

Food Service Practices in Indian Hotel Organisations: an Investigation of F&B Managers' Perceptions

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Abstract: The study is developed to explore the extent of inclusion of food service practices in the product offer by Indian hotel industry and to find if these services depend on the organisational demographic characteristics. The study was limited to the hotels that provide sleeping accommodations and meal options in India. The respondents were 200 food and beverage managers of these businesses. The findings show that the hotels are mostly sole proprietorship and most managers are college graduates and male. A structured instrument was developed to examine the food service practices. Based on a survey of 200 food and beverage manager's perceptions on food service practices were assessed by a 19- food service practices and 5 demographic characteristics. Factor analysis was performed to identify service practices, one-way ANOVA was employed to test the association of the demographic characteristics with food service practices. Results indicated that serving the guest within the estimated time given to the guest makes a guest delight', 'the way the food is presented and served in the tray to the guest creates an impact on the guest mind', 'quality holds more importance than quantity', 'training of employees should be carried out for serving complicated dishes' and 'suggesting a complimentary dish if a guest is not satisfied with the service offered by you is a good idea, may constitute the most important food service practices in the Indian hotels. Further, the results revealed that there is a positive relationship between food service practice variables and category and type of sample hotels, but there is no relationship between food service practices variables and age, number of employee and size of capital. The study makes a modest attempt to add information to the very little empirical knowledge available referring to the food service practices in Indian hotel industry.

Key words: Food & beverage • Service • Hotel • Practice • Industry • India

INTRODUCTION

The enormous changes have been noticed during the last ten years in service operations in terms organizational structure, revenue, innovativeness and information technology etc, of these information technology has dramatically affected the environment of food and service practices world wide and India is no exception to this. Today, the nature of food and beverage industry has changed entirely to cope with the diversity of changes in requirements of guests such as home delivery. The multicultural influences and guest habits in this sector have led to substantial focus on new cuisines. This had a profound impact on the concept of service in the hospitality industry and this is also reflected in the revolutionary changes observed in the

service and beverage services [1-2]. A vast variety of services ranging from welcoming to checkout of guests have become part and parcel of today's hospitality industry. Edvardsson and Olsson [3] stated that service is an activity or series of activities, which take place in interactions with a contact person and provides guest satisfaction. In fact, service is a term that is used to describe the manner and method in which food is served to guests in foodservice operations [4-5]. In former times, this often constituted an elaborate and convoluted protocol, much of which is no longer in vogue, notwithstanding that some technical terms are still in use today such as French service or gueridon service, American service or plate service, English service, Russian service and Buffet service etc. Thus, the concept of 'service' has been predominant in the

hospitality industry, which contribute to guest satisfaction, guest attraction and long term sustainability in the business operation. In hospitality industry, tangibles like buildings and food equipment act only as hygiene factors and the quality and standard of delivery of the services is recognized as motivating factor that have the potential of converting prospective clients into guests. Therefore, the food and beverage services are department has occupied pivotal place among all the departments of a hotel. It is the department that converts the potential clients into prospective guests.

The hotel industry in India is going through an interesting phase after a turbulent and difficult year. One of the major reasons for the increase in demand for hotel rooms in the country is the growth in sectors like information technology, telecom, retail and real estate. Rising stock market and new business opportunities are also attracting hordes of foreign investors and international corporate travellers to look for business opportunities in the country [6]. Similarly, the Government of India's 'Incredible India' promotion campaign and the 'Atithi Devo Bhavah' campaign have also helped the growth of domestic and international tourism and consequently the hotel industry. India is finally emerging as a choice destination going by its rank as the fourth most preferred travel destination [7] and one of top five destinations among 167 countries [8]. The tax policies of the government of India such as abolishment of the inland air travel tax by 15%, reduction in excise duty on aviation turbine fuel to 8% and removal of a number of restrictions in excise on outbound chartered flights including those relating to frequency and size of aircraft have directly benefited hotel industry. The government's decision to treat convention centers as part of core infrastructure has also fuelled the demand for hotel rooms. There are some 1,980 hotels approved and classified by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, with a total capacity of about 110,000 hotel rooms [9].

