

Employers' Attitudes and Hiring Intentions towards Persons with Disabilities in Hotels in India

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *The hospitality industry is labour intensive. Currently, in India, hotels have a high employee attrition rate. This study aimed to explore the attitudes of hotel managers towards recruiting persons with disabilities as employees, a move which could benefit all concerned.*

Method: *A structured survey instrument was sent to 31 employers in star category hotels.*

Results: *Employers' attitudes have a significant influence on the recruitment of persons with disabilities. While the intention to hire persons with disabilities is positively associated with quality of work, loyalty, and dependability, it can also be negatively associated with lack of skill, work experience, poor time management and absenteeism.*

Conclusion: *It is concluded that employers hire person with disabilities to work in hotels as they are more reliable and loyal towards the organisation. This attitude from the side of employees with disabilities will also help to overcome the problem of high employee attrition that has a deleterious effect on profitability in the service industry.*

Limitation: *The data is collected from hotels in a single city, which may limit the generalisation of the findings.*

Key words: *employer, attitude, hotel, persons with disabilities, hiring intention, factor analysis*

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism, a leading economic sector, contributes 10.4% of the world's GDP and 9.9% of the total employment. In terms of employment generation, tourism directly contributes 5% and indirectly contributes 8.1% of total employment in India, and this is expected to rise by 2% per year (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2020). The hospitality industry is one of the most significant segments of the tourism industry (Hayes et al, 2009). Hospitality and tourism have a symbiotic relationship where the sustained success of one industry determines the sustainability of the other. The hospitality industry is labour intensive, where the success of the firm is determined by its employees, from top management to entry-level employees (Hayes et al, 2009). The memorable experience provided by a human being cannot be substituted by technology (Harkison, 2017). Currently, the hospitality industry in India faces a grave threat of high employee attrition (Datta, 2020). Compared to other service industries, employee attrition in the hospitality industry is significantly higher (Guchait et al, 2015; Datta, 2020) and can be as high as 40% (Sathyanarayanan, 2016). High employee turnover has a significant impact on the quality of service provided to the customers (Zhao et al, 2015; Datta, 2020). Important causes identified for labour shortage are an inadequate number of people willing to make a career in hospitality, perceived low financial compensation and high employee turnover (Hayes et al, 2009). Hayes and his colleagues (2009) concluded that hotels will continue to face human resource challenges for the foreseeable future until an innovative solution is obtained.

Finding skilled employees is an ongoing challenge for every hotel manager and a lot of time is spent in recruiting and training new employees. However, there is another pool of human resources known for loyalty and a long tenure of service with an organisation (Strindlund et al, 2018), yet it faces severe unemployment in the same context. A study in 2011 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) concluded that out of about 70 million people with disability in India, a meagre 0.1 million are employed (Shenoy, 2011). The unemployment rate among persons with disabilities has many adverse cascading effects on their lives. High levels of poverty, inequity in salaries, poor access to quality education, and poor access to housing and sanitation further hinders them. Disability of an individual can lead to social isolation, negative image, negligence, inequity, discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, access to resources, transport and built infrastructure (Naami, 2011; World Health Organisation, 2011; Hoff, 2013). The noted economist Amartya Sen opines that poverty and disability are bidirectional,

where disability tends to increase poverty and poverty escalates the risk of disability (Sen, 2015).

Employment is a critical factor that determines the quality of life of individuals with a disability. Persons with disabilities have been found as good in doing their work as people without disability (Hernandez et al, 2010). Yet, historically, persons with disabilities have never been given equal opportunities; they are discriminated against and stigmatised in their workplaces even after the enactment of the Disability Act by the governments in both developed and developing countries. Despite years of legislative and social efforts to include persons with disabilities as employees in an organisation, their presence remains very minimal, with even a decreasing trend (Burkhauser et al, 2012).

