

## Role of Hospitality Sector in Enhancing Guest Experience during COVID-19 Pandemic

**Dr. Sarjoo Patel<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Smita<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor (Stage-III), Department of Family and Community Resource Management, and Associate Director, Post Graduate Diploma in Hotel Interiors, Faculty of Family and Community Sciences, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara.

<sup>2</sup>Temporary Assistant Professor, Department of Family and Community Resource Management, Faculty of Family and Community Sciences, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara.

### Abstract

Hospitality is the topmost demanding industry all over the world, and there is huge competition. Therefore, satisfaction of the guests is of utmost importance for this industry to attract them to their hotels. Due to the pandemic, people are not feeling safe so are avoiding traveling to different places. They are searching for a place where they feel safe as they are looking for virus-free accommodation. Majority of them would prefer to stay at a hotel that provides proper facilities to make their guests happy. The hospitality sector is best known for its focus on quality, service, and customer satisfaction. So, in the COVID times, the pressure among the hospitality staff has increased to an extent to maintain guest satisfaction. However, the industry is primarily dependent upon travellers, therefore, the hoteliers and property managers are now planning different ways in which they can gain their customer's trust and make them visit their place. They are taking into consideration all precautionary measures and keep thinking about new ideas to attract their customers. This motivated the researchers to find out the impact of COVID 19 on the Hospitality Industry and assess the role of Hospitality Sector in enhancing Guest experience. A descriptive research design was used for conducting the present study. The study was carried out in the Vadodara District of Gujarat State. The sample comprised 30 hoteliers and managers. The tool for collecting data was a Questionnaire and was collected through Google form. Questions comprised of the Background information and how the hospitality sector is dealing with this COVID situation to enhance their guest's experience. The results revealed that the hospitality sector is playing a very important role in enhancing customer's experience of their hotel. They are providing various facilities related to cleanliness and sanitization, maintaining social distancing and they at the same time keep on thinking about various innovative ideas and practices that they can provide to their guests such as improving their online review system, adding their brand photos, and videos and keep on

updating their websites frequently, etc. They are also working on increasing the advertisement of their business and are more active on social media sites. As the hospitality industry already suffered from a very big loss, now it has become a great challenge for them to deal with this situation. Analysis of data was done based on the data received.

**Keywords:** Hospitality, guest experience, travellers, COVID 19 pandemic.

## Introduction

Hospitality is the topmost demanding industry all over the world. Almost everyone loves to travel and visit new places, so, there is a huge competition. Therefore, satisfaction of the guests is of utmost importance for this industry to attract them to their hotels. The emergence of the pandemic COVID-19 which is considered the biggest challenge of the decade has affected the lifestyle of human beings in a worse way and resulting in a negative impact on the mental health, physical well-being, social, and financial conditions of the people. People are not feeling safe and are avoiding traveling to different places as there is a risk of contamination because hotels are the places where there is a very high degree of interaction among guests and workers [1]. Therefore, people are spending more and more time at their homes to stay away from such diseases. But it's been more than a year and this virus is still in existence. So, people need to go to work, they require some outing, there is a kind of boredom by living inside only. Therefore, they are now searching for a place where they feel safe as they are looking for virus-free accommodation. Majority of them would prefer to stay in a hotel that provides proper facilities to make their guests happy.

The hospitality sector has gone through a very drastic phase due to the COVID-19 pandemic and because of which the staff lost their job, there occurred reduction in the wages and all this leads to a condition of mental and physical stress, anxiety and depression among the staff and resulted in a low-performance level of work. And this ultimately affects their attitude and influences the quality of service and the productivity level that the employees provide. [2].

The hospitality sector is best known for its focus on quality, service, and customer satisfaction. So, in the COVID times, the pressure among the hospitality staff has increased to an extent to maintain guest satisfaction. The COVID-19 pandemic is forcing the tourism and hospitality sectors to innovate and adapt to the changes that are new for them [3]. However, the industry is primarily dependent upon travellers, therefore, the hoteliers and property managers are now planning the ways in which they can gain their customer's trust and make them visit their place. They are taking care of all the precautionary measures and are thinking about new ideas to attract their customers.

To overcome this situation, hotels will need to review their existing service offerings to adapt to the “new normal” and provide different types of new and innovative services to their guests when

they visit their place. To achieve this, the hospitality sector needs to bring a change in their daily operations to offer an experience which the guests like. They also need to ensure that both their guests and the hotel staff are safe. Therefore, hotels need to adopt new practices starting from the sanitation and hygiene facilities which are the most important thing that should be considered nowadays. Cleanliness is another point to be considered and the area should not only be aesthetically clean but also clinically clean. One more thing that the hotel staffs need to take care of is to follow the guidelines provided by the government and to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour [4].

