

Advantages of Aggregators in Hotels: Enhancement of Visibility and Reach for Small Scale Hotels – Perspectives of Rural India

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Abstract – This study analyses the relevance of digital aggregators and small-scale hotel collaboration in India. The past few years have seen the use of digital aggregators in small-scale hotel businesses. Such collaboration has allowed hotel owners to survive and serve their consumers. Moreover, the collaboration between small-scale hotel owners and aggregators is the newest trend in business expansion. Despite their growth, the significance of such collaboration is unknown and requires further investigation. This research aims to resonate the relevance of digital aggregators and small-scale hotel collaboration. Further, the study is designed through qualitative research methodology; the research followed 35 in-depth interviews to gather credible data for this research. A thematic pattern was drawn to communicate the findings through the perspectives of the hotel owners. The results are drawn through a 90 per cent similarity index and in-depth analysis of interview transcripts. The research findings discussed the role of aggregators in funding, promoting, and revamping the service structure of small-scale hotels. Further, the research iterated the significance of aggregators in employee handling of small-scale hotels and possible exposure to business expansion.

Keywords – Scarcity, strategic decisions, Developing economies.

JEL Classification – M30 M31 M37 M50

Introduction- Small-scale hotels are integral to growing economies and generate substantial earnings for their rural counterparts. Equipped with basic amenities and minimal attributes, small-scale hotels have pictured minimalistic gestures of rural places. However, the situation has altered due to technological progressions and specific transitions within the hotel industry. Technological advancements have typically allowed hotel industries to transform and create meaningful services for their consumers. Even the growth of technological advancements has resulted in the establishment of newer hotel branches within the rural counterparts. Such developments have impacted the growth of small-scale hotels, and their existence has been questionable. Further, the pandemic has played a negative role in small-scale hotels' growth and even questioned long-term survival concerns.

Small-scale hotels had minimal infrastructure and the owners were known to own hotel businesses for generations. Moreover, small-scale hotels were surrounded by the religious places of India and encouraged practices of minimal amenities. However, the growth of technologies has resulted in global visits to these places, and the availability of basic amenities has questioned the efficacy of small-scale hotels in an advanced society. Moreover, the small-scale hotel owners were religious believers and practised minimal technology usage. Such perspectives have hindered their advancements and business growth. Overall, lack of business acumen, minimal understanding of business strategies and minimal professional acumen have questioned the profitability of small-scale hotels in a competitive business environment.

Literature review – Muhsen et al. (2022) discussed that small-scale hotels are minimalistic in rural areas. Primarily, a small-scale hotel is owned by generational business owners and is supposed to provide basic amenities. Typically, a small-scale hotel comprises minimal rooms and is expected to have shared washable areas. Similarly, Abraham et al. (2022) said small-scale hotels are prevalent in rural India, and the budget-segmented people are primarily consumers of such services. According to Bhadra and Mishra (2021), small-scale hotels are basic, limited and prone to advanced services. Quite often, the consumers of such hotels settle through compromises due to their budget constraints. Similarly, Parwej and Ranjan (2021) emphasized that these hotel owners are accustomed to marginal income and decreased service demand. Previously, the demand for such hotels was prevalent and acceptable. As John (2021) described, technology has altered the perspectives of hotel usage, and small-scale hotel owners have suffered the consequences of such progress.

The rural dynamics of India are typically based on traditional customs, rituals and minimalism. Here, Mishra et al. (2021) pointed out such thoughts align individuals to practice minimal choices and maintain simplistic lifestyle choices. Moreover,

minimalist perspectives have been reflected through their daily consumption, and eventually, the hotel owners have continued simplistic practices (Fredrick & Parappagoudar, 2021). However, Gupta and Duggal (2022) discussed the situation altered through technology usage, and global audiences showcased their interest in visiting rural India. Eventually, the perspectives of small-scale hotels were coined, and the negative aspects were highlighted. Afterwards, the negative aspects and unprofessional practices of small-scale hotels were highlighted. The existential challenge remained for the hotel owners, and understanding modern customs remained pivotal (Tripathi & Baga, 2020).