The attitudes of employers, the key stakeholders, have been identified as a significant determinant in the employment rate of persons with disabilities (Houtenville et al, 2012). Although there have been a few studies regarding recruitment, hiring and retaining of persons with disabilities in the hospitality field, a study by Hernandez et al (2010) revealed that persons with disabilities, as compared to people without disability, had similar ratings on job performance, and had a longer tenure in the job with similar supervision time. A study on Pizza Hut's "Job Plus Programme" with 4,000 participants, more than two-thirds of them persons with a disability, found that persons with disabilities had a turnover of less than 20% as compared to people without disability at 150% (Disabled World, 2009). On hiring persons with disabilities, Chicago Marriott had also experienced a lower turnover rate which came down to 32% as compared to an industry average of 50% (Laabs, 1994). While comparing the performance of employees in the hospitality industry, rated by their managers, persons with disabilities are found to be either equal to or better at doing their work than persons without disabilities (Ignamells et al, 1991). Employers from food service firms have also appreciated the role of persons with disabilities for their skills at work, dependability, cooperation, adaptability, low absenteeism, and low turnover (Chi et al, 2003). Employing persons with disabilities as a workforce leads to increased revenue as it attracts guests from diverse backgrounds and enhances corporate social responsibility (Kalargyrou et al, 2014). Research in the United States found that guests prefer those organisations which hire persons with disabilities as employees (Siperstein et al, 2006).

While giving an overview of positive experiences and attitudes of employers on hiring employees with disabilities, this review also suggests that employers have

negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities. Employers perceive that persons with disabilities lack in skill and job-related knowledge (Bruyere et al, 2006). Managers and administrators have been found to be biased against hiring persons with disabilities, as they fear that their supervisory time will increase and productivity is hampered (Hernandez et al, 2008). Employers' discomfort and unfamiliarity in managing issues related to disability are found to be other barriers for hiring persons with disabilities (Dixon et al, 2003). Gilbride et al (2003) found that employers are hesitant to recruit persons with disabilities as they lack awareness of the source of recruitment, knowledge of the selection process, and experience uncertainty related to the degree of comfort or assistance to be provided. Shaw et al (2014) and Strindlund et al (2018) found that a lack of accommodation strategies by the employer forms another barrier in recruiting persons with disabilities. Ebunenyi et al (2018) observed that the most critical determinant on employers' unwillingness to employ persons with disabilities is their perception that persons with disabilities are not productive and may be violent at the workplace. Employers in leisure and hospitality do have "aesthetic anxiety" as they believe that direct interaction between guests and persons with disabilities will make the guests uncomfortable (Colella et al, 2011; Madera et al, 2019). They have a negative apprehension that persons with disabilities may spoil the aesthetics of the hotel (Groschl, 2005).

It is observed that most of the earlier research work has been from the supply side, i.e., the perspectives of persons with disabilities, rather than from the demand side, i.e., the employers. Various researchers in other cultural contexts have studied the attitude of employers (Unger, 2002; Chan et al, 2010; Houtenville et al, 2012; Strindlund et al, 2018). However, the voice of the employer or the demand side is largely absent in the existing review of literature in the Indian context. It is of prime importance that various concerns of employers be addressed so as to increase the rate of employment of persons with disabilities. Unemployment among persons with disabilities and the high employee turnover in the hotel industry induces a paradox. Narrowing and counterbalancing this paradox will improve the success and profitability of the hospitality industry as well as the well-being of persons with disabilities.

Considering the high employee turnover in the hospitality industry and the severe unemployment rate among persons with disabilities in India, this study was undertaken to elicit information that could be relevant and significant in the Indian context.

Objective

The study aims to identify and analyse the managers/service providers' attitudes and intention to recruit persons with disabilities. The outcome of the study will open new avenues that might give an opportunity for developing innovative solutions to fill the paradoxical gap of high employee attrition in the hotel and severe unemployment among persons with disabilities.

METHOD

Study Setting

This study was carried out in early 2020 in Bengaluru, the capital city of Karnataka State. The city is an information technology hub, housing renowned national and international hotel chains.

Sample

The study targeted the managers of hotels that were star-rated, varying from three-star to five-star deluxe hotels. There are totally 39 star category hotels in Bengaluru, approved by the Hotel and Restaurant Classification and Approval Committee, India, and the Hotel Association of India (Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Association of India, 2020; Hotel Association of India). The study units were selected, adopting a cluster random sampling technique. The hotels are clustered based on their geographical location as South, West, North and East Bengaluru.

The managers responsible for recruitment were approached and requested to participate in this study. A total of 31 persons agreed while 5 hotel managers refused to participate. The response rate was 86%.

Data Collection

Data was collected between February and March 2020, using a validated structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert Scale. The external validity of the data collection instrument was verified by three academic and two research experts. Necessary modifications were made as per the suggestions of the experts, before submitting the Scale to the agency which had been funding the present study. After getting the funding agency's approval, data collection took place. Both descriptive and inferential data analysis were carried out to fulfil the aims

of the study. SPSS Version 25 was used to analyse the data. Mean and standard deviation were used to describe the data. Explorative factor analysis was adopted to identify underlying dimensions of the recruiters' attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the funding agency. Prior approval and verbal consent were taken from the hospitality recruiters who agreed to participate in the study.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The data collected for the study was analysed using descriptive statistics. The demographic profile of the respondents is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic and Business Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Profile	Frequency	Percent	Demographic Profile	Frequency	Percent
Gender			Employing Persons with Disabilities		
Male	25	80.06	Yes	20	35.50
Female	6	18.52	No	11	
Age			Number of Persons with Disabilities in Hotel		
Average	38		Average	1.91	
Minimum	28		Minimum	1	
Maximum	53		Maximum	5	
			Total	69	
Star Category			Type of Disability		
3 Star	16	51.62	Hearing Impaired	28	40.58
4 Star	4	12.90	Locomotor Disability	22	31.88
5 Star	6	19.35	Blind and Low Vision	13	18.84
5 Star Deluxe	5	16.13	Multiple Disability	6	8.70

Type of Ownership			Level of Employment		
Independent	10	32.25	Entry	58	84.05
Chain	21	67.75	Supervisory	9	13.30
			Managerial	2	2.65
Number of Rooms			Previous Work Experience of Employing Persons with Disabilities		
Average	137.8		Yes	8	25.81
Minimum	35		No	23	74.19
Maximum	357				
Total Number of Employees					
Average	114.7				
Minimum	30				
Maximum	515				
Total	3556				

The sample consisted of 25 male and 6 female respondents, ranging in age from 28 to 53 years. Their average age was 38 years. Close to 65% of the respondents did not have any past work experience with persons with disabilities. More than half of the respondents belonged to three-star category hotels, while about 34% were from luxury hotels, both five and five-star deluxe hotels. About two-thirds of the respondents were from hotels that were part of a hotel chain, while one-third were from independent hotels. The average number of rooms in the sample hotels was 137.8 rooms. The availability of rooms in the sample units varied between a minimum of 35 and a maximum of 357 rooms. The number of persons employed in the hotels ranged from 30 to 515, while the average was 114 employees.

Almost half of the hotels were currently employing persons with disabilities. The total number of persons with disabilities employed in all the 31 hotels was 69. The number of persons with disabilities employed per hotel varied from 1 to 5. Among the employed persons with disabilities, the primary disability was hearing disability followed by locomotor, visual and multiple disabilities. More than three-fourths of the persons with disabilities were in entry-level jobs in the hotels, and only 7.4 % were employed at managerial level.