Staying behind the glass counters in the reception area and concierge desks can prevent the chance of infection. Teleworking if possible can be done for some jobs; it can prevent physical contact with others [5]. The pandemic has brought a lot of negative things but if we see into its positive side so in some way it has also accelerated the adoption of new technologies and applications into the hotel industry. People can work, contact, and be in touch with others without even meeting them. The contact-less nature of coronavirus has necessitated the introduction of new technology trends in hospitality.

The hospitality industry has adopted various new methods and is working hard in improving the homepage of their website, being more available online, and showing their presence via email, messages, etc. They have become more active on social platforms; by adopting new measures for hygiene and safety, etc., cleaning and sanitizing the lift and other areas of their hotel, transforming their business from offline to online and switched to online in terms of Travel Agencies, Online booking, and cancellation system, taking customer's feedback and keeping in view their opinions. One more thing they focus is that they can start providing training to the workers regarding all the safety measures to be followed.

Ventilation is also a very important factor in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 so, the areas where there is a facility of ventilation like gardens, outdoor open areas, rooftop, etc. they can utilize those areas. And if there is no such facility then they can consider using natural ventilation by opening windows if possible, use of exhaust fans where they are available. There should be proper flow of air as air exchange is very important and it can be achieved by cross-ventilation system. Other than that, despite opening the areas where there is a high chance of risks like the gym and swimming pool they can provide facilities like an area for yoga, meditation, etc.

## Objectives

1. To find out the impact of COVID 19 on the Hospitality Industry.
2. To assess the role of Hospitality Sector in enhancing Guest experience.

## Methodology

The present study was carried out in Vadodara district of Gujarat State. Descriptive research design was used for conducting the study. The sample comprised 30 hoteliers and managers who

are into this business since past few years. The tool for collecting data was a Questionnaire and was collected through Google form which consisted of three sections. Section I comprised of the Background information, Section II comprised of the impact of COVID 19 on the Hospitality Industry and Section III consisted of the role of hospitality sector in enhancing Guest experience in this COVID situation. Analysis of data was done by on the basis of the data received in which frequency and percentage were calculated

## Results and findings

### I: Background information

**Table 1. Frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents based on their background information**

Background information of the respondents		f	%
Age (in years)	25-34	19	63.3
	35-44	8	26.67
	45-54	3	10
Gender	Male	28	93.3
	Female	2	6.67
Monthly Income (in rupee)	Up to Rs.30,000	7	23.3
	Rs.30,001-60,000	18	60
	Rs.60,001 and above	5	16.67
Educational Qualification	12 <sup>th</sup> pass	5	16.67
	Graduate	21	70
	Post Graduate	4	13.3
	Other	0	0

#### a) Age of the respondents (in years)

Majority 63.3% of the respondents were ranged between 25-34 years of age, 26.67% were between 35-44 years and only 10% were ranged between 45-54 years respectively. The mean age of the respondents was found to be 39.5 (table 1).

#### b) Gender of the respondents

It was found that majority percentage i.e. 93.3% were male and only 6.67% were female (table 1).

