



Employee Engagement Strategies in the Hospitality Industry: A Comparative Study of Luxury and Budget Hotels

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement significantly affects productivity, job satisfaction, and retention in the hospitality industry. This study compares engagement strategies in luxury and budget hotels, focusing on the roles of leadership, organizational culture, and financial resources. A quantitative method using a structured survey was conducted with 200 hotel employees across various age groups and genders. Statistical analysis assessed the effectiveness of engagement initiatives in both hotel types.

Findings show that luxury hotels invest more in career development, employee recognition, work-life balance, training, and compensation. In contrast, budget hotels face financial constraints, leading to fewer structured engagement efforts. Demographic analysis revealed that 40% of respondents were aged 26–35, followed by 25% (18–25), 22.5% (36–45), and 12.5% (46+), indicating a young workforce. Gender distribution was fairly balanced: 55% male and 45% female.

Luxury hotels showed stronger engagement due to better financial resources, structured leadership, and a positive culture. Employees in these hotels reported higher satisfaction linked to career growth, recognition, work-life balance, and compensation. Budget hotels, though limited by finances, can improve engagement through non-monetary methods such as better leadership, recognition, and flexible policies.

Leadership and organizational culture were critical to engagement, with supportive and inclusive practices leading to higher employee loyalty and satisfaction. Financial capability remained a key factor, shaping benefits and training opportunities. While budget hotels lag in resources, they can still foster engagement by leveraging effective leadership and culture-focused strategies.

Keywords: Employee engagement, Hospitality industry, Luxury hotels, Budget hotels, Leadership, Organizational culture, financial resources, Productivity, Job satisfaction, Retention, Customer service, Engagement strategies, Motivation, Career development, Employee recognition, Work-life balance, Training and development, Compensation and benefits, Quantitative research, Survey, Demographics, Statistical analysis, young professionals, Gender distribution, Incentives, Non-monetary strategies.

Introduction

Employee engagement is a critical factor in determining organizational success, particularly in service-driven industries such as hospitality. The hospitality industry, encompassing luxury and budget hotels, relies heavily on the motivation, commitment, and satisfaction of employees to deliver exceptional guest experiences. Employee engagement strategies directly impact service quality, employee retention, and overall business performance (Saks, 2006). While luxury hotels often implement comprehensive engagement strategies with a focus on employee well-being and career development, budget hotels may face challenges in providing similar benefits due to financial constraints. This study aims to examine and compare employee engagement strategies in luxury and budget hotels, highlighting key differences, challenges, and best practices.

The concept of employee engagement has evolved over the years, with researchers defining it as a multidimensional construct involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioural aspects (Kahn, 1990). Engaged employees demonstrate higher productivity, commitment, and willingness to go beyond their job requirements (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In the hospitality industry, where customer satisfaction is paramount, engaged employees contribute to positive guest experiences, repeat business, and favourable brand reputation (Baum, 2015). However, engagement levels vary between luxury and budget hotels due to differences in organizational culture, leadership styles, training opportunities, and compensation structures.

This study employs a comparative approach to analyze employee engagement strategies in luxury and budget hotels. Through a combination of primary data collection via surveys and secondary data from existing literature, the research seeks to identify factors influencing employee engagement,

effective strategies adopted by different hotel segments, and potential improvements. The findings will provide valuable insights for hotel management, policymakers, and stakeholders in the hospitality industry to enhance employee engagement practices.

Review of Literature

In hospitality management, employee engagement is vital for enhancing job satisfaction, customer service quality, employee retention, and overall organizational performance. As customer experience and brand loyalty heavily depend on human interaction, it becomes essential to understand employee engagement across various hotel segments. This review synthesizes global academic research to explore strategies and factors influencing engagement in the hospitality industry.

Studies span diverse geographies like India, Uganda, South Korea, the US, and Greece, offering broad insights. Sharma (2022) highlights differences in engagement programs between three- and five-star Indian hotels, with luxury hotels showing better outcomes due to superior leadership and compensation strategies. George et al. (2020) found that in Uganda, organizational inducements like financial incentives significantly influence employee engagement, which mediates industry loyalty. Lee et al. (2024) demonstrated that internal branding in South Korean hotels strongly enhances engagement and job satisfaction.

Qualitative studies, such as Honeycutt (2022), explore luxury hotel engagement practices, emphasizing recognition, staff development, and inclusive work environments. Psychological factors are key; Karatepe & Karadas (2015) show that optimism, resilience, and emotional support drive engagement in luxury settings. Similarly, Thomas & Albishri (2024) connect environmental CSR to employee engagement and organizational citizenship behavior in luxury hotels.

