THANK YOU! FOR NOT SERVING:

A STUDY ON CUSTOMER'S PERCEPTION TOWARDS RESPONSIBLE BEVERAGE SERVICE

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Licensed establishments have the legal and moral responsibility of serving alcohol responsibly. Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) or Responsible Beverage Service (RBS) ensures that alcohol abuse and alcohol related harms are under control. While there has been extensive research done on the impact of RBS in controlling alcohol related harms, research on customer's perception and attitude towards RBS is limited. Like any enforced social cause, there exists resistance towards accepting RBS by customers, especially when a server or bartender denies a customer further service of alcoholic beverages. This study attempts to examine the acceptance of responsible beverage service practices by customers and its influence on controlling alcohol abuse and intoxication. Survey questionnaire was administered to customers who frequent bars in star hotels. The responses were analyzed using SPSS 21 (Statistical Package for the Social Science). The results would shed light on what the customers thought was the best practices in RBS and would give the hospitality professionals insight to the most practical and effective ways of practicing RBS.

Keywords: Alcohol Abuse, Intoxication, Responsible Service of Alcohol, Responsible Beverage Service.

Restaurant and bars are popular venues for people to interact, network and socialize, and alcohol in most cultures is the social lubricant. Since historic times, alcohol has been both loved and hated. While some cultures and societies have totally shunned it, others have made it an integral part of their life style. Even though alcoholic beverages are popular during most social gatherings, alcohol abuse and intoxication is considered improper and unacceptable throughout the world.

Alcohol is the most widely consumed social drug in the world. The world alcohol market is growing at a CAGR of 2.0% and is expected to reach $1684 Billion by 2025 (Allied market research 2012). According to the Allied market research the global alcoholic beverages market is driven by an increase in global young-adult demographic, surge

in disposable income and rise in consumer demand for premium and super premium products. While alcoholic beverage markets have definite economic benefits, it does have a shady side as well. The World Health Organization estimates that around 3 million deaths every year is caused by alcohol and the harmful use of alcohol is the root cause of around 200 diseases and injury conditions. (Jernigan & Trangenstein, 2020) This double-edged nature of alcohol has urged Government's across the globe to put in tight controls and regulations related to its production, promotion, sale, service and consumption.

Responsible Beverage Service (RBS) or Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) was introduced in licensed premises to discourage alcohol abuse and alcoholism in bars and restaurants. The underlying motive being, reduction in alcohol related harms and injuries. Responsible beverage service (RBS) stands for the supply and service of alcoholic beverages in a responsible manner. It also includes that license holders, employees and managers serving alcoholic beverages should ensure that they conduct their business in a responsible manner and are also accountable for their actions. (The liquor Act, 1992)

Initially known as 'server intervention', RBS targets server behavior. The early server intervention programs focused mainly on identifying intoxication and then refusing further service of alcohol to intoxicated customers. Server intervention has today evolved into a more holistic approach of Responsible Beverage Service, where priority is given to prevent intoxication and alcohol abuse in the first place. RBS not only prevents alcohol abuse but also ensures that underage customers and any person at risk are not served. An effective RBS program not only focuses on staff behavior in controlling alcohol abuse, but also creates an atmosphere for the responsible consumption of alcohol by customers. (EFRD, 2008)

This study examines the acceptance of responsible beverage service practices by customers and its influence in controlling alcohol abuse and intoxication.

Rossow and Baklien (2010) states that Responsible Beverage Service (RBS) is a licensed premises intervention aiming at reducing alcohol related harms focusing on reducing the availability of alcohol to minors and prevent the service of alcoholic beverages to obviously intoxicated persons. Saltz (1985) mentioned that RBS includes broad set of strategies to create safer drinking environment that first, reduce the risk of intoxication and second, reduce the risk that intoxicated persons will harm themselves or others.

Mosher) (1983) has divided RBS into three components:-

- Training- Educating the employees.
- Legal – Rules and regulations on RBS and laws and liabilities on failing to provide RBS.
- Environmental – The design of outlet, outlet location to facilitate responsible service and consumption of alcohol and transportation facilities to customers.

Salt (1985) mentions that policies should not only be limited to not serving minors or intoxicated customers but should also look into the availability of food and non alcoholic beverages , standards for customer behavior, staffing requirements, transportation of intoxicated customers and management support to servers while following RBS.

O'Donnell (1985) found that about half of the drivers under the influence of alcohol had been drinking in a licensed establishment like bar or restaurant, and drivers whose last drink was at a bar had higher blood alcohol levels . Early research into RBS, like the Navy server Study (Salt 1987) and Russ and Geller (biblio?) (1987) tried to establish an association between RBS and alcohol abuse. These early studies tried to estimate the impact of RBS on the consumption of alcohol by customers. While these early research was able to associate RBS with reduced intoxication. The extent to which RBS impacts alcohol abuse could not be confirmed. Similar study by Rossow and Baklien (2010) in Norway found that RBS program in Norway failed to reach its objectives. While RBS could not reach its objectives in Norway, in neighboring Sweden the STAD project which translates into *Stockholm prevents alcohol and drug problems* was found to be highly effective. The failure of RBS in Norway was attributed to a lack of depth in both program content and policy. The researchers found that State and establishment policies, Support of management, program content and ways of implementation are crucial for any RBS programs to succeed. The key reason for the STAD projects success was its interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration between key operators who worked together to influence the availability and demand for alcohol. Sweden's equivalent to the RBS is called *Ansvarsfull alkoholservering* or AAS. Another reason for the RBS failing in Norway according to Rossow and Baklien(2010) was that servers who underwent RBS program were not trained in how to evaluate whether customers were underage or already intoxicated nor were they equipped to handle situations where denial of alcohol was required.

Toomey and Wagenaar (1999) Suggested that instead of burdening licensed establishment in providing RBS training to its staff a more practical and economic approach will be server licensing and certification. Where in servers are required to meet certain requirements and certification before taking up a job involving alcohol. Toomey et al (1998) after doing a qualitative assessment of RBS training program for servers across US states found that most of the RBS training programs across the US targeted the waiting staff and while the crucial owners of the establishments were not included or required to undergo such training. The researchers emphasized the need for a uniform standard across the country while training staffs on RBS. Gehman et al (1999) discussed that one of the major reasons for any RBS program being ineffective was because of the nature and kind of RBS training provided to the servers. The researchers found that the trainings provided only knowledge based information, not the skills or incentives necessary to change server behavior.

Green and Plant (2006) identified the various risk factors in the design of a bar that increased the likelihood of alcohol abuse. Their study categorized the various risk factors as-

- Internal physical characteristics and atmosphere
- Organizational factors
- Patron Characteristics
- Beverage choice
- External characteristics

Their study goes on to suggest how these factors could be modified and controlled to create an environment for not only providing RBS but also a healthy and responsible drinking environment.

Costello et al (2011) in their research studied the reasons why the service personal over served customers even after knowing that they were intoxicated. According to them the main reason for over serving was the server's reliance on their own values and judgments and the embarrassment of facing patron backlash and confrontation when refused service.

RBS across the world

Historically and even to this day, religion has played a major role in forming the alcohol policies of a country. Islamic countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia has taken a very hard line approach towards alcohol. While every country has laws pertaining to alcohol, the role and liability of a licensed establishment in providing responsible beverage service is clear or written in only a few. In the US, dram shop liability makes RBS necessary in licensed establishments. Introduced during the temperance movement in the mid-1800, it is based on the principal that anyone who profits from the sale of alcohol should be held liable for any resulting damages. This in turn has encouraged most of the establishments to introduce preventive strategies in order to reduce dram shop suits. Strict alcohol laws and rules in the European Union, Australia and other developed countries have encouraged the implementation of Responsible Beverage Service in licensed premises.

Having understood the negative impact of alcohol the WHO in 2010 came up with the "Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol". In its report RBS has been mentioned as an important component in reducing the negative consequences of drinking and alcohol intoxication. Countries including India have seriously considered this report and few nations like Australia has come up with its own National Alcohol Strategy for 2018-2026 based on the WHO report. But it has been mostly the developed and higher income nations who have been able to successfully implement most of what is mentioned in the WHO report. Rules and practices regarding responsible beverage service (RBS) or responsible service of alcohol (RSA) across the world all have a common objective of reducing, controlling and terminating the harm caused by alcohol abuse and intoxication. Though the objectives are common, the approach to RBS could vary from one country to another. Most of the developed countries like the USA, UK and Australia have well established laws, rules and regulations concerning RBS.

In the **USA** the regulation on alcohol is given to the individual state under the 21th Amendment to the constitution. In most US states, establishments whose core activity is the sale of alcoholic beverage have a cut of age limit for customers as 21, while other places like restaurants where food sales dominates the sale of alcohol the minimum age for customers is kept at 18. In most states the legal age to be a bartender is 21. Depending on state rules and policy, RBS training can be mandatory, voluntary or a combination of both. While mandatory and voluntary training in RBS is self explanatory, in a Combination or mixed system not all but few employees in an establishment are required to be RBS trained. In the US the major motivator for RBS has been the Dram shop law and lawsuits. Dram shop law makes the business or establishment that sells or serves alcoholic beverages liable to damages in case the

patron or guest meets with or causes an accident. In the US, dram shop liability makes RBS necessary in licensed establishments.

Europe historically has been a wet culture with alcohol engraved in the society. It is home to some of the most popular alcoholic beverages in the world. Drinks like Scotch, Irish Whiskey, Cognac , Sherry, Port and brands like Johnnie Walker, Jameson's, Courvoisier, Heineken and many others are a must have in any decent bar. Alcohol consumption in Europe is the highest in the world with a per capita consumption double that of the world average. In 2006 WHO identified alcohol as the third common factor for diseases in the European Union after hypertension and tobacco. One of the major challenges for an effective alcohol policy in the EU let alone RBS has been the ease of cross boarder travel and employment. This has initiated the WHO to come up with an alcohol policy for the entire EU in October 2006 when the European Commission agreed Upon the European Alcohol Strategy for 2006-2012.

In **Australia** alcohol has been identified as the second leading preventable cause of death after tobacco. RSA was introduced first in New South Wales in year 1830. RBS policy and rules in Australia are both strict and clear. Making RBS training and certification compulsory to any server or person involved in sale and service of alcohol. Bellis et al (2015) found that across the world Australians were next only to New Zealanders when it came to knowledge and understanding on responsible beverage service.

One of the more effective RBS program has been from New Zealand. Not only has RBS been implemented into the community it was also understood by the majority of the population. The process in which RBS has been implemented in the country has made it more acceptable by everyone. The Government initially started the Host Responsibility movement. Targeting not only licensed premises but any private function where alcohol was being serviced. This strategy helped the government in instilling the culture of responsible service even before it was made mandatory with the commercial establishments. The Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 an improvement on the previous Sale of liquor act 1989 law were introduced to reduce the harms of excessive drinking.

From the literature review it is understood that though RBS can create an impact in controlling abuse of alcohol, it can be only effective when it is supported by strong house policies, management support and a strong state alcohol law. Support to server by the management and incentives are found to be the motivators for the staff to actually practice RBS.

The major challenge for any bar or restaurant is to be responsible and at the same time to be profitable. While the Government and local communities have taken RBS seriously, forcing as well as encouraging bars and restaurants to practice RBS. The deciding factor is still a change in attitude and behavior from both the server and the customer.

The most common RBS strategies used in bars and restaurants, identified from the literature review and from customer as well as suggestions from bars and restaurant management are-

- Young guests are required to show their age proof before ordering drinks.

- Guests who have already consumed enough alcohol are not served anymore alcohol.

- Guests who are already identified as heavy drinkers are not allowed to enter.

- If found intoxicated guests are requested to hand over their vehicle keys.

- If found that the guest has been only drinking alcohol. They are suggested to slow down and order some food.

- Intoxicated guests are dropped back in the hotel's car or a cab with security personal.

- Signs on ' Responsible Drinking' placed in venue.

- Regular patrol and checking by excise officials.

These RBS strategies were used in the study to identify the practices which the guests/customers highly approved and considered to be the most effective in checking over consumption and abuse of alcohol.

Objective of the study

- To examine the level of acceptance of responsible beverage service practices by customers.
- To examine the influence of responsible beverage service practices on alcohol abuse and intoxication.
- To identify effective RBS strategies.

Methodology

Research Design

In order to obtain the identified objective a descriptive research design was selected.

Sampling

In this study, a purposive sampling technique, method has been used

for selecting the respondents from the 'Universe'. 'Universe' for this study was first meant for customers who frequented bars and restaurants in 5star hotels.

The second set of questionnaire was meant for Hospitality professionals dealing with alcohol. The 5 star brands operating in Karnataka were approached for the same.

A total of 400 customers of were surveyed. Of the 400 respondents, 230 were male and 170 female.This study was conducted during May - November 2019.

Statistical tools

The SPSS 21 (Statistical Package for the Social Science) was used to analyse the data. A test to determine the Normality of the Data- the Shapiro Wilk test was conducted, which showed that the data in this study was a non-normal data. Therefore, Non-Parametric tests were more suitable for testing the hypothesis.

For the first section of the study, the demographic variables were analysed using SPSS.

A Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis was carried out to determine if a customer's support and approval of RBS have any influence on them accepting the server from not serving any more alcohol.

The impact of RBS on customer loyalty in bar and restaurants is addressed using measurement model (OLS regression) technique.

Hypothesis testing has been conducted using the Spearman's ordinal correlation for non

parametric data.

Data Analysis Results and Discussion

Objective 1: To examine the level of acceptance of responsible beverage service practices by customers.

The Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis, carried out to determine if a customer's support and approval of RBS have any influence of them accepting the server from not serving any more alcohol reviled that, customer's support and approval of RBS have a meager influence of them accepting the server from not serving them any more alcohol. This finding is interesting because while there is a 92.3% approval for RBS, the percentage of people who approved a server carding them (stop serving alcohol) was only 44.3%.Further investigation on this discrepancy was done by asking the respondents for this contrast in opinion. It was found that people who approved RBS also practiced Responsible Drinking and were not in the habit of over indulgence. Therefore they avoided any situation which would have required the server or establishment to card them.

Objective 2: To examine the influence of responsible beverage service practices on alcohol abuse and intoxication.

Most of the previous studies on the influence of RBS on alcohol abuse and intoxication had contrasting reports. While some studies like Saltz's (1987) 'Navy Server Study' and Russ and Geller (1987) were able to identify a positive impact in RBS controlling alcohol abuse. Other studies like Rossow and Baklien (2010) could not verify if RBS could control alcohol abuse. In this study it is found that there is a strong perception among customers that RBS can reduce cases of alcohol abuse and intoxication in bars and restaurants and the community.

Objective 3: To identify effective RBS strategies.