Within the rapidly changing hospitality business environment there has been a resurgence of interest among researchers regarding the importance and application of food and beverage service practices. The literature to date has focused on some large scale hotels mainly in western countries. It has been noticed that services literature has grown significantly over the last decade, reflecting the increased contribution of hospitality industries to the national economy. But the limited literature on service importance and adoption remains fragmented. The majority of researches [10, 11, 3]. have concentrated on the financial, insurance and

other service sectors and one of the largest industries world- wide, the hospitality industry, has not been specifically investigated.

According to World Travel and Tourism Council [12] travel- and tourism-related activities account for over 230 million jobs, or 8.7 per cent of jobs worldwide. Similarly, the hospitality industry is the largest and rapidly growing industry in India, employing over 20 million people, accounting for 8.5% of the total workforce and generating over 5.9% of GDP [9]. However, hotel organizations and managers face real challenges in attracting and retaining tourist and in offering a high-quality 'service' to the increasingly demanding and discerning tourists.

The promises and challenges of this industry make it a useful research site for the present investigation. In light of the above, the decision to target the Indian hotel organisations reflects desire to add exploratory data to the emerging food and beverage service practices in Indian hotels.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The next section discusses selected literature on the food service practices and the hypothesis to be tested. The third section discusses the research methodology used. The results are presented in the fourth section. The paper draws inferences on practical implications and future research directions.

Review of Literature and Hypothesis Development:

Today, most hotels strive to empower their employees to deliver better quality services and to develop border service base in order to ensure quality of given products and services in the international competitive market.

During the recent past numerous studies have been made in the field of food and beverage management [13-19]. These studies discussed the application of food and beverage service practices in different countries and identified some of the widely and globally used broader food and beverage service practices in dining and room services. Further, studies on the importance and application of food & beverage services have been conducted both in hospitality management research and general management research [20-30].

Gary and Tom [14] suggested that the most significant changes taking place in food and beverage areas in hotels are contracting out operations to external operators by individual restaurateur or branded restaurant chains. This development is widely regretted by many traditionalists but represents a reality in North America and, increasingly, in the United Kingdom

as well. Nick and Ray [31] examined literature relating to consumer studies in foodservice during the last decade. They identified gaps and weaknesses in the body of knowledge on consumer behaviour in the food service industry and suggested undertaking new researches in the area of food and beverage service so that unexpressed area can be explored and approved ten business strategies.

Androniki [32] opined that dependable and low-profile individuals are most appreciated by their supervisors and states that food service jobs are perceived as involving limited control and high role conflict, attributable to their relatively low status and the boundary-spanning nature of their activities. Further, correlation analysis identified the personality requirements that the supervisors associated with good service provision performance in the context of planning, decision-making and serving.

Kevin *et al.* [33] revealed that significant differences existed between three tourist groups' satisfaction perceptions of value for money, quality of food, number of dishes, standard of food service, variety of dishes, presentation of food and speed of service in general; and of bread, coffee, meat and soup in particular. Further they indicated that quality of food, value for money, variety of dishes, attractiveness of surroundings and presentation of food were the attributes that most affected the overall food service experience.

Svetlana [34] stated that innovation in food service technology offers differentiation and cost leadership in strategic terms. The majority of food service businesses do not have research and development laboratories. At present, the innovations in equipment design and layout, packaging and service techniques are of a defensive or reactive nature. He further, pointed out that Novel food service processes can evolve as a result of adoption of technological breakthroughs in "high tech" fields of the economy. This justifies investments in offensive research and highlights the importance of technical competencies for a food service professional. Elson and Muller [35] suggested that "restaurant mix" should be included in vacation ownership and resort development planning. Further they stated that hospitality industry is in the early growth stage of the product life cycle. As the customers for the vacation ownership product become more price sensitive patron profile, the offering must become more complex so that more and more tourists may be attracted. Further, Sandra and Andrew [36] argued that success within the hotel industry lies with customer satisfaction which is the result of good delivery of

products / services. Candice and Pamela [37] analysed that cart service is an important component of a club's food and beverage mix. Not only do convenience carts contribute gross and net revenues, but research shows that they are an expected amenity that increases members' overall satisfaction with the golf experience. Fotis [5] investigated the factors which have impact on success or failure in new service development in the hotel sector. Furthermore, the study investigates several new dimensions, which have never been tested before in new service development. These new aspects reflect recent new insights from services marketing research. Hotel organisations have to continuously develop new services in order to be successful and the results of these and further investigations will be of potential value to hotel and generally hospitality managers, as it will enable them to focus on new service development more strategically and professionally.

Wood [16] suggested that the future of food and beverage service begins from the premise that establishing such an overview requires an appreciation of the condition and consequences of hospitality research more generally for food and beverage research. Although it is unclear as to whether this is still the case, within hospitality management education it has not much altered the strong central concept of a practically oriented food production and service model of food and beverage management. Svetlana Rodgers [38] emphasised on the food production demands competencies in both natural science and management principles. The study suggested framework includes the following areas of research: technological innovation, process design (including Industrial Cuisine), product development (including Molecular Gastronomy, Industrial Gastronomy and Functional Meal) and risk management (including quantitative risk assessment and predictive microbiology). Developments stemming from food science and engineering could be combined with studies in operations management, consumer psychology, cognitive psychology, sociology and economics. Similarity, Walker [39] emphasised that hospitality industry is facing major challenge of having well trained and competent employees in the room service department from the tone of voice of the order taker and the courteous manner with which the order is taken to the panache of the server. Further, he pointed out that training makes the difference between ordinary service and outstanding service in hospitality industry. Nigel and Christopher [40] opined that hotel & restaurants are widely considered to be under-performing assets therefore they have sought to

improve their financial performance by adopting modern food and beverage service techniques. Kit and Ka, [41] recognised efficiency and quality as key components of business strategies. The concepts of efficiency, while armed with the capabilities of quality, help organizations attain service effectiveness and excellence. They further suggested that today's organizations need to manage continuous improvements and breakthroughs in quality that meet customer requirements and expectations. Mozeik *et al.* [42] findings indicated that perceived ease of use with mobile handhelds is comparably more important toward the adoption of restaurant-based e-services as opposed to conventional lap/desk devices, where perceived usefulness was marginally more important. Findings are discussed within the context of the emerging mobile Internet and how restaurateurs need to better leverage this medium.

Teng and Barrows [43] respond to the emergence of a research gap in the hospitality service orientation literature. Appreciation of the three service orientation concepts of employee characteristics, organisational climate/culture and business strategy can assist hospitality researchers and practitioners to identify ways to differentiate their service offer. The authors highlight the need for future studies to examine the stability and validity of service orientation measures in the hospitality service context.

Burns, Julia and Gregory [44] determined if patient meal satisfaction can be maintained after changing from traditional patient meal service to Cook/Chill pre-plated meals. They found cook/chill systems were more likely chosen if the foodservice managers' focal points were food cost, labor and equipment expenses. Although several design issues abound, currently used survey and tracking measures to monitor effectiveness of a meal service was the only way to monitor the change retrospectively for this study. Using more than one measure to look at the success of the changing foodservice systems would provide more comprehensive information. Dutta, Umashankar and Parsa [45] identified reasons for service failure in the restaurant business in the context of developed and developing economies. It also sheds light on the behavioral aspects of customers' perception towards these failures and their responses to the same. They further looked into the recovery strategy employed by restaurants and the customers' perception towards the recovery strategies. Mikyoung and Giri [46] found key differences between US and Korean restaurant customers' perceptions of wait-staff behaviour and their impact on performance.