Meanwhile, Verma (2020) discussed that small-scale hotel owners struggled with growth and existence. However, the rare hope arose through the aggregators. Typically, aggregators are affiliated companies equipped with fancy expertise. Simplistically, Das and Dev (2020) explained that aggregators are Uber cab services. Such services enable drivers and consumers to fulfil their needs. Further, Bandi et al. (2022) observed that similar practices were followed in the hospitality sector, and hotel owners aligned their faith to the aggregated business model. Primarily, aggregators collaborated with the hotels and, through their applications, promoted the hotels. Eventually, the aggregators gathered relevant attention for their partner hotels and allowed them to substantiate profits. Farah et al. (2022) believed that while the aggregator's growth is promising, minimal references are accumulated to resonate with the aspects of small-scale hotels and aggregators. As Cooper et al. (2021) discussed, multiple reasons hindered the growth of small-scale hotels. Primarily, these businesses are running through their traditional beliefs. Similarly, the generational owners had beliefs of minimalistic consumption and simplistic lifestyle (Modgil et al., 2022). Moreover, Balodi et al. (2022) discussed the perspectives of minimal technology advancements in small hotels, which hindered their growth.

Further, Moheseni et al. (2021) discussed that small-scale business owners feel financial constraints that hinder their infrastructural developments and offerings of advanced facilities. Nonetheless, these hotels are historical archetypes that often generate substantial traffic to the surroundings. However, the challenge remained for them to operate, without funds, infrastructure and promotional capabilities (Kumar et al., 2023).

According to Palme et al. (2023), a troublesome situation resulted in incorporating aggregators in small-scale hotel businesses and revamping existing ambiguities. Typically, the aggregators initiated their operations through situational analysis and possible concerns. Afterwards, aggregators had significant roles in revamping small-scale hotels' structures. Specific concerns were addressed through aggregators and possible modifications were initiated.

Although, the aggregators initiated modifying and revamping existing ambiguities (Teotia et al., 2020). However, Chiu et al. (2021) discussed the challenges as the infrastructural concerns prevailed and remained pivotal. Similarly, existing challenges persisted due to the nature of small-scale hotels. Most hotels lacked basic amenities, and owners had to shut down their business operations.

Further, Roy and Jain (2022) discussed that the severity of such a situation is aggravated due to the pandemic and alarming concerns. Primarily, the pandemic has outlined the importance of hygiene and social distancing. Similarly, cleanliness, sanitization and other precautions were mandatory to disclose. Such circumstances burdened small-scale business owners with additional financial requirements. Further, the situational circumstances resulted from the utmost focus on alterations and practical usages of aggregators. Certain studies have indicated the growth of small-scale hotels in rural areas of the country (Chakraborty & Jain, 2022). However, such references are minimal and provide minimal perspectives of the hotel owners.

Henceforth, this research addresses and unveils certain paradoxes that have remained untold. Small-scale businesses are prevalent in the country, and admissible growth is visible. However, the challenge remained in accumulating business perspectives through the aggregators. Further, adequate benefits of aggregators in small-scale businesses remain unknown and demand more significant intervention. Hence, this research aspired to resonate with the usages of aggregators within small-scale hotels. Subsequently, this investigation outlined possible benefits hotel owners have through the incorporated usages of aggregators and their hotel businesses.

Objectives and research questions – Based on the existing discussions, this research proposes specific and open-ended research questions. Inclusions of such aspects serve certain purposes to comprehend the usages of aggregator services in smaller hotels of the rural places.

RQ1- Possible reasons behind collaboration with the aggregators and impact of such collaboration in regular business mechanisms.

RQ2- Key advancements, hotel owners are getting through the usages of aggregators in daily business operations.

RQ3- Possible impacts on their earning and survival through the incorporation of aggregator in small scale hotel businesses.

RQ4- Extensions of support from the aggregator and possible scope of future in their respective businesses.

Methodology-

Existential research is curated through qualitative research acumen and semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research studies are appropriate to comprehend perspectives and accumulate social discourses. Moreover, minimal phenomenological progressions often require understanding of perspectives and phenomena (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2023). Such circumstances require incorporating qualitative studies, which embrace an understanding of a broader perspective. Henceforth, this research has accumulated relevant perspectives on this research through qualitative research perspectives and semi-structured interviews. Further, the semi-structured interviews had credible benefits to this research. The incorporation of semi-structured interviews allowed the creation of a comfortable environment and contextual communication during the interviews. Overall, exploration of this research through qualitative pursuits resulted in an understanding of the existing concerns and possible exploration of perspectives (vega et al., 2023).

