

Customer Service in the Hospitality and Tourism Sector

Student's Name:

Institutional Affiