

NEW TRENDS AND PRACTICES POST UNLOCK IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN INDIA: An Overview

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Abstract:

COVID-19 has given a major setback to the hospitality industry in India. Soon after the lockdown began in the month of March 2020, the industry got a major drop in their business leading to cancellation in bookings to shut down in businesses. The industry has faced multiple challenges during the pandemic. During the lockdown hospitality industry did a lot of trials to sustain their business. Post unlock the ministry of health gave permission to hospitality industry under “mission begin” with many guidelines to be followed. Hospitality being ‘people industry’ and health and safety being prime importance to everyone, they came up with multiple new trends and practices which helped them to gain the trust of guests and also sustain their business. This article aims to find out effects of COVID-19 on hospitality and various new hospitality trends and practices followed in India post UNLOCK. The study will be done by secondary data, through data available on books, published literature, research papers, news articles, magazines, annual reports and various online platforms.

Key words: innovations, trends, hospitality, hospitality industry in India, hotels, COVID-19 and hospitality industry

Introduction

“The term hospitality refers to the cordial and generous reception and entertainment of guests or strangers, either socially or commercially.” (Raghubalan & Raghubalan, 2010)

Thus hospitality industry is basically providing facilities for accommodation, food and beverage and other ancillary services to the guests for their comfort and leisure which helps attain maximum guest satisfaction. COVID-19 has spread to all over the world. Huge number of territories and countries is suffering from this issue and try to deal this pandemic situation. The first case of the corona virus infection is reported in India on 30th Jan 2020 in Kerala. First Lockdown is announced on 24th Mar 2020 by prime-minister [Narendra Modi](#). The government trailed it up with lockdowns in

75 districts where COVID-19 cases had observed as well as all major cities. (Tilak, 2020). Hospitality industry being the service industry and closely associated with tourism industry has grown rapidly in last decade and is considered as one of the emerging sectors. Recently global hospitality industry was largely impacted by COVID-19 pandemic and was one of the major setbacks for the global economy. Hotels, restaurants and ancillary services were closed for many months with many sector losing business and jobs. In India permission to open the hotel and restaurant business was given in different phases of unlock. Hotelier had only two options available either to shift the services and marketing or close the business. With new normal guidelines issued from the government the hospitality industry have planned to do soft opening with limited essential facilities and minimum staff. Hotels are dealing with new normal norms and customer satisfaction hand in hand. The prime importance post Unlock is health and safety which translates to physical evidence for hygiene and sanitization at place. To make the customers feel safe and comfortable hotels are trying to come up with new trends and technologies which will attract more customers to the hotels. Some of the new trends and practices followed by hotel industry in India will be discussed here.

Objectives:

1. To understand effects of COVID – 19 on Hospitality Industry in India.
2. To find out various trends and practices used by Hotels in India post UNLOCK.

Literature Review

Mr. Sudip Mullick and Ms. Sneha Joshi, Khaitan & Co, said that the hospitality and leisure industry faced a major crisis situation in terms of operations and revenue during pandemic and the industry might take 12-18 months to recover. As per them some experts mentioned that the revenue will contract from 30%-50% in 2020 as compared to 2019. They also stated that the brands like Hilton and Marriott have developed special programs for making sure that there are improved hygiene practices ensuring full safety of their guests.

Dogan Gursoy & Christina G. Chi said in “Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality industry: review of the current situations and a research agenda” that according to UNWTO, 2020 that world’s economy was shutdown overnight due to COVID-19 pandemic. (Bartik et al., 2020) said that due to orders on community lockdown, social distancing, travelling restrictions led to temporary closure and decrease in demand of the business.

Sukrit Dogra said in his article named ‘COVID-19: Impact on the hospitality workforce’ that due to COVID-19 global pandemic had an impact on the growth of global economy. India was hit hard by the same. Experts said that domestic hotel companies will face a weak quarter 4 in fiscal year 20 and

weaker quarter 1 in fiscal year 21. Hospitality industry will also change the nature of their nature of work where a balance between smart and skilled labour is sought after, employees should up-skill and re-skill to face the new challenges in the industry.

Vikrant Kaushal and Sidharth Srivastava in their article named 'Hospitality and tourism industry amid COVID-19 pandemic: Perspectives on challenges and learnings from India' mentioned that due to pandemic there has been travel restrictions, event cancellations, border closures and quarantine requirements which have given extreme challenges to tourism and hospitality industry. Post lockdown one of the prime solutions to the situation is employee training and re-training where multi-tasking is a key in the longer run. Participants in the research also stated the importance of media in awareness of COVID-19 outbreak and necessary precautions to be taken while being unbiased on the communities.

New Trends and Innovations in Hospitality Industry

- 1. Focus on secondary revenue:** As the industry felt a set back because of a months of shutdown, they have found an innovative technique to face the crises and utilize their assets to generate revenue and stay floating. Some of the services provided were food deliveries, laundry services, housekeeping services, facility management services, event organizing at guest requested place, warehousing, co-working and many more.
- 2. Emphasis on health and wellbeing:** People are still scared to step out freely as fear of COVID-19 is still there amongst everyone. In such situation to gain the trust of the customers by following the new normal guidelines is of utmost importance. Some of the precautions taken by hospitality industry in terms of health and wellbeing are:
 - **Thermal Scanning:** with the present day need of safety and precaution in pandemic situation, thermal scanners are installed at the entry points of the hotels which help to take the body temperatures with the help of infrared sensor maintaining minimum physical contact and social distancing. They are also called as temperature guns which detects the fever which is one of the symptoms of COVID-19 virus.
 - **Hygiene and Sanitization:** pandemic has urged the need of highest hygiene and sanitization at work. Sanitizers are kept at the entrance for footwear, hands and luggage disinfection. All the guests are requested to follow the protocol of wearing masks during the stay.
 - **Social Distancing:** Floor markers are made at every public places in the hotel to ensure safe distance between the guests.

- **Stringent housekeeping supervision:** Housekeeping department was called as COVID-19 warriors during the pandemic situation. Very stringent housekeeping practices are followed at hotels to making sure health and safety of everyone. All the areas in the hotel either front of the house or back of the house are sanitized well. All the touch points like door knobs, switches, remote control & elevator buttons are constantly cleaned and disinfected. Hand caddy consists of sanitizers and electrostatic spraying technology is used for cleaning. Many hotels seal the rooms after cleaning till the guest arrival for assuring them best possible safety. Proper visible signage boards are placed at public areas giving instructions on social distancing and SOP's. Laundry handling is strictly isolated and segregated strictly to ensure no cross contamination. Face masks and hand sanitizers are made available to guests on request as part of the toiletries products which are usually kept in the room. A new department is setup who looks after the hygiene and quality control in the organization. Unnecessary movements of employees in the guestrooms are avoided.
- 3. Training Employees:** Employees are the one who comes in constant touch with the guests and plays a vital role in customer satisfaction. With the help of medical experts and domain specialists, hospitality industry have started training their employees for new normal SOP's and maintaining safety and hygiene practices in the property. The training modules are based on the guidelines given by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Considering the gravity of the situation employees are trained in such a way that they take things seriously. Employees are also motivated to convert this 'new normal' into a 'new opportunity'. Cross training is provided at this situation as the industry is working with minimum staff and it will help the employees to multi-task. Domain experts are also participating in the safety programs organized by different statutory bodies to ensure that the guidelines are followed well.
- 4. Contactless practices:** Hotels are following new contactless practices at all point of sale areas. Front office is making online check-in and check-out through mobile apps or self check-in and check-out terminals. Guests are given online payment options through UPI payments, NEFT or RTGS. Many hotels have de-cluttered stationeries such as notepad, pens, newspapers in room menu cards etc., and provided digital alternatives. Some hotels are providing these things only or request.

5. **Thinking out of the box: Introducing new concepts:** With new tourism norms, domestic tourism is given importance. For the same, some of the popular concepts post UNLOCK are explained below:
- **Staycations:** Staycation is a concept where people (individual or family) book a hotel and stay in the same city as their hometown. They also participate in the leisure activities organized by the hotel or they just go and relax for a day or two to get the 5 star experience.
 - **Workcations:** People have been given an opportunity to work from home lately and this has given the opportunity to hotels to generate a new scope. New concept has emerged post lockdown called workcation where people travel to different places and stay at hotels who given them internet facility. Tourists work for the day time and enjoy activities at the destination in the evening.
 - **Weekend gateaways:** Post lockdown it was a necessity for people to relax with friends and family away from the hometown. Hotels started promoting weekend holiday as a quick option for leisure and relaxation.
6. **Being Flexible:** post UNLOCK phase hotel industry has become flexible in their policies. Easy cancellation, refund and rebooking have been one of them. With this they can reassure guest on easy cancellation in case of any further policy changes from the ministry of health. Hotels have also shown flexibility in terms of guest engagement by engaging them in activities such as cooking sessions on immunity boosting recipes, short insightful session from ayurveda doctor on how to take care of one's health by healthy eating and exercises during pandemic situation, planning sessions on yoga, meditation, breathing techniques etc. Hotels have arranged for virtual sessions on cooking, plating, art, property tour, and wellness tips for better guests engagement.
7. **Marketing strategies:** After the crises in business hotelier had to really change their perspective towards the marketing. Similar offers and packages are put forward in front of the guests with highlighting health and safety concerns. People are concerned on budget aspect as well thus marketing strategies like offering combi-packs (plans like A.P, M.A.P, continental plans are offered), twofer marketing i.e. buy 2 for the price of 1, free upgrades, offers on mini-bar, gourmet (premium) box meals, book now pay later vouchers plays a major role. Some of the other marketing strategies adopted by the hotel industry are positive content on social media page, showcase videos on newly implemented policies for health and safety of the guests at the hotel and efforts of organization to support local community, interview guest and

ask for their experience and share it, website upgrade and enhancements and new norms being published, implementation of loyalty program, focusing on new social events through MICE to cover up the backlog, tie-ups and many more. Hoteliers are targeting altogether new clientele through marketing. Gen z and millennial crowd is pulled as they are the ones who might give repetitive business by staycations, weekend holidays, workcations and many more.

CONCLUSION

Hospitality industry is extremely impacted by COVID-19 pandemic and uncertainties prevail on its future. This pandemic has really tested their patience and resilience. Industry has faced a lot of issues such as months of lockdown, loss of business, loss of employment and even in some cases a shutdown. Even though the hospitality industry has begun again with new normal guidelines, it is very important for this sector to gain customer trust by providing best possible hygiene and sanitization. The above discussed new trends and practices are not a complete solution to fix the losses but it will surely help hospitality industry to begin again and sustain for a longer time till this pandemic is over or the proper vaccination is available. Industry will not be same again; people will be cautious and show safe behavior. They will have to constantly keep communicating with the loyal guests who may give them repeat business. The focus has to be more on the domestic market and constant marketing through social media platform showcasing the new trends and techniques will help them boost their business. The most important learning for the industry is survival and planning for the future of the business. To be flexible and adaptable will help the industry in the longer run. Hospitality sector has a lot on their platter and it will take time to bounce back to 'completely normal' with 'new normal'.

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