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THEFT, QUALITY, AND THE AVAILABILITY TO PURCHASE AMENITIES
OFFERED IN HOTELS

KELESY A. PINKER

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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

David Cranage
Associate Professor of Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management
Thesis Supervisor

Arun Upneja
Associate Professor of Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management
Honors Adviser

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

Abstract

Over the past years the theft rate of amenities in the hotel industry has been on the rise. The study I conducted addressed this problem by identifying what level of quality amenities are stolen the most often and also if the ability to purchase these amenities in the hotel would change the tendency to take amenities. I performed this study by approaching people at random and presenting them with one of four scenarios; in a 2 by 2 design with two levels (low and high) of quality and two levels (available and not available) of availability to purchase the amenities in the room. Following these scenarios the same series of 10 questions were given to all participants and quantified to determine the rates of theft. The results of the study showed many statistically significant relationships with the hotel quality and the quality of the amenities given.

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Introduction

While traveling and working in the hotel industry I always took notice of the amenities that were offered to guests in the room. As I grew older and entered the hospitality field I found that I would gage each hotel heavily on these items and seemed to keep track of the best and worst I experience over the years. I then thought about the theft rates of these items and I wondered what made people take certain things over others and if the quality of the items was any indicator.

I found it interesting that some companies are now selling the in-room items to guests and one could have the luxury of the hotel amenities in their own home. These can be purchased in ways that include an in-house gift shop, online, or through a company catalog. I wondered if companies did this as a revenue generator or simply to deter customers from taking things from the room. By giving guests the option to purchase such items, some could see this as an added bonus to the hotel itself and increase the customers' satisfaction. I wanted to conduct a study to investigate if offering these amenities for sale, whether they are high or low quality, was increasing guest perceptions of the hotel. Furthermore, I wanted see if the ability to purchase these amenities has an effect on the theft rates of the offered sheets, towels, robes and slippers.

After thinking about this I asked myself if others do this as well. Do they judge the whole hotel by the amenities in the room? I proceeded to look into the subject and found very little research has been published about the quality, theft rates or the availability to purchase amenities in the hotel industry.

Literature Review

Most of the research that I reviewed concentrated on the inter-personal aspects of quality and guest satisfaction. The research emphasized the communication between employees and the guests and how these interactions resulted in satisfied or dissatisfied customers. Some research did touch on the in-room amenities but as an aspect of what guests expect in luxury resorts. At no point was research found on how the quality of the in-room amenities affects a guest's satisfaction. Due to the paucity of information I discovered, I found that the hospitality field would benefit from a study that addresses these issues.

Study Design

Scenario Design

In order to conduct this study a 2x2 scenario design, 2 quality (high, low) vs. 2 sale (for sale vs. not for sale) was used. Scenario one and two

offered the amenities in the room to be sold at cost in the hotel's gift shop.

The only difference between the two scenarios is the quality of the amenities.

Scenario 1: With amenities for sale, high quality

You go to a hotel for a long weekend. Upon entering the room and settling in you notice a small sign on the desk informing you about the amenities offered in the room. **These include a very high quality full length terry robe with pockets and the hotel crest, terry cloth slippers, Egyptian cotton sheets, and high quality thick, extra large bath towels with the hotel crest monogram.** The last line on the sign informs the guest that the amenities are available for sale at cost in the lobby's gift shop. It states that if the guest enjoyed them while they visited the hotel they can purchase them to enjoy at home.

Scenario 2: With amenities for sale low quality

You go to a hotel for a long weekend. Upon entering the room and settling in you notice a small sign on the desk informing you about the amenities offered in the room. **These include a 50/50 cotton/polyester blend half length robe, cotton slippers, jersey sheets and standard hotel bath towels.** The last line on the sign informs the guest that the amenities are available for sale at cost in the lobby's gift shop. It states that if the guest enjoyed them while they visited the hotel you can purchase them to enjoy at home.

Scenario three and four did not have the option of buying the amenities in the hotel's gift shop at cost and also had different qualities of amenities offered inside the room.