This research comprehended a detailed discussion to guide the accumulation of the perspectives of aggregator application usage in hotel businesses. Typically, the discussion guide had discussion points and open-ended questions. Introductory questions were incorporated to develop rapport and introduce the research purpose. Afterwards, detailed discussions were followed through the discussion guide (Khoa & Hung, 2023). Ideally, the research comprehended the utility of aggregator application usage in hotel businesses.

Years of operation	Location	Numbers of participants
0-5	Rural	04
5-10	Village areas	08
10-15	Rural	03
15-20	Rural and Village areas	11
20-25	Village areas	4
25 and above	Rural areas	5

Table 03- Detailed demographics of the participants.

Afterwards, the methodology has operationalised this research through the detailed inclusion-exclusion criteria. Primarily, this research has accumulated small hotel owners' perspectives and possible experience through aggregator applications. Such objectives are focused on the research to include hotel owners of rural and semi-rural areas in India. Similarly, the study ensured hotel owners were accustomed to and aware of aggregator application usage. Typically, the research has incorporated purposive sampling techniques, and the interviews have been conducted using predetermined criteria. On average, interviews lasted fifty minutes, and the discussion mode remained English. Overall, the research has incorporated 35 interviews, and detailed transcriptions of the interviews were performed through relevant software. Generally, the semi-structured interviews were initiated through rapport building and progressed through detailed discussions. A detailed discussion guide was used during the interviews to understand and contextualise the discussions. Moreover, the discussion guide had five sections and segregated our discussions. Introductory sections were utilised to understand specific perspectives from aggregator application usages. At the same time, the remaining sections comprehend possible benefits through aggregators in hotel businesses.

completion of interviews followed the understanding of data patterns and coding. Typically, qualitative interviews were transcribed, and detailed patterns were mapped. Similarly, the transcripts were uploaded to the NVIVO research software,

and possible similarities were identified. Data similarities were identified through coding and understanding themes (Robinson, 2023). Meanwhile, the finalisation of themes requires a detailed representation of data and possible links within the data. Such processes often allow the research to gain data familiarity and identify research themes. Here, the research followed such processes to gain data similarity and present a thematic representation of our research. Afterwards, employed external experts to follow similar processes and similarities of ninety per cent resulted in the finalisation of themes.

Results –

Professional support and scope of staff training: previously, professionalism was the primary concern amongst small-scale hotel owners. Mainly, small-scale hotels had reputations of unprofessional and untrained workforces. Similarly, these hotels had minimal professional reputations, impacting their service standards. However, such circumstances have altered through the usage of aggregators. Typically, (Figure – 01) these applications are equipped with their professional teams and professional networks. Such linkages allow hotel personnel to understand professional dynamics and incorporate advanced service standards. During the interviews, the hotel owners rightfully admitted such aspects of aggregators. Further, they admitted the scope of training and development of their existing workforce through the aggregators. Primarily, the aggregators are collaborating through their brand name and assistance. Hence, the aggregators ensure adequate diligence and professionalism. Such aspects begin through the incorporation of capacity building and workforce development. While discussing, the hotel owners discussed the scope of development and employee training.

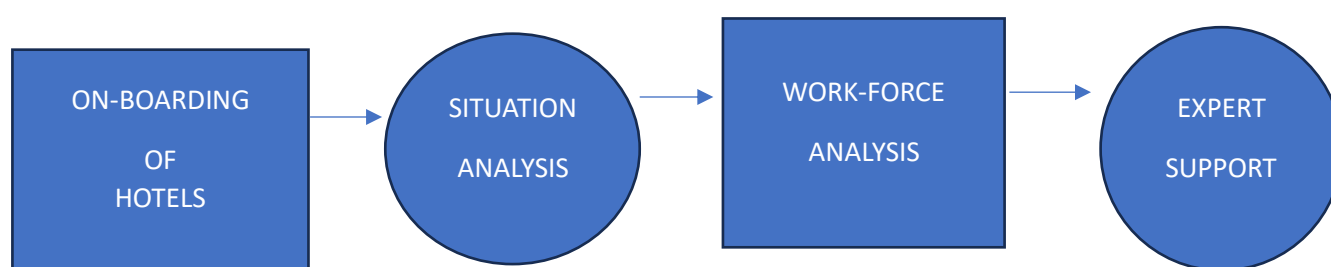


Figure 01 – Role of aggregators in employee training and development.

