**Chapter – I** is the Introduction Chapter, which provides a broad outline of the hotel industry and customer satisfaction; the objectives of the study; the hypothesis; and the research methodology.

**Chapter – II** makes an attempt to review the existing literatures of related topics on the research study. Articles of various researchers and authors from different sources viz. books, periodicals, journals, dissertations, thesis, working papers, and websites are provided in this chapter.

**Chapter – III** presents the history and the working methodology of the hotel Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar Group of Hotels at Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.
Chapter – IV describes various customer satisfaction theories to analyse and measure the level of customer satisfaction.

Chapter – V illustrates the analysis and interpretation of the collected data regarding this research study.

Chapter – VI is the concluding chapter highlighting the findings and presenting the suggestions and conclusion.

11. CONCLUSION

As the hospitality industry becomes more competitive, economic pressures increases and the industry continues to expand, there is an obvious need to retain clientele as well as increasing profitability. It is therefore unsurprising that hospitality management professionals have to strive to improve guest satisfaction. This study can be of great help to hotel administration in providing a direction on how to conduct and modify the existing practice of measuring customer satisfaction in hotels.
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