While personalization was a significant predictor of satisfaction in the US sample, concern was a significant predictor for the Koreans. Courtesy and civility were important to both samples.

It can be observed that although some aspects of food and beverage service practices have been examined for their importance in the context of demographic characteristics but an in-depth analysis is absent in such studies. Furthermore, the usage of food and beverage service practices assumes greater significance in the context of hotel enterprises because of their people and service centricity and the nature of work. Hotel industry is people intensive industry, wherein human capabilities are argued to determine the level of service quality and organisation performance. There is no published empirical investigation related to this research theme in the Indian context and given the rapid growth of the Indian hospitality sector such an examination is likely to be insightful.

The study provides two hypotheses in order to explore food service practices and to understand the difference in derived food service practices in relation to specific characteristics of hotel enterprises.

Hypothesis 1: There is a set of food service practices which are widely used in Indian hotels;

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between food service practices and specific characteristics of hotel organisations such as category, age, capital, number of employees and type of ownership.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sampling and Data Collection: Sample hotels were identified from the highly respected directory of the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India and FHRAI that serves as a resource centre for business information and maintains relevant databases of hospitality firms. To initiate the sample 850 food and beverage managers were contacted through mail, only 370 food & beverage managers responded and agreed to participate in the survey, all of which were sampled. They represented a mix of industry, size and operation. A survey methodology was chosen because it was deemed to be the most efficient way of reaching a large number of respondents, whereas the data required facilitated the use of a mail-administered questionnaire with close-ended questions. Of the total sample, usable questionnaires were returned by 200 (54.05 %) respondents. Table 1 presents the number and per cent of respondents for this study.

Table 1: Distribution of sample according to hotel characteristics (N=200)

	Number	Percentage
Category of hotels		
3 star	118	59.0
4 star	57	28.5
5 star	20	10.0
5 star Deluxe	05	02.5
Years of Existence		
≤ 5	52	26.0
6 - 10	68	34.0
11 - 15	43	21.5
16 - 20	31	15.5
≥ 21	06	03.0
Capital (in million Rs)		
≤ 100	79	39.5
101 - 300	67	33.5
301 - 500	24	12.0
501 - 1000	17	08.5
≥ 1001	13	06.5
Employees (numbers)		
≤ 50	73	36.5
51 - 100	62	31.0
101 - 200	35	17.5
201 - 300	19	09.5
≥ 301	11	05.5
Type of ownership		
Chain (joint, partnership)	42	21.0
Individuals	158	79.0

Research Instruments

Food Service Practices: The research used existence of 19 food service practices (see Table 2) measured on a Likert-type 5-point scale ranging from 1=never 5= Always) for usages. The scale includes the two central attributes of food service practices (*Dinning Service Practices and Room Service practices*) as discussed in the literature.

Table 1 presents the distribution of sample hotel organisations with respect to the demographics used in the study. In terms of years of existence, 68 (34%) existed for 6 to 10 years, 43 (21.5%) existed for 11 to 15 years and another 31 (15.5%) for more than 16 years. 52 (26%) existed for less than 5 years. This shows that most hotels have already established their names in the market, gained stability in the society and indeed is part of a growing hospitality industry. The capital of most organisations is less than 100 million; the size of employment in most organisations is less than 50 employees, most of the hotels (79 or 39.5%) had 50 or more employees. There are 62 (31%) that have 51 to 100 employees and 35 (17.5%) with 101 to 200 employees. The findings imply that the number of employees was largely dependent on the organizational set-up of the hotels and the services offered. Finally most hotel organisations 158 (79%) are individual enterprises.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The level of implementation of food service practices of Indian hotels in terms of product offering is presented in Table 2. The nineteen items have been derived based on our data coincide with the conceptually derived food service practices and tested empirically in the Indian hotel organisations. The results indicate that hotels in India include a “Very High” (X=4.69) level of food service practices in their product offerings. They consider the ‘serving the guest within the estimated time given to the guest makes a guest delight’ (X=4.96), ‘the way the food is presented and served in the tray to the guest’ creates an impact on the guest mind (X=4.79), ‘quality holds more importance than quantity’ (X=4.71), training of employees should be carried out for serving complicated dishes’ (X=4.54) and ‘suggesting a complimentary dish if a guest is not satisfied with the service offered by you is a good idea’ (X=4.52). Oftentimes they consider the proper food service practices ‘food Served in the correct order holds lots of importance in making a customer satisfied with your services’ (X=3.80), ‘Service provided to the guest in the room helps to make your guest delighted’ (X=3.73) and sometimes ‘time taken for serving an order in the room holds lot of importance in making a guest satisfied’ (X=3.10).