Research by Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou (2019) on talent retention in Greece, the US, Australia, and the UK stresses local adaptation of global practices. Kim & Baker (2022) note that staff appearance impacts customer perception in luxury hotels. Menguc et al. (2013) and Saks (2006) underline that engagement is lower in budget hotels due to the lack of structured practices and organizational support, affecting customer outcomes and performance.

Studies like Park et al. (2019) and Lee & Ok (2016) identify internal branding, job resources, and justice as engagement drivers, with engagement mediating satisfaction and commitment. Salanova et al. (2005) show that service climate and engagement jointly improve performance and loyalty. Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) reveal that daily access to resources boosts engagement and financial returns. Nitin et al. (2023) confirm that HR practices significantly impact engagement and service quality in hospitality compared to other industries.

Overall, the literature affirms that strategic, context-specific engagement approaches, including leadership, branding, psychological support, and CSR, are crucial for fostering high performance and employee retention in the hospitality sector.

Research Gaps

1. Insufficient Knowledge of Technology-Driven Hotel Employee Engagement

The hotel sector has seen a sharp rise in the adoption of mobile engagement apps, AI-driven HR systems, and staff performance tracking software. However, there is still a dearth of research on the effects of these technological interventions on staff engagement in luxury vs low-cost hotels (Gupta & Patel, 2023). Research shows that whereas budget hotels concentrate more on economical solutions like automated shift scheduling, luxury hotels typically make significant investments in customized staff engagement initiatives utilizing technology (Choudhury & Banerjee, 2024). To comprehend the efficacy and employee views of AI-driven engagement technologies across various hotel categories, more research is required.

2. Work-Life Balance's Effect on Employee Engagement

Although work-life balance is a critical component of employee motivation and retention, little is known about how it affects engagement levels in luxury vs low-cost hotels (Das & Ghosh, 2023). According to research, inexpensive hotels frequently suffer with lengthy working hours and fewer benefits, whereas luxury hotels have more flexible schedules and wellness programs (Thomas & Menon, 2024). This disparity emphasizes the necessity for a comparison analysis to determine whether work-life balance policies have a different direct impact on engagement levels and turnover rates in luxury hotels as opposed to low-cost ones.

3. Regional and Cultural Differences in Employee Engagement Techniques

The majority of research on engagement tactics in the hotel sector is generic and ignores regional and cultural variations (Mishra & Jain, 2024). A luxury hotel in Europe may have quite different expectations for employee engagement than a low-cost hotel in India or Southeast Asia. Although several studies have looked into how culture affects staff motivation, there is still a dearth of information comparing the ways that cultural backgrounds influence engagement tactics in high-end and low-end hotels (Verma & Sharma, 2024). To determine whether universal engagement tactics can be used across various hotel categories or if they require customisation based on cultural characteristics, a more thorough, region-specific analysis is necessary.

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research methodology to examine employee engagement strategies in the hospitality industry. A descriptive study approach will be used to assess the effectiveness of various engagement strategies in luxury and budget hotels and their impact on employee satisfaction, retention, and service quality.

The target population consists of employees working in luxury and budget hotels across various regions. To ensure unbiased representation, a simple random sampling technique will be employed. A sample size of 110 respondents will be selected to achieve statistical significance.

Primary data will be collected through a structured online survey questionnaire, which will include Likert-scale, multiple-choice, and ranking items to assess employees' perceptions of engagement strategies, job satisfaction, and workplace commitment. The survey will be distributed through professional networking platforms, hotel industry forums, and direct email outreach to hotel employees.

Additionally, secondary data from industry reports, hospitality management studies, and previous academic research will supplement the findings. The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques via Excel. Methods such as regression models and mean analysis will be applied to measure the relationship between engagement strategies and employee performance in different hotel categories.

The findings of this study will provide data-driven insights into best practices for employee engagement in the hospitality industry. The results will help hotel managers and policymakers refine their human resource strategies to enhance employee motivation, improve retention rates, and optimize service delivery in both luxury and budget hotel segments.

Population and Sampling

Population: Employees employed at high-end and low-cost hotels in different regions make up the target population. Employee engagement techniques have a direct impact on employees from various departments and job types in the hospitality industry.

Sampling Method: Simple random sampling is the method employed.

By guaranteeing that each member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen, this approach reduces bias and enhances the findings' generalizability.

Thus, to sum up:

Population: Workers from high-end and low-end hotels across different areas.

Simple random sampling is the method used for sampling.

Data Collection Methods

Primary Data Collection - Surveys, along with Questionnaires, take a structured format with closed-ended questions.

Secondary Data Collection - Literature Review Sources

Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive Statistics

These will be used to summarize and present the demographic data and general responses from the survey.