Further, the discussions highlighted the roles of aggregators in employee grooming, credibility building and the development of a professional workforce. Incorporation of such mechanisms has a meaningful impact on hotel operations and business growth. The previous references have directly discussed the aspects of professionalism in small-scale hotel businesses. Nonetheless, integrating aggregator applications and incorporating modern aspects have altered such concerns. Further, small-scale hotel businesses also conduct their operations through professionals and credibility, which communicate the role of aggregators in credibility building.

Broad reach and visibility- Small-scale hotels have suffered inevitable adversity due to their financial capabilities and promotional constraints. Similarly, these hotels are situated in rural areas, highlighting locational disadvantages. The situation has become worrisome after the pandemic. Such circumstances have benefitted these hotel owners through aggregator collaboration. Typically, the aggregator applications operate within the country and have access to multiple locations. Such representations have meaningful benefits and allow small-scale hotels to have adequate reach within their location. The hotel owners highlighted such perspectives and specific aggregator efficacies during the discussions. Since the hotel owners had financial and budget constraints, the promotion of their respective hotels had been compromised. Eventually, the lack of promotional aspects impacted their businesses and resulted in minimal guest arrivals.

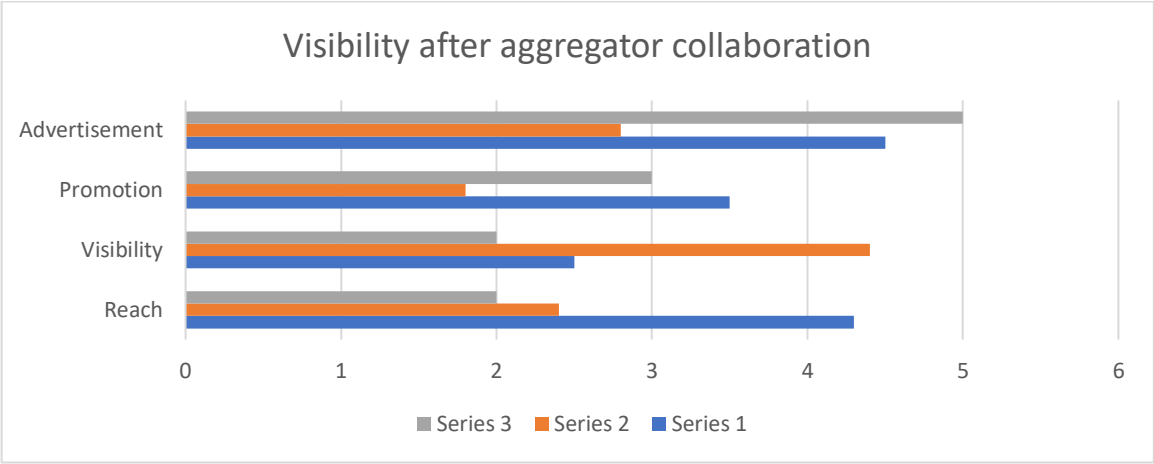


Figure 02- Visibility index after aggregator collaboration.

Such perspectives are altered through the usage of aggregators. Typically, hotel attributes are shared through the applications, and guest reviews are reflected. Further, the applications have geolocation attributes, which recommend nearby hotels to the searched users. Ultimately, (Figure- 02) through the incorporation of advanced services and mechanisms, small-scale hotels are relevant exposure. Discussions with the hotel owners allowed us to understand specific aspects of hotel visibility and business transitions. Previously, small-scale hotels had only local and occasional guests. However, such perspectives have changed due to their visibility and broad reach. Nowadays, these businesses are getting guests across the country and, sometimes, international visits.

Financial assistance and enhancement of existing services – Previously, small-scale hotel owners had difficulties getting financial assistance, and their understanding of modern services was compromised. Modern service standards require adequate financial capital and exposure to modern facilities. Such aspects were hindered, as the external investors had minimal interest in renovating small-scale hotels. Similarly, the small-scale hotel owners had minimal understanding of modern services and advanced aspects of hotel businesses. Such perspectives doubted the growth of small-scale businesses within the country. Henceforth, the collaboration of hotels and aggregators is noteworthy. Typically, the aggregators realised the business needs and allowed relevant financial assistance to the hotel owners. During the interviews, the hotel owners highlighted such aspects of their businesses. The business owners often had a shortage of capital and an understanding of advanced services.