Summarising the above findings, it may be said that the set of ‘serving the guest within the estimated time given to the guest makes a guest delight’, ‘the way the food is presented and served in the tray to the guest creates an impact on the guest mind’, ‘quality holds more importance than quantity’, ‘training of employees should be carried out for serving complicated dishes’ and ‘suggesting a complimentary dish if a guest is not satisfied with the service offered by you is a good idea’ may constitute the most important food service practices and are widely used in the Indian hotels. In light of these results H1 may be accepted, supporting that there is a set of food service practices in the Indian hotel enterprises which are widely used.

Table 3 displays the bivariate correlation coefficients between all the variables used in the study. We observe strong, positive and significant correlations between all the food service practice variables (Dinning Service Practices=DSP, Guest Room Service practices =GRSP and All Food service practices = AFSP). These results supporting hypothesis H1.

Table 2: Food Service Practices of Indian Hotels in Product Offering

Dinning Service Practices	Mean	Scale
Silver Service make a guest more Satisfied than Pre-Plated Service	4.29	Always
Butler Service should be given to VIP's only	4.15	Always
Guerdon service attracts the guest and helps you get the repeat orders	4.26	Always
Quick Service makes a guest delight	4.19	Always
Quality holds more importance than quantity	4.39	Always
Correct accompaniment served correct dish makes a customer delight	4.17	Always
Food Served in the correct order holds lots of importance in making a customer satisfied with your services	3.80	Oftentimes
Serving the Guest within the Estimated time given to the guest makes a guest delight	4.96	Always
The way in which the food is presented to the guest helps in getting repeat orders	4.16	Always
Training of employees should be carried out for Serving complicated dishes	4.54	Always
Room Service practices		
Service Provided to the guest in the room helps to make your guest delighted	3.73	Oftentimes
The way the food is presented and served in the tray to the guest creates an impact on the guest mind.	4.79	Always
Do you Up sell your products whenever guest called for Order	4.48	Always
Do Up selling makes a guest satisfied	3.40	Oftentimes
Food Served in Crockery having a logo of the Hotel creates a impact on guest mind	3.71	Oftentimes
Feedback of the guest should be considered to improvise on the standard of service	3.73	Oftentimes
Suggesting a complimentary dish if a guest is not satisfied with the service offered by you is a good idea.	4.52	Always
Time taken for serving an order in the room holds lot of important in making a guest satisfied	3.10	Sometimes
Quality holds more importance than quantity	4.71	Always
Overall Mean	4.69	Very High

Table 3: Bivariate correlations for the variables used in analysis

	Age	Capital	Size in employee	Type of Ownership	Category	DSP	GRSP	AFSP
Age	1.000							
Capital	0.712**	1.000						
Size in employee	0.692**	0.712**	1.000					
Types of ownership	-0.345**	0.433**	-0.370**	1.000				
Category	-0.105	-0.128	0.154	0.060	1.000			
DSP	0.515**	0.639**	0.392**	-0.304**	-0.427**	1.000		
GRSP	0.597**	0.416**	0.477**	-0.217**	-0.523**	0.403**	1.000	
AFSP	0.334**	0.484**	0.426**	0.468**	0.415**	0.362**	0.352**	1.00