Employers' Attitudes towards Persons with Disabilities

The attitudes of recruiters towards employing persons with disabilities were elicited by making use of 18 statements. Existing literature has described the attitudes of employers as a major hindrance in the recruitment of persons with disabilities in star hotels. The descriptive statistics on employers' attitudes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Employers' Attitudes towards Persons with Disabilities

Sl. No	Statements related to Recruiters' Attitudes	Mean (Standard Deviation in bracket)
1.	Persons with disabilities are loyal to their organisation	3.91 (1.24)
2.	Persons with disabilities turn out work of higher quality	3.80 (1.04)
3.	Persons with disabilities are more reliable	3.94 (0.68)
4.	Persons with disabilities need less supervision	2.34 (0.76)
5.	Persons with disabilities are more productive than others	2.84 (0.93)
6.	Persons with disabilities generally have good work experience	3.26 (1.07)
7.	Persons with disabilities have a low level of absenteeism	2.31 (0.88)
8.	Persons with disabilities have poor time management*	3.78 (1.08)
9.	Persons with disabilities are less emotional than others	3.78(0.85)
10.	Persons with disabilities are generally superior in job-related skills	3.31 (0.87)
11.	Persons with disabilities are consistent in their performance	3.09 (0.96)
12.	Persons with disabilities display strange/unpredictable behaviour*	3.13 (1.09)
13.	Persons with disabilities never bring up excuses at work	3.87 (0.92)
14.	Persons with disabilities are easy to train for jobs	2.90 (1.06)
15.	Persons with disabilities make guests uncomfortable*	4.23 (0.90)
16.	Other employees are comfortable about working with persons with disabilities	2.48 (0.92)
17.	Employing persons with disabilities would increase business cost*	3.12 (1.11)
18.	Employing persons with disabilities brings in litigation*	2.37 (0.92)

* Negatively worded statements

The results in Table 2 reveal that for most of the attitude-related variables, the recruiters displayed a mix of both positive and negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities. The positive attitude towards employees with disability was in terms of the low level of absenteeism, quality of work, dependability and loyalty towards the organisation. The recruiters believed that employing persons with disabilities in hotels could make the guests uncomfortable. They also had negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities regarding various organisational aspects such as training, supervision, productivity, lack of work experience, relationship with co-workers and the possibility of litigation in employing persons with disabilities. However, the results also reveal the high variance in attitudes among the recruiters, as the standard deviation for many statements was more than 1.

Underlying Dimension of Employers' Attitudes

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using the principal component analysis to understand the principal dimensions within the variables that reflect the attitudes of the recruiters. The EFA yielded five factors: 'Workplace Discipline', 'Interpersonal Relationship', 'Workplace Behaviour', 'Quality and Loyalty', and 'Cost of employment'. The total variance explained by the five factors was about 74.06. The Eigen values of factors varied from 5.644 to 1.001. High Cronbach Alpha values, more than 0.7, indicate good reliability of the factors. During the EFA, two variables in attitude were removed. The statement "Persons with disabilities display strange/unpredictable behaviour" was removed for the low factor loading, which was less than the 0.5 cutoff. The statement "Persons with disabilities are less emotional than others" was removed to improve the reliability coefficient as the removal results increased the Cronbach alpha from 0.430 to 0.817 for the factor named 'Interpersonal Relationship'. The results of factor analysis, Eigen value, Cronbach Alpha and the variance explained are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of EFA for Recruiters' Attitudes

Statements related to Recruiters' Attitudes	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Cronbach Alpha	Variance Explained	Mean (SD)
Workplace Discipline	5.644		0.854	20.03	3.50 (0.84)

Persons with disabilities generally lack job skills	0.883				
Persons with disabilities lack work experience	0.841				
Persons with disabilities are prone to high absenteeism	0.705				
Persons with disabilities have poor time management	0.689				
Persons with disabilities are less productive than others	0.676				
Interpersonal Relationship		2.442	0.826	15.09	2.84 (1.02)
Persons with disabilities make guests uncomfortable	0.904				
Persons with disabilities make other employees uncomfortable	0.868				
Employing persons with disabilities brings in litigation	0.742				
Workplace Behaviour		1.521	0.817	14.95	3.27 (0.816)
Persons with disabilities often bring up excuses at work	0.852				
Persons with disabilities need less supervision	0.733				
Persons with disabilities are inconsistent in their performance	-0.726				
Persons with disabilities are more emotional than others	0.653				