- Mean, Median, and Mode – To determine central tendencies in employee perceptions.
- Percentage and Frequency distributions – To analyse demographic patterns and responses to multiple-choice questions.
- Standard Deviation and Variance – To measure variability in responses

Inferential Statistic

These will help determine relationships and make predictions based on the sample data.

- Regression Analysis – To measure the relationship between employee engagement strategies and outcomes like job satisfaction, retention, and performance.
- Correlation Analysis – To evaluate the strength and direction of associations between variables (e.g., leadership style and engagement level).
- Mean Comparison (e.g., Z Test) – To compare engagement levels between luxury and budget hotel employees

Software Used

- Microsoft Excel – For organizing data, running basic descriptive statistics, and performing regression and comparative analysis.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the employee engagement strategies implemented in hospitality industry.
2. To compare employee engagement strategies implemented in luxury and budget hotels.
3. To analyse the impact of leadership, organizational culture, and financial resources on employee engagement in the hospitality industry.

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant relationship between employee engagement strategies implemented in luxury and budget hotels.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant relationship between employee engagement strategies implemented in luxury and budget hotels.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group (18-25)	28	25%
Age Group (26-35)	44	40%
Age Group (36-45)	25	22.5%
Age Group (46 and above)	13	12.5%
Gender (Male)	60	55%
Gender (Female)	50	45%

Interpretation

The demographic analysis of the respondents indicates a diverse age and gender representation, ensuring a balanced perspective. A significant portion of the respondents (40%) were aged between 26 and 35, followed by 25% in the 18-25 age group. This suggests that a considerable percentage of employees in the hospitality sector are young professionals in their early career stages. Furthermore, the gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 55% male and 45% female respondents. This data indicates that both men and women play an active role in the industry, with near-equal representation in employment.

Table 4.2: Comparison of Employee Engagement Strategies in Luxury and Budget Hotels

Engagement Strategy	Luxury Hotels (Mean Score out of 5)	Budget Hotels (Mean Score out of 5)
Career Development Programs	4.5	3.2
Employee Recognition	4.3	3.5
Work-Life Balance Initiatives	4.2	3.0
Training & Development	4.6	3.4
Compensation & Benefits	4.7	3.1

Interpretation

The results in Table 2 reveal that luxury hotels have significantly stronger engagement strategies than budget hotels. Key areas such as career development, employee recognition, work-life balance, training, and compensation scored higher in luxury hotels. For instance, career development scored 4.5 in luxury hotels versus 3.2 in budget hotels, and compensation received 4.7 compared to 3.1. Work-life balance (4.2 vs. 3.0) and training (4.6 vs. 3.4) also showed notable gaps. These findings suggest that luxury hotels invest more in employee growth, well-being, and retention, while budget hotels face challenges due to limited resources.

Table 4.3: Impact of Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Financial Resources on Employee Engagement

Factor	Correlation with Engagement (Luxury Hotels)	Correlation with Engagement (Budget Hotels)
Leadership Style	0.78	0.65
Organizational Culture	0.81	0.67
Financial Resources	0.83	0.58

Interpretation

The correlation analysis in Table 3 shows that leadership, organizational culture, and financial resources significantly impact employee engagement, with stronger effects in luxury hotels. Leadership had a correlation of 0.78 in luxury hotels and 0.65 in budget hotels, while organizational culture showed 0.81 and 0.67, respectively indicating a more supportive work environment in luxury settings. Financial resources had the highest correlation (0.83 in luxury vs. 0.58 in budget hotels), emphasizing their role in enhancing engagement through better pay and benefits. Overall, luxury hotels invest more in engagement strategies, resulting in higher employee satisfaction and retention compared to budget hotels.

Z-Test Analysis: Employee Engagement Strategies

Testing Hypotheses: The following hypotheses were put out to determine if luxury and low-cost hotels' employee engagement techniques varied statistically significantly in their efficacy:

- *Null Hypothesis (H_0):* Employee engagement tactics used in high-end and low-end hotels do not significantly differ from one another.
- *Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):* states that staff engagement tactics used in high-end and low-end hotels are significantly correlated.

Z-Test (Engagement Strategies) for Mean Differences

To determine if there is a significant difference between luxury and budget hotels' mean engagement strategy ratings, a two-sample Z-test was used.

1. Luxury Hotel Mean = 4.46

2. Average for Low-Cost Hotels = 3.24

3. The luxury standard deviation is approximately 0.19, the budget standard deviation is approximately 0.19, and the sample size is 110 per group.

0.0256 is the pooled standard error (SE).

P-value < 0.00001 $Z = (4.46 - 3.24) / 0.0256 \approx 47.66$

In summary, the null hypothesis is disproved. The success of staff engagement strategies varies greatly, with luxury hotels receiving far higher scores.

Z-Test for Correlation Differences

To assess if engagement-related organizational factors have significantly different correlations in luxury vs. budget hotels, another Z-test was performed.

1. Mean Correlation (Luxury) ≈ 0.8067

2. Mean Correlation (Budget) ≈ 0.6333

3. Standard Deviation (Luxury) ≈ 0.0252

4. Standard Deviation (Budget) ≈ 0.0476

5. Pooled SE ≈ 0.0309

$Z = (0.8067 - 0.6333) / 0.0309 \approx 5.61$

P-value $\approx 2.06 \times 10^{-8}$

Conclusion: Null hypothesis is rejected. The correlation between engagement and organizational factors is significantly stronger in luxury hotels.

Findings

1. A study on staff engagement in the hospitality sector reveals significant differences between luxury and budget hotels. Demographic analysis shows that 40% of employees are aged 26–35 and 25% are 18–25, indicating a young workforce. The gender distribution is fairly balanced, with 55% males and 45% females, suggesting active participation from both genders.

2. Luxury hotels implement more structured engagement initiatives than budget hotels. They score higher on key indicators such as work-life balance (4.2 vs. 3.0), employee recognition (4.3 vs. 3.5), and career development programs (4.5 vs. 3.2). Training and development (4.6 vs. 3.4) and compensation and benefits (4.7 vs. 3.1) also scored significantly higher in luxury hotels, indicating a stronger focus on employee growth and motivation.
3. Leadership, organizational culture, and financial resources greatly influence engagement, with stronger correlations in luxury hotels. Leadership style correlates 0.78 in luxury hotels versus 0.65 in budget ones. Organizational culture scored 0.81 vs. 0.67, while financial resources showed the highest gap—0.83 in luxury hotels compared to 0.58 in budget hotels. These findings emphasize the critical role of structured leadership, a positive work environment, and adequate financial support in fostering engagement.
4. Luxury hotels benefit from better financial health and systematic management, enabling greater investments in training, development, and competitive compensation. These advantages translate to higher employee satisfaction and retention. In contrast, budget hotels struggle to match these efforts due to limited resources.
5. In conclusion, financial investment, strong leadership, and supportive culture are crucial for employee engagement. While luxury hotels excel in these areas, budget hotels can still improve engagement by adopting low-cost strategies like improved work-life balance policies and enhanced recognition efforts, even with financial constraints.

Conclusion

Employee engagement is a crucial factor in the success of the hospitality industry, influencing job satisfaction, retention, and overall service quality. This study sought to compare engagement strategies in luxury and budget hotels while analysing the impact of leadership, organizational culture, and financial resources on engagement levels.

The results indicate that luxury hotels have more structured and effective engagement strategies than budget hotels. Career development programs, employee recognition, work-life balance initiatives, training & development, and compensation & benefits were all rated significantly higher in luxury hotels. This suggests that luxury hotels invest more in their workforce, leading to better retention and job satisfaction.

The study also found that leadership, organizational culture, and financial resources play a significant role in employee engagement. Leadership style had a stronger influence in luxury hotels, where structured management practices are more prevalent. Organizational culture was another critical factor, with luxury hotels fostering a more inclusive and motivating work environment. Financial resources showed the highest correlation with engagement, emphasizing the role of competitive salaries and benefits in employee motivation.

In contrast, budget hotels face challenges in maintaining high levels of engagement due to financial limitations, fewer career development opportunities, and less structured leadership practices. This results in lower job satisfaction and higher turnover rates among employees.

The findings highlight the need for hotels, particularly budget establishments, to refine their employee engagement strategies. While financial constraints may limit budget hotels, there are non-monetary engagement strategies that can enhance motivation and job satisfaction.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance employee engagement in both luxury and budget hotels:

1. **Investment in Career Development:** Hotels should establish structured career growth programs, mentorship initiatives, and leadership training sessions to retain talented employees and promote long-term engagement.
2. **Enhancing Employee Recognition:** Regular recognition programs, including awards, bonuses, and appreciation events, can significantly boost employee morale.
3. **Improving Work-Life Balance:** Budget hotels, in particular, should explore flexible work arrangements, mental health programs, and wellness initiatives to improve employee satisfaction.
4. **Strengthening Leadership Practices:** Leadership training should be prioritized to ensure effective communication, motivation, and strategic employee management in both luxury and budget hotels.
5. **Leveraging Financial Incentives:** Budget hotels should adopt innovative financial strategies, such as profit-sharing models and performance-based bonuses, to enhance employee engagement despite financial constraints.

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