#### c) Monthly income (in rupees)

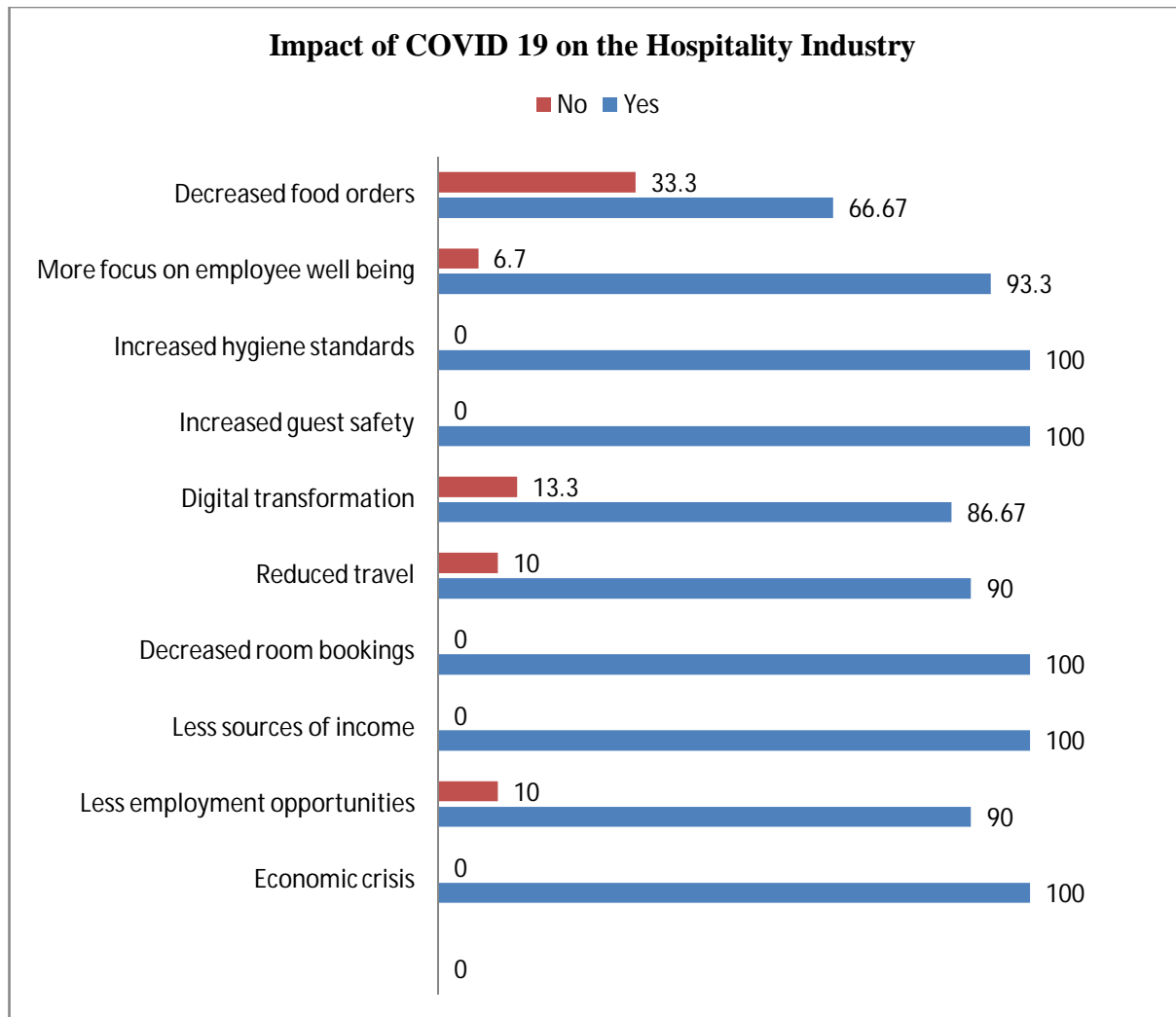
It was found that 60% respondents' monthly income was in between Rs.30001 to 60000, approximately 23% respondents were having monthly income below Rs.30000 and only 16.67 %

were having the monthly income above ₹60001. The mean income of the respondents was Rs. 53000 (table 1).

**d) Educational Qualification of the respondents**

When asked about their educational qualification, majority 70% respondents were Graduate, 16.67% respondents were 12<sup>th</sup> pass, and 13.3% had done Post-Graduation (table 1).