** Significant at 0.01 level; * Significant at 0.05 level

Note: Dinning Service Practices=DSP, Guest Room Service practices =GRSP, and All Food service practices = AFSP

Table 4: F-values from the one-way ANOVA on Food service practices

Food service Practices Measures	Control variables					
	Mean scores	Category of hotels	Age	Size in capital	No. of employees	Type of ownership
Dinning Service Practices(DSP)	4.30	5.405**	1.327	1.890	1.582	5.035**
Guest Room Service	4.63	4.613**	1.580	1.337	0.708	4.601***
All Food Service Practices(AFSP)	4.43	5.009**	1.453	1.613	1.145	4.818**

Significance at level * p< (0,1),** p< (0,05),*** p<(0,01), **** p<(0,001)

With respect to the characteristics of the Indian hotel organisations, we see in Table 3 that there is a negative association between age, capital and size and most food service practices variables, giving thus partial support for hypothesis H2. These results indicate that the hotels having large amount of capital and large number of employees widely make the use of food service practices as compared to other hotels.

In order to assess the relationship between some of the independent (or demographic variables) and application of food service practices, or in other words to be able to test Hypothesis 2, one-way ANOVAS were performed. The results of this analysis are summarised

in Table 4, which presents the corresponding F-values. The findings in this table are informative. In column 'mean scores' the average scores of the usage of food service practice variables are reported. It is seen that all means are much above level 2 in the 5-level Likert scale.

The dimensions of 'category' and 'type of ownership' found to be statistically significant on all food service practice variables. It can be said that large size hotel organisations are using food service practices then small size hotels. On the contrary, the dimensions of 'age', 'size of capital' and 'no. of employees' did not produce statistically significant results with respect to the food service practices variables.

In the light of these results, regarding Hypothesis 2, we found that there is a positive relationship between food service variables and category and type of ownership and there is no relationship between food service practices variables and age and size (capital or employees).

CONCLUSION

The scope of this paper was two-fold purpose: first, to explore the extent of coverage of food service practices included in product offering in the Indian hotel industry and to investigate whether these services in the Indian hotel organisations depends on the demographic characteristics.

In general, food and beverage service practices have not been widely researched in the hospitality literature [16]. In the last two decades very few academic studies have concentrated on this area [11, 14, 16, 18], which means that the knowledge of food & beverage management literature has not advanced very far. This study investigates several new food service dimensions, which have never been tested before in hospitality literature. These new aspects reflect new insights from services research. Hotel organisations have to continuously develop new food & beverage services practices in order to be successful and the results of this and further investigations will be of potential value to hotel and generally hospitality managers, as it will enable them to focus on food and beverage services more strategically and professionally.

According to H1: The findings of study identified most important food service practices in the Indian hotels such as 'serving the guest within the estimated time given to the guest makes a guest delight', 'the way the food is presented and served in the tray to the guest creates an impact on the guest mind', 'quality holds more importance than quantity', 'training of employees should be carried out for serving complicated dishes' and 'suggesting a complimentary dish if a guest is not satisfied with the service offered by you is a good idea'.

According to demographic findings, or H2: results indicate that there is a negative association between age, capital and size and most food service practices variables these results reveal that the hotels having large amount of capital and large number of employees rated more importance of food service practices as compared to other hotels.

The study found that most of the hotels are medium size in nature. Almost all managers are college graduates and the majority of them are male. A great majority offered more than sixteen rooms that are mostly double size in nature and the most common forms of service used are dining service.

The study had two limitations; first, the sample was drawn from a small number of hotel organizations (850) and the factual data was collected from the single source (Food & Beverage Manager). A larger sample could provide a better understanding of the study area. Secondly, beyond conceptualisations of the food and beverage service practices, research is needed that should consider several food service practice measures that are likely to impact the reliability and validity of empirical investigations.

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