Quality and Loyalty		1.259	0.766	13.10	3.71 (0.66)
Persons with disabilities turn out work of higher quality	0.860				
Persons with disabilities are loyal to their organisation	0.754				
Persons with disabilities are more reliable	0.717				
Cost of employment		1.001	0.726	10.86	3.24 (0.93)
Employing persons with disabilities increases business cost	0.867				
Persons with disabilities are harder to train for jobs	0.765				

Hiring Intentions of Employers

The hiring intention is a behavioural construct that reflects affective behaviour of an individual which is the outcome of cognitive and affective feeling towards an object, individual and event (Robbins et al, 2013). The hiring intentions of the employers in star hotels were measured using 5 statements which reflect their positive and negative attitudes in recruiting persons with disabilities in their respective organisations. The descriptive statistics on employers' hiring intentions are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Hiring Intentions

Sl. No	Statements related to Employers' Attitudes	Mean (Standard Deviation in bracket)
1.	I prefer to hire persons with disabilities over others if I get a chance	3.61 (1.11)
2.	High probability of hiring persons with disabilities in my organization	3.77 (1.20)
3.	I am interested in hiring persons with disabilities in my organization	3.68 (0.83)
4.	I recommend that others recruit persons with disabilities	3.48 (0.99)

5.	Within the coming 6 months, I plan to hire persons with disabilities	3.58 (0.99)
6.	Overall hiring intention	3.62 (0.95)

The descriptive statistics in Table 4 show that the employers in hospitality organisations have very moderate intentions towards recruiting persons with disabilities. The standard deviation reveals that there is a significant variation in employers' intentions in hiring persons with disabilities in the sampled hotels.

Effect of Employers' Attitudes on Hiring Intentions

The effect of employers' attitudes on their hiring intentions has been studied in previous research. There is contradicting evidence on the effect of attitude on hiring intention (Burke et al, 2013). However, the factors that influenced either the negative or positive intentions to hire persons with disabilities have not been studied. Using a multiple linear regression model, this study aimed to uncover the relationship between these two constructs. The mean factors evolved using EFA have been considered as independent variables, with the hiring intention as a dependent variable. Mean scores were calculated for each factor. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Effect of Employers' Attitudes on Hiring Intentions

Variable	B	Standard Error	Beta	t value	P value
Intercept	2.205	0.482		4.574	0.000**
Workplace Discipline Issues	-0.306	0.103	-0.392	-2.965	0.007*
Workplace Behaviour	0.074	0.106	0.092	0.700	0.490
Cost of Hiring	-.0085	0.071	-0.120	-1.206	0.239
Interpersonal Relationship	-0.245	0.066	-0.380	-3.727	0.001**
Quality and Loyalty	0.881	0.166	0.893	5.308	0.000**

Dependent variable: Intention to hire persons with disabilities

* Denotes the significance at 5% and ** significance at 1%

The results of multiple regression disclose that employers' attitudes towards discipline-related issues, interpersonal concerns and quality and loyalty of persons with disabilities have a significant impact on hiring intentions. Attitudes related to workplace discipline and interpersonal concerns have statistically

significant adverse effects on hiring intentions. The finding reveals that when employers have a negative attitude towards persons with disabilities in workplace discipline-related issues and interpersonal concerns, they have low intention to hire persons with disabilities. The adjusted R^2 value 0.743 shows that the estimated model has a good fit and the F ratio of ANOVA value 18.323 reflects that the independent variables in the model are good predictors of dependent variable ' hiring intention'.