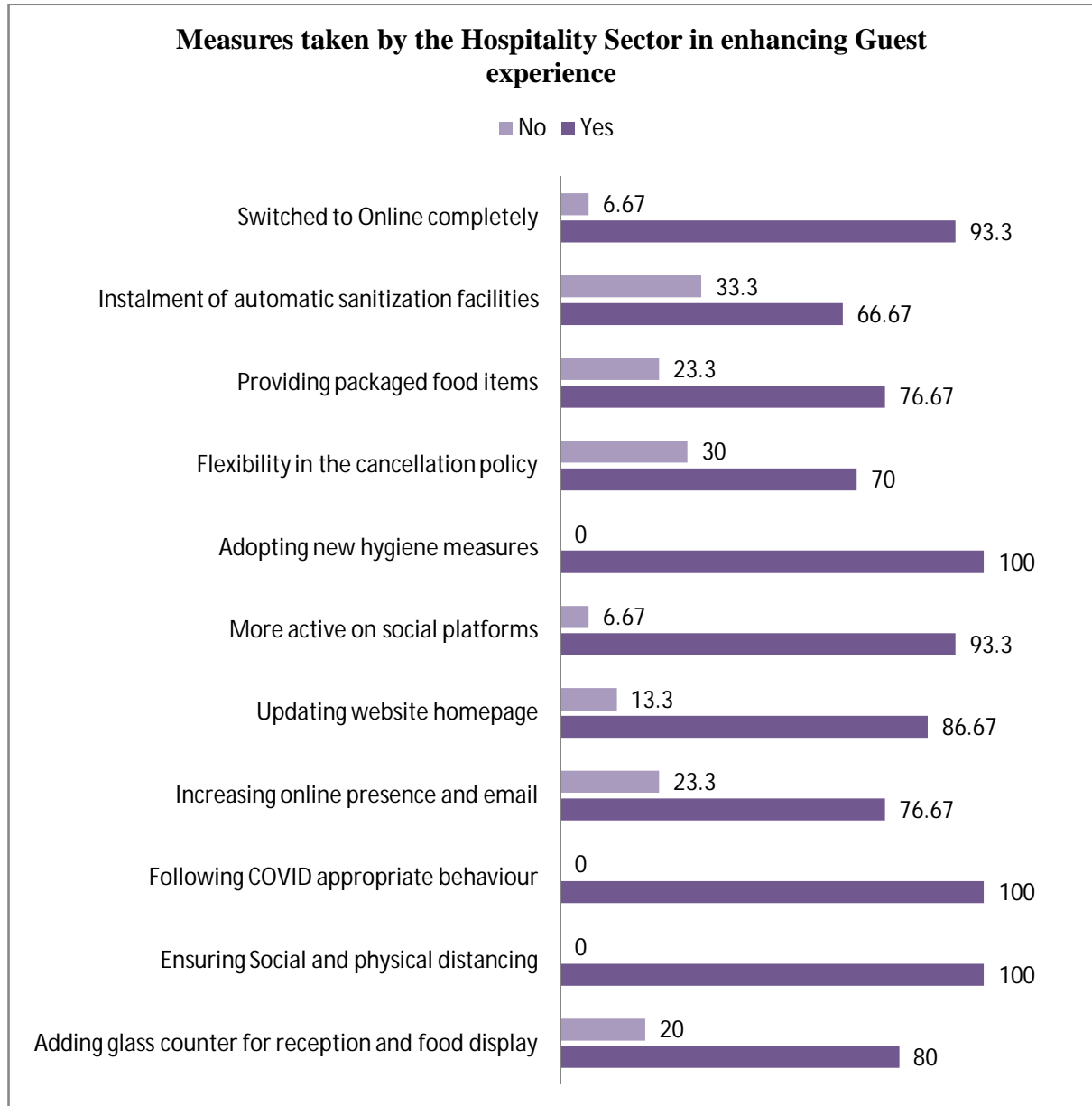
**II- Impact of COVID 19 on the Hospitality Industry**



**Figure 1. Distribution of the respondents showing Impact of COVID 19 on the Hospitality Industry**

The results revealed that all the respondents found that the COVID-19 pandemic showed an impact on Economic crisis, Fewer sources of income, Decreased bookings, Increased guest safety, Increased hygiene standards. More than 85% believed that there is more focus on employee well-being, Lesser employment opportunities are there, Reduced travel and system changed to Digital that requires more skilled employees (fig 1).

### III- The role of Hospitality Sector in enhancing Guest experience



**Figure 2. Distribution of the respondents on the basis of the measures taken by them in enhancing Guest experience**

Results revealed that almost all the respondents took some new and innovative measures to make their guests experience a better service. Cent percent respondents were taking care of all the hygiene measures, following COVID appropriate behaviour like maintaining physical distancing, etc. more than 80% of respondents have become more active on social platforms like Instagram, Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter, etc. to connect well with the guests, they have also updated their website and added new and attractive photographs of the hotel, its services, and nearby beautiful areas. Many of them added a glass counter in the reception area and also in the food counter so that the guests will be safe when they interact with the front desk staff, or they go on

for buying any food item. Approximately 76% of respondents replied that their staff were providing food items that are properly wrapped or packaged keeping in mind all the safety and hygiene measures. More than 60% of the respondents have increased their presence more on online sites and platforms; they are providing people with easy and flexible cancellation policies and only 30% did not (fig 2).

## Conclusion

From the study 'Role of Hospitality Sector in Enhancing Guest Experience during COVID-19 Pandemic', it was found that the COVID-19 Pandemic has very adversely affected the hospitality sector and it's been more than a year that this sector is continuously going in loss. People are willing to visit new places but due to the risk of the virus, they have controlled themselves. So, in order to attract the guests again and make their trip safe and protected the hospitality sector is taking care of a lot of new and innovative ideas and methods in order to deal with this COVID situation and enhance their guest's experience in many ways. They have adopted various techniques such as installing new and innovative sanitizing facilities that ensure safety, they were also taking care of all the hygiene measures, following COVID appropriate behaviour by washing their hands frequently with soap and water, wearing a mask, wearing gloves, hair mask especially the food and beverage department staff, maintaining physical distancing, etc. Most of them added a glass counter in the reception area and also in the food counter so that the guests will be safe when they interact with the front desk staff, or they go on for buying any food item. They were providing food items that are properly wrapped or packaged keeping in mind all the safety and hygiene measures. They have become more active on social platforms such as Instagram, Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter, etc. to connect well with the guests. They have created their own page and channel and also updated their website and keep on adding new information and attractive photographs of the hotel, its services, and nearby beautiful areas.

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