Scenario3: Without amenities for sale high quality

You go to a hotel for a long weekend. Upon entering the room and settling in you notice the different amenities offered by the hotel. **These include a very high quality full length terry robe with pockets and the hotel crest, terry cloth slippers, Egyptian cotton sheets, and high quality thick, extra large bath towels with the hotel crest monogram.** There is no indication that these items are available for sale in the lobby or available to purchase from the hotel.

Scenario 4: Without amenities for sale low quality

You go to a hotel for a long weekend. Upon entering the room and settling in you notice the different amenities offered by the hotel. **These include a 50/50 cotton/polyester blend half length robe, cotton slippers, jersey sheets and standard hotel bath towels.** There is no indication that these items are available for sale in the lobby or available to purchase from the hotel.

The amenities in scenario one and three are those that would be found in a high end hotel. These include Egyptian cotton sheets, monogrammed robes and towels and high quality slippers. The scenarios

with the lower end options include jersey sheets, polyester/cotton blend robes, regular bath towels and lower quality slippers; these were offered in scenario two and four. The aspect of including the prices of each amenity was left to the subjects' imagination. Set prices often frame people's perceptions; therefore, the prices were omitted.

Survey Design

Once the scenarios were created, a questionnaire of approximately ten questions was asked to be filled out pertaining to the scenario that was given to each subject. The amount of questions was limited to minimize the dropout rate and receive the most honest answers. The seven-point Likert style scale was used to give subjects a range to answer within. Question number five, contains multiple parts and was given a reverse Likert scale, one being completely agree and seven being completely disagree whereas all other questions were scaled with seven being the completely agree and one representing completely disagree. This was done as a check to insure that subjects were consciously reading and answering the questions. The last two questions however, were open-ended because these questions were about each individual's past experience with hotels. Questions on each scenario were kept identical and included perceived quality of each amenity, quality of hotel, service, enjoyment of the ability to purchase, and most likely to take each amenity without paying. *The survey can be found in Appendix 1*

Distribution of Surveys and Data Collection

One hundred scenario surveys were given to willing subjects ranging from ages 18- 70. Each scenario was distributed at random and the responses were kept confidential by not asking personal questions and by having each subject place their completed survey in a box. No surveys were extracted from the box until all one hundred were complete. Once taken out all surveys were separated by scenario and assigned a number that represents each subject and their individual responses. These surveys were completed in a three month period from June 2009 to August of 2009 in Atlantic City, NJ and State College, PA.

Analyzing Survey Responses

Once all surveys were sorted and assigned a unique identifier, based on the scenario each answer was given a number value according to the Likert Scale, and put into a excel file to be analyzed. Once entering the data it was found that some surveys were not answered satisfactorily. This was determined by the pattern of response that did not change when the Likert Scale was reversed. This indicated that the subject did not read the questions and their responses would skew the data. The surveys that were answers unsatisfactorily were not used in the study. This accounts for scenario three and four having twenty-four responses and scenario two having twenty-six responses. In total ninety-nine surveys qualified to be analyzed. If a subject failed to respond to a question the cell was left blank and the analysis continued without that response.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the analysis was to pull out as much information from the nine questions that were asked of the subjects. By comparing the data in several ways, many relationships were discovered and links from multiple questions were formed. The information was compared sometimes by question and sometimes by scenario. The findings are as follows.

Quality Manipulation and the Affect of Purchase Availability on Quality Perception

The first part of data addressed was the quality comparisons between each scenario and the amenities included in each. When looking at scenario one and two one would expect to see a difference in quality perception. Based on amenity quality this would indicate that people considered the items offered in scenario one, the Egyptian sheets, monogrammed robes, and so on, to be of superior quality, more than those in scenario two. This was found to be true with a p-value of less than .001, which tells us that there is a statistically significance difference and that these two scenarios are seen as different, showing that scenario one was perceived to be of higher quality than scenario two. Therefore our manipulation was successful. Scenario one and three show little difference because the amenities offered in each were exactly the same. There is no statistically significant difference due to a p-