Figure 03- Financial help from collaboration.

The collaboration of aggregators and small-scale hotels had answers to these concerns. Typically, the collaboration of small-scale hotels and aggregators has certain benefits. First, (Figure- 03) the services experts evaluate the businesses, and relevant mechanisms are followed to alter the existing aspects. Similarly, the aggregators bear the renovation costs, and relevant adjustments are made to ensure modern standards. Exchanges of such perspectives allow the business to revamp and adjust according to the required standards. Hotel owners struggled to overcome such challenges earlier, and businesses had trouble accumulating relevant advancements.

Development of in-house facilities – Typically, a small-scale hotel is known to offer basic amenities to its guests. Such amenities were comprised of a decent room and possible washable areas. Moreover, these hotels did not offer in-house kitchens, hygienic bathrooms, parking facilities and internet services. The absence of such facilities has impacted these businesses and resulted in the growth of others. The aggregators observed such perspectives, which resulted in the development of in-house facilities. During the interviews, the hotel owners highlighted such perspectives and the possible significance of such practices. Previously, small-scale hotel owners had different perspectives on hotel businesses. Further, the owners believed in servicing the country's middle-class segments. Henceforth, the requirement for advanced and in-house facilities was minimal.

Research questions	Aspects	Support from the data
Reasons and impact of aggregator collaboration	Such collaboration helping to gain professional insights, small hotel owners are getting financial assistance from the aggregator and the hotel owners are managing workforce through aggregator services	Almost, 80 percentage of the participants admitted the relevance of aggregator collaboration and possible impacts. So, support of RQ1 from the data is gained.
Possible advancements of existing hotel operations the owners are getting through aggregator collaboration	Hotel owners are utilising the aspects of promotional services, digital marketing and enhancing visibility index	Almost, 85 percentages of the respondents admitted such efficacies. Even the entire sample admitted the direct and indirect influence of aggregators in business expansion. So, support of the RQ2 from the data is gained.
Survival and impact on earning	Scope of earning has improved, survival has eased through infrastructure development, operational capacities are enhanced	Almost ninety percentage of the respondents admitted their scope of earning has enhanced through the aggregator services. Further, they admitted their scope of business survival has improved. So, support of the RQ3 from the data is gained.
Scope of future	Through aggregator investments Small scale hotel owners are expanding their operations, enhancing their capital and promotional aspects are also improved.	Almost every participants admitted the significance of aggregator collaboration. Such collaboration is allowing them to sustain growth and foresee a prospective future. Support of the RQ4 from the data is gained.

Table 01- Research support of the data

Such perspectives have altered through the usage of aggregators. Nowadays, small-scale hotels offer extravagant facilities at competitive rates. Such advancements are helping people upgrade their service standards and allowing hotels decent

earnings. Notably, the small-scale hotels are developing relevant infrastructure and housing required amenities. Ultimately, by altering such perspectives, hotels are equipped with adequate infrastructure—eventually, incorporating advanced facilities results in the retention of guests, newer visits and repeated visits. Overall, through the alterations of services and the development of in-house facilities, hotel owners are surviving through profits.

Enhancement of earnings and scope of profitability— previously, profits were limited, and the scope of further improvement was questioned. Ultimately, small-scale hotels operated on limited budgets, minimal promotions and prolonged financial constraints. Such aspects have limited the growth and prospects of small, scaled hotels. Further, the pandemic made people sceptical regarding their hotel choices. During the interviews, the hotel owners narrated such discourses through their perspectives. Hotel owners struggled to make earnings and promote their hotels to attract relevant attention. Eventually, the prolonged struggle impacted the profitability, and the scope of earnings was compromised.