From the descriptive analysis on customer's perception on effective RBS practices as listed in Table 3, it is observed that the practice of young customers showing proof of age before ordering an alcohol is considered to be most effective (mean score 4.233) in controlling alcohol abuse. Followed by, stopping service to guests who have already consumed enough alcohol (mean score 3.925). The practice of diluting drinks is least preferred by the customers among the various RBS practices followed in licensed establishments (mean score 2.445). Interview with selected customers reveled that they felt that such a practice even though done with good intentions was unethical and considered it as cheating the customer.
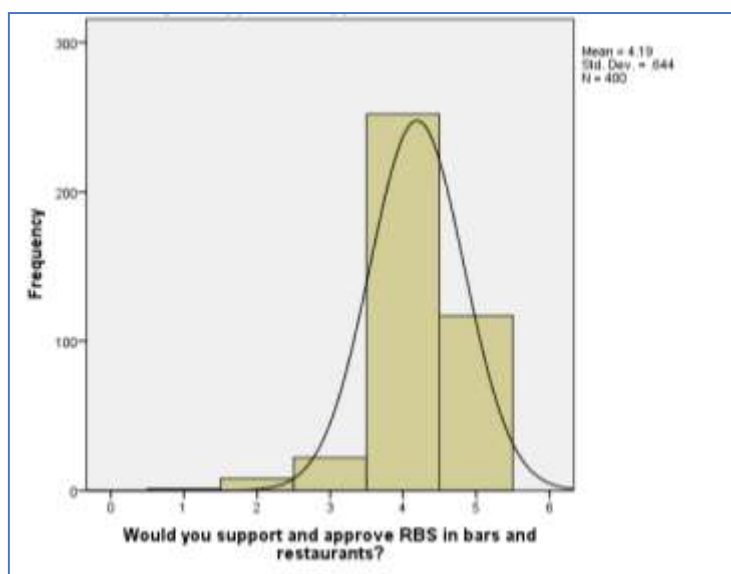
Figure 1: Descriptive statistics for support and approval of RBS
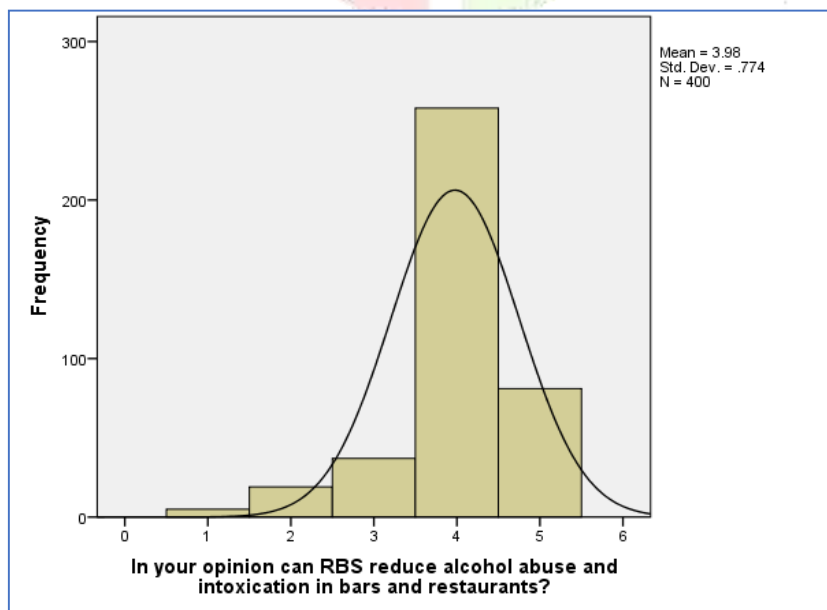
Figure 2: Descriptive statistics for RBS reducing alcohol abuse and intoxication in bars and   restaurants

Before applying any statistical tools to test the hypothesis, the data was tested for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results in the table 1 shows that for '*would you support and approve RBS in bars and restaurants*' and ' *in your opinion can RBS reduce alcohol abuse and intoxication in bars and restaurants*' the Shapiro-Wilk significance is .000 ,which is below the significant value of .05, indicating that the data does not follow a normal distribution. Therefore, non parametric tests would be more suitable to test the hypothesis.

Table 1: Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Would you support and approve RBS in bars and restaurants?	.323	400	.000	.731	400	.000
In your opinion can RBS reduce alcohol abuse and intoxication in bars and restaurants?	.359	400	.000	.750	400	.000

H0: RBS practices do not result in lesser alcohol abuse incidents.

H1: RBS practices result in lesser alcohol abuse incidents.

In essence, as the level of acceptance of the respondents towards RBS practices moves from strongly disagree to strongly agree. There will be a higher proportion of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that, there would be reduction in alcohol abuse incidents in Bar and Restaurants

Spearman's ordinal correlation coefficient result:

Here X → Level of acceptance towards RBS practices

(Measured on an ordinal Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Y → Level of acceptance towards reduction in alcohol abuse

(Measured on a ordinal Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Table 2: Spearman's ordinal correlation coefficient result between acceptance towards RBS practices and acceptance towards reduction in alcohol abuse.

	Acceptance towards reduction in alcohol abuse
Acceptance towards RBS practices	r = 0.268*, p-value = 0.000, S.E = 0.036

N = 400, * Significant at 5 % level

From the above Spearman's ordinal correlation, it is observed that the correlation (r) between the levels of acceptance towards RBS practices and levels of acceptance towards reduction in alcohol abuse is r = 0.268 (p=0.000) and it is statistically significant at 5 % level. Thus, we accept alternative hypotheses H_1. This indicates that higher the level of acceptance towards RBS practices, higher the levels of acceptance towards reduction in alcohol abuse. However, the 'r' value of 0.268 indicates a weak correlation, thus one could conclude that the level of acceptance towards RBS practices does not strongly correlate with the degree of acceptance towards reduction in alcohol abuse in Bar and Restaurants by the sample customers.

Table 3:Customer Response to effective RBS strategies to be followed by Five star Hotels

RBS Strategy	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Young guest are required to show their age proof before ordering drinks.	400	1.0	5.0	4.233	.7874
Guests who have already consumed enough alcohol are not served anymore alcohol	400	1.0	5.0	3.925	1.0034
Slow service or delayed service for guests who are over consuming alcohol.	400	1.0	5.0	3.735	.9835
Guests who are already identified as heavy drinkers are not allowed to enter.	400	1.0	5.0	3.415	1.2130
If found intoxicated guests are requested to hand over their vehicle keys.	400	1.0	5.0	3.320	.9849

If found that the guest has been only drinking alcohol. They are suggested to slow down and order some food.	400	1.0	5.0	3.545	.9902
Drinks are purposefully diluted for guests who have already consumed too much alcohol.	400	1.0	5.0	2.445	1.1577
Intoxicated guests are dropped back in the hotel's car or a cab with security personal.	400	1.0	5.0	3.318	1.0533
Signs on ' Responsible Drinking' placed in venue.	400	1.0	5.0	2.800	1.2546
Regular patrol and checking by excise officials.	400	1.0	5.0	3.778	.8888

Table 3: Customer response to effective RBS strategies to be followed by Five star Hotels

The success of any RBS program is possible only if there is a holistic approach towards this initiative, i.e. all the stakeholders –the policy makers, enforcing body, bar and restaurant management, staff as well as the customer's support towards the initiative.

While this study did prove that there is acceptance of RBS by guests/customers and belief that RBS could check alcohol abuse, the sample used for the study were people who frequented five stars hotels in Bengaluru, this left out a major population which frequented stand alone bars and restaurants, where the majority of alcohol consumption in- premises takes place.

While this study looked into the customer's viewpoint on RBS, future research on this subject could look into other perspectives, like RBS policies making, staff training or RBS implementation.

Recommendation

As more and more people in the state and country start consuming alcohol, the need to control and check the negative impact of this rise is becoming more important. While this research has been able to verify the positive impact of RBS in checking alcohol abuse and controlling intoxication, it will take a combined effort from all the stakeholders to create a responsible drinking culture. The major decisions need to be taken by the policy makers as stricter rules and regulations including penalties; will make RBS more effective in the long run. Beverage companies and licensed establishments need to educate and encourage customers to drink responsibly and also to support RBS by servers.

Simple practices like checking the age of consumers can create a huge impact in reducing underage drinking. Customer education and acceptance will be the key to success for RBS by any establishment.

The Government will have to take a 'carrot and stick' approach on Hotels to ensure that they practice Responsible Beverage Service. Rewarding those practicing RBS and punishing those who are not. Spot checking by excise officers in venues will ensure that RBS is being followed seriously. It should also ease the burden on servers as consumers will be more willing to listen to a Government official than an employee.

Conclusion

RBS plays a small but significant role in checking alcohol abuse in the society. As more

and more customers and hotels start adopting RBS it will create a culture of responsible

drinking in the community. When RBS becomes a standard across licensed establishments there will be a measurable decrease in alcohol related accidents and crimes. Though most of the hotels are following some amount of RBS practices and the acceptance level of R

BS by customers is also increasing. It will require a consistent effort from all quarters to ensure that there is any actual cultural and behavioural change with respect to how we treat and consume alcohol. RBS practice across bars and restaurants will be able to control alcohol related issues in the community. It needs to be implemented across licensed establishments as only a few places practicing RBS will neither be sustainable or profitable in the long run as customers will have alternate options if only a few places are strict about RBS. This is where the role of the policy makers, community and law enforcers become important. They will have to ensure that RBS is implemented and practiced across all establishments and that there is no loophole in the system for both customers and establishments to take advantage

Scope for Further Research

The study focused on RBS in five star hotels in the State of Karnataka. The findings would have been much different had the research been done on licensed establishments others than star hotels as the majority of alcohol sale and consumptions happens in the local bars spread across the state where the profile of the customers as well as the employee is very different from that of a customer and staff in a five star hotel. Scope for research is high in such areas. A similar study on other states might give different results as drinking culture and acceptance of alcohol varies across states and cultures even within India.

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