value greater than 0.785. These results not only show that people perceived the quality to be the same but it also indicates that the option to purchase the amenities in the hotel's gift shop had no effect on perception of the quality. Scenario one, with the higher quality items, and scenario four, the lower quality amenities, show a larger difference in response. The ANOVA test shows a p-value less than .001, meaning these two scenarios show a significant difference. Once again, this proves that guests do see a difference in the items given in each room and the more luxurious goods were ranked higher (mean=5.77) for the higher quality amenities and lower (mean= 4.17) for the lower quality amenities. The lower quality option scenarios (two and four) were ranked lower than scenarios one and three, the higher quality option scenarios, which is a good indication that the scenario manipulation worked. Scenario two and four showed no significant difference because they once again shared had same items offered with a p-value of greater than 0.289 showing no significance between the two scenarios. This also shows that the availability to purchase the items in the room did not affect the subject's ranking of the quality of the amenity.

Individual Amenities and Quality

When looking into individual amenities offered, the towels appeared to have the most significant difference, with a p-value less than .001. This seems to show that people perceived the towels to have the most influence

when comparing amenities. The higher quality towels, scenario one and three, had a higher mean quality at 5.88 and 5.75 than scenario two and four (lower quality towels) with means of 4.03 and 3.83 respectively.

Average Amenity Quality vs. Quality of the Hotel

The second question of the survey, asked subjects to rank the quality of the hotel, this question could not only be affected by, the quality of the amenities, but also to the availability to purchase them. Some subjects could decide the availability to purchase is a luxury and therefore the quality of the hotel would be superior. To test this theory we again used ANOVA. This was used to compare the average amenity quality and the perceived quality of the hotel.

When comparing the high quality amenity scenarios, the perceived quality of the hotel in scenario one and three have a mean response of 5.9165, compared to scenarios two and four which have a significantly lower ($p < .001$) mean response of 4.3153. This would seem to indicate that amenity quality affects peoples' perception of hotel quality. But, it also shows for the lower amenity quality scenarios, the hotel as a whole was rated as lesser quality but, by no means as inferior in quality, with means above the midpoint. However, the results show that a hotel can raise a customer's perception of the quality of the hotel by increasing the quality of the amenities.

Quality hotel vs. Quality of Service

The relationship between the perceived quality of the hotel and amenity quality were indicated above. Further analysis of the quality of the amenities and the perception quality of the hotel needs to be compared to the perceived service provided by the hotel. Subjects indicated that quality of amenity affects quality of hotel and in turn also affects the perceived level of services offered. The average response when comparing just the perceived quality of hotel and the perceived quality of services are as follows. Scenarios one and three have mean responses for the perceived quality of hotel to be 6.20 and 5.91. Perceived quality of hotels for scenarios two and four are 4.5 and 4.4, respectively. Average perceived quality of service is 6.40 and 5.91 for scenarios one and three and 4.69 and 4.68 for two and four, respectively, which would seem to indicate that the quality of the amenities offered affects both the perceived quality of the hotel, and also affects the perceived service offered in the hotel. ANOVA comparisons for an amenity and hotel quality, and for amenity and service quality were all significant at $p < .01$.

Amenities Offered Increase Satisfaction vs. Ability to Purchase Increases Satisfaction

In question five (d& e) of the survey we compared two aspects, *having these amenities (the ones in each subjects' assigned scenario) offered for personal use will increase my satisfaction with the hotel and the ability to buy these amenities increases satisfaction with the hotel*. Subjects replied that the

quality of the amenity does not affect the level of satisfaction when the availability to purchase is there. But the quality of the amenity does effect satisfaction when the availability is not there with a p-value less than .05. This would seem to indicate that when the person has the ability to purchase the item they like, whether high or low quality, it seems to affect their satisfaction equally. When people cannot purchase the amenity the higher quality seems more pronounced (perhaps exclusive) and overall people have higher levels of satisfaction. When high quality is held even the ability to purchase does not affect satisfaction. When both low quality amenities were compared the ability to purchase, the satisfaction was marginally significant with a p-value of less than .07. In other words, the availability to purchase the amenities increased satisfaction when amenity quality was low. This seems to concur with the findings, discussed below, that low quality slippers were the amenity most likely to be taken. And now that you can buy them instead increases satisfaction.