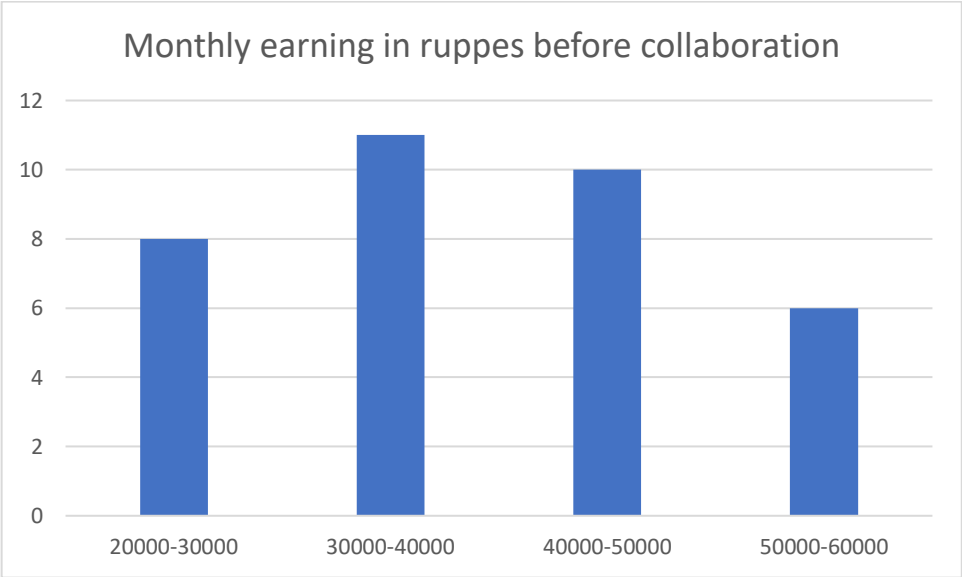


Figure 4A- Monthly earnings before aggregator collaboration.

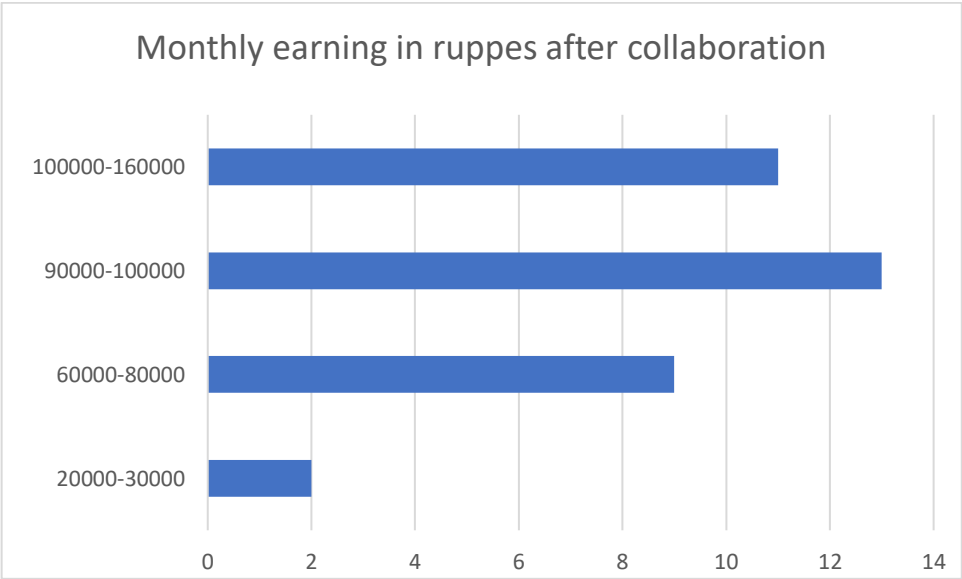


Figure 4B- Monthly earnings after aggregator collaboration.

Aggregators are equipped with applications and specific attributes. The incorporation of such mechanisms is advanced and modern. Promoting hotels through such applications allows hotel owners to promote their hotels and generate required

attention. Further, these applications allow access to competitive rates and additional features. Such perspectives allow for generating required traffic and daily transactions across the hotels. Moreover, these applications allow for specific attributes and attractive nearby attractions. Specific feature usage allows hotels to gather public attention and retain regular guests. Finally, hotels provide regular discounts and priority passes through the aggregator applications. The incorporation of such features allows hotels to acquire newer visitors and enhance their earning scopes.