DISCUSSION

The continued success and positive contribution of tourism to the Indian economy are determined by the sustained success of the hospitality industry in the country, as they share a symbiotic relationship with each other. However, for the last few years, the sustainability of the hospitality industry has been affected due to high employee attrition, which requires an innovative solution (Hayes et al, 2009). This research aimed to address the high employee turnover in hotels nowadays, by identifying an alternative workforce, namely, persons with disabilities who are currently facing unemployment. The results of the study also indicate the poor rate of employment, as a mere 69 persons with disabilities (out of 3556 employees), hardly representing 1.94%, are employed in the sampled hotels.

The finding implies that employers in hotels have both positive and negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities. The managers have a positive attitude towards persons with disabilities as they are very loyal to the organisation, more reliable and deliver better quality of work. The findings of this study are similar to the studies of Hernandez et al (2010) and Strindlund et al (2018), as the employers in the current research context also believe that persons with disabilities are more loyal and reliable to the organisation. However, in terms of absenteeism, the findings of the present study contradict the earlier studies.

Most of the respondents fear that the presence of persons with disabilities in hotels will make the guests uncomfortable and affect their business. The findings of the study are in line with studies by Bruyere et al (2006), Hernandez, et al (2008) and Colella et al (2011). Results of the current study reveal that respondents also have a similar attitude towards persons with disabilities. This phenomenon is attributed to "aesthetic anxiety" (Colella et al, 2011). Other issues on which the recruiters have negative attitudes are additional cost of training, extended supervision, lack of work experience, workplace litigation and poor time management.

The results obtained through multiple regression divulge that the employers' attitudes have a significant influence on their intention to recruit persons with disabilities in their organisations. Employers have low intentions when they believe that employing people with disability leads to workplace discipline and interpersonal issues and vice versa. They are open to recruiting persons with disabilities if the employees demonstrate quality work output, loyalty and are reliable. The employers abstain from recruiting persons with disabilities for not possessing requisite skills necessary for the job, lacking work experience, for absenteeism, poor time management and productivity.

Implications

The major implication for employees with disability is to prove that they are capable of delivering high-quality job performances, are loyal to the organisation and are reliable. When they apply for a hotel job, they must convince the recruiters that they are adequately skilled, with appropriate experience, productivity, low levels of absenteeism in the past, and can effectively manage time and work. This research implies that recruiters must be aware that there is another pool of human resources consisting of those who are in no way inferior to other employees in terms of skill and competence. Institutions working with persons with disabilities must provide accurate information to employers on the cost of recruitment, training and supervision of these personnel, in order to increase the workplace representation of persons with disabilities. Recruiters should be educated to do away with their misperceptions and negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities. They must believe that hiring qualified workers with a disability will increase their organisations' diversity. It also helps the organisations to secure loyal, reliable employees who will have long service tenure.

Limitations

The data was collected from a single city, which limits the generalisation of the findings. Hotel-specific variables that influence employers' hiring intentions may not be included in the study; as there are minimal studies in the country, this affects the content validity of instruments used to collect the data. The moderating role of the type of hotel operation, past experience of recruiters who employ persons with disabilities and type of hotel ownership, have not been studied; these can be explored in future. The low sample size is another concern in adopting multiple regression as it may lead to the problem of overfitting and

reproducibility. However, the sample size of more than 25 is adequate as sample units are not clustered (Jenkins et al, 2020).

Despite the limitations, this research work contributes valuable insights on narrowing down the factors that act as barriers in the recruitment of persons with disabilities by hotel managers. By addressing these barriers, recruiters can effectively reduce employee attrition while persons with disabilities will reduce their unemployment proactively.

CONCLUSION

The significant contribution of the study is multifold. The study provides evidence on employers' attitudes in recruiting persons with disabilities in India, an emerging economy and a culturally diverse one. The existing studies available are from developed economies, mostly from the western world. This study extends the possibilities for replication in different service sectors, where employee attrition is a major issue for sustainability. It is a step towards addressing the paradox of high employee attrition and severe unemployment in the same context. By adopting exploratory factor analysis, five specific positive and negative factors that determine employers' hiring intentions have been identified.

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