Quality of Amenities Affects a Guest's Intent to Return

In question five(c) of the surveys, subjects were asked if the quality of amenity amenities offered affected their intent to return to the hotel. The data shows that the quality of amenity is marginally significant at less than .06. These results would seem to indicate that the higher the quality the more likely the guest is to return. The survey also compared whether the option to purchase affected their intent to return. Overall there is no significant

difference indicating that the ability to purchase does not affect their intent to return.

Theft and Quality

With regard to what people will steal, quality did not affect all amenities equally. When analyzing the likelihood of taking each item and the quality of these items in each scenario, only one occurrence of statistical significance was found. We found when evaluating scenario one and two when looking at the slippers in the room, the results showed a p-value of less than .05. Comparing these scenarios indicates that quality does affect the impulse to take without payment. Surprisingly, subjects responded to taking the lower quality slippers significantly more often than taking the high quality slippers. The mean response to taking the slippers in the high quality scenario was 3.00, while the response to the same question in the low quality scenario two was a mean of 4.30. This statistically significant difference shows that subjects are more likely to steal the lower quality slippers than the higher quality slippers.

Interestingly, the offer to make the slippers (or not) available for purchase had no significant effect on the subjects' responses when considering the quality of the slippers and stealing. The other three amenities, sheets, robes, and towels did not show significance when comparing the quality and the impulse to take without payment.

Limitations

Limitations that need to be considered when looking at the results of this study include the subjects involved. Many of the subjects were students at the university level ranging from ages 19-22. This is a limitation because these subjects are less likely to be economically able to stay in a higher quality hotel, and if they have, it might not been as often as we would prefer. This constraint can cause a lack in the ability to realize the difference between quality amenities and also the likelihood to take without purchase.

Another large portion of the test subjects were employees in the hospitality field. Subjects in a luxury resort were asked to complete the survey. This may pose a problem since the amenities offered in their place of work are of the luxury line and by bias their responses.

The truthfulness regarding the theft question was also considered a limitation. The wording that was used, taking home without purchase, was looked at as a less extreme way to say stealing. The term stealing or theft puts a negative connotation on the question and can alter responses. While people may try to be honest about what they think they would do in the situation, people have a tendency not to portray themselves in a negative light.

A limitation that could have affected the results of this study is the prices of each amenity were not included in the scenarios. However, with this information included perceptions of quality could be altered as well as the likelihood to take. However, if we placed dollar signs and prices in the survey

people would not take into consideration the description of the item and focused on the prices which could have distorted the results from this study.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the data it can be said that higher quality amenities offered to guests yields a higher perception of both the quality of the hotel and the services they provide. The data shows that people are more likely to perceive the hotel to be of higher quality if the quality of the amenity offered is superior. The data also supports that lower quality amenities offered in the rooms then is thought to be of lower quality by the participants.

From the data collected, it was found that the availability to purchase the amenities offered in the rooms had little effect on both the theft rates and the perception of the hotel. I feel this aspect was not highlighted enough in the scenarios given to subjects and may have been somewhat overlooked, and therefore possibly affecting the non-significance of the results.

This study shows that a high quality amenity offered in hotel rooms will yield a lower rate of theft of these items. This indicates that it would be a better investment for companies to spend more money on higher quality amenities because people are less likely to steal them as well as perceiving the hotel to be of better quality and service.

Cost also plays a role when it comes to the advice to stock higher quality slippers because guests are less likely to steal them and the perception of the quality and service of the hotel goes up with the higher quality. But, if the rate of theft of low quality slippers is 50 out of 100 and they cost \$2.00 per pair the cost for this is \$100.00. If the rate of theft for high quality slippers is only 10 out of 100 and they cost \$15.00 the cost is also \$150.00 and the decision to switch to higher quality slippers needs to be reconsidered. This could be applied to all amenities that were featured in this study.

Future Research

Further research should be pursued into the aspect of availability to purchase the in-room amenities. A study looking into the cost to make these amenities available, find if the companies are making a profit from this, and if this has affected the theft rates of the items should be undertaken. This research could be conducted through historical data research of companies that do offer this service. By comparing the costs and theft rates to where the company was before the service was offered as to where it is currently the service can be evaluated and determined its effectiveness.

Additionally it would be beneficial to see if by adding the costs of the items into the scenarios if quality perceptions would change. Theft rates would also be more closely analyzed to see if the costs of these items would

persuade customers to take without purchase more often or discourage from taking all together.

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Appendix 1

Rank the quality of each good offered in the hotel room from 1 to 7. Place an X in the box that corresponds with each amenity.

	Poor Quality						Highest Quality
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Robe							
Slippers							
Towels							
Sheets							

The quality of the amenities indicates what kind of quality hotel?

Lowest Quality						Highest Quality
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

What do you perceive to be the quality of the services of the hotel?

Lowest Quality						Highest Quality
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

If the Hotel offers to sell each amenity at cost how likely are you to purchase each individual amenity?

	Not Likely						Highly Likely
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Robe							
Slippers							
Towels							
Sheets							

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (please place X in each box)

	Completely Agree			Neither Agree or Disagree			Completely Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The amenities offered improves my image of the hotel							
The amenities offered improves my perception of the service of the hotel							
The quality of amenities in the room affects my intent to return.							
Having these amenities offered for my use will increase my satisfaction with the hotel							
The ability to buy these amenities increases my satisfaction with the hotel							
I enjoy the option of purchasing each amenity in the hotel							

The quality of the amenities offered in the room influences the tendency to take them home without purchase.

Completely Disagree			Neither Agree or Disagree			Completely Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Which amenities are you most likely to take home without paying for them?

	Least Likely						Most Likely
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Robe							
Slippers							
Towels							
Sheets							

How many times have you stayed in hotels with **this quality** of amenities in the last two years? _____

How many times have you stayed in a hotel with high quality amenities? _____

Appendix 2

This table depicts the comparison findings discussed in this study.

<i>Quality Manipulation and the Affect of Purchase Availability on Quality Perception</i>	Scenario 1 vs. 2 = Statistically Significant Scenario 1 vs. 3 = NOT Statistically Significant Scenario 1 vs. 4 = Statistically Significant Scenario 2vs. 4 = NOT Statistically Significant
<i>Individual Amenities and Quality</i>	Robes = NOT Statistically Significant Slippers = NOT Statistically Significant Sheets = NOT Statistically Significant Towels = Statistically Significant
<i>Average Amenity Quality vs. Quality of the Hotel</i>	Statistically Significant
<i>Quality hotel vs. Quality of Service</i>	All comparisons were Statistically Significant
<i>Amenities Offered Increase Satisfaction vs. Ability to Purchase Increases Satisfaction</i>	Low Quality Amenities vs. Ability to Purchase = Statistically Significant Amenity Quality vs. Satisfaction when for sale is offered = NOT Statistically Significant Amenity Quality vs. Satisfaction when for sale is NOT offered = Statistically Significant
<i>Quality of Amenities Affects a Guest's Intent to Return</i>	NOT Statistically Significant
<i>Theft and Quality</i>	Low Quality Slippers = Statistically Significant High Quality Slippers = NOT Statistically Significant Low Quality Robes = NOT Statistically Significant High Quality Robes = NOT Statistically Significant Low Quality Sheets = NOT Statistically Significant High Quality Sheets = NOT Statistically Significant Low Quality Towels = NOT Statistically Significant High Quality Towels = NOT Statistically Significant

Academic Vita

Kelsey A. Pinker
612 South Allen Street, State College, PA, 16801
Phone: 717-421-4678
kap5097@gmail.com

Objective:

Senior Honors Thesis

Education:

B.S., Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management, The Pennsylvania State University,
2010
Schreyer Honors College
Thesis: Theft, Quality, and the Availability to Purchase Amenities Offered in Hotels

Experience:

Teaching Assistant, 2010
The Pennsylvania State University
Courses: Advanced Food Production and Service Management

Awards and Honors:

2010 recipient of Health and Human Development Student Excellence Award for Hotel,
Restaurant, and Institutional Management

Skills and Qualifications:

Microsoft Office, Internet

References:

Excellent references available upon request