Discussion- Previously, Fischer and Guzel (2023) discussed that small-scale hotels are limited-capacity hotels operating in rural areas. Primarily, small-scale hotels have a history of minimal amenities and are known to serve limited segments. Further, these hotels are rudimentary and lack modern facilities. However, this research supported such findings yet expanded the perspectives of small-scale hotels. This research discussed the hindrance of growth resulting from the unavailability of capital and guidance. Moreover, Hendren et al. (2023) discussed that small-scale hotels were known to comprehend minimal professionalism and operated through an untrained workforce. Probably, the incorporation of aggregators has altered such perspectives. Hotel owners have gained substantial attention mainly through digital enablers and small-scale hotels.

Previously, salah et al. (2023) highlighted the significance of aggregators in hotel chains. However, such discussions were limited to larger hotel chains and operated in metro cities. This research highlighted an emerging perspective. Mainly, the study discussed the growth of small-scale hotels and aggregators situated in rural counterparts. Findings have highlighted the significant role of aggregators in small-scale hotels. Singh et al. (2023) believed the growth of aggregators is limited to bigger cities and renowned hotel chains. Such perspectives are altered, and the role of aggregators in small-scale hotels is highlighted. Aggregators are onboarding small-scale hotels and promoting their services through substantial technology advancements. Even through technology incorporation, small-scale hotels are witnessing substantial growth in their existing services. Further, Kumar and Sumathi (2023) believed their limited acumen hinders the growth of small-scale hotels. Conversely, the study identified such growth was hindered by limited capital, guidance, and a lack of promotional capabilities.

Earlier, Elshaeer et al. (2023) questioned the significance of aggregators in hotel businesses and believed aggregators hinder business growth. However, this research opposed such claims and discussions. Aggregators are supposed to earn through their facilities. Nevertheless, the aggregating services are unique, allowing small-scale businesses to operate efficiently. Further, the aggregating services are comprised of professional business services, helping small-scale hotel owners grow and expand their existing reach.

Conclusion- This research advocated the significance of aggregators in small-scale hotels. Small-scale hotels are prevailing and generational. Such hotels serve the primary purposes and predominantly serve the needful segments. However, recent developments have certainly questioned the efficacies of small-scale hotels, and their existence has been doubted. The incorporation of aggregators and small-scale hotels is impactful. Moreover, small-scale hotels acquire relevant skills, service standards and credibility through such collaboration. Further, the aggregators understand business needs, provide professional assistance and even promoting specific hotel attributes. Overall, through aggregators the small, scaled hotels are elucidating the purpose of modern advancements and surviving through professional acumen.

This research's findings are based on the hotel owners' perspective. Primarily, the study has accumulated the business owners' perspectives and their possible impact on earning through aggregators. However, consumers' perspectives from small-scale hotels should be investigated. Through this research, future research scholarship may investigate the role of small-scale hotels in consumer satisfaction. Further, the research is based on a particular country and part of developing economies. Similar, exploration is requested in other countries or combinational research through multiple countries. Such perspectives may allow comprehending the clear significance of aggregators in small scale hotels.

Author contributions –

Conceptualization – Gourav Roy

Data curation – Gourav Roy

Transcription – Gourav Roy

Analysis – Gourav Roy

Methodology – Gourav Roy

Final writing and Review – Gourav Roy

Supervision – Gourav Roy

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Appendices-

Sample codes	Main themes
Learning, support, development, training, work-force management, expertise, technology centric.	Incubation of professional expertise from the Aggregators
SEO, promotion, application usages, unique promotion, reach, global connect.	Broad reach and enhancement of visibility
Investment, assistance, guidance, support, scope, wide assortment	Financial support and enhancement of existing facilities
Benchmarking, modernity, relevant support, contextual references,	Infrastructure development
Profit, scope of earning, enhancement of wealth and earning	Earning scope and profitability

Table 01- Sample coding table of the research.

Discussion phase	Type of discussions
Introduction	Basic question on their hotels, perspectives on technology usages, existing and earlier concerns.
Beginning to aggregators usages	Duration of aggregator usages, possible reasons, business changes after usages, type of aggregators are they using.
Possible benefits and concerns	Gained aspects of using aggregators, associated assistances, support and expertise, possible concerns
Tackling earlier obstacles through aggregators	Areas of improvement, possibly helps from the aggregators, available support, and impact on overall service standards
Scope of earning and improvement through collaboration	Aspects of earning, discussions on profitability, guest retention, and possible impacts of global promotion

Table 02- Sample representations of the discussion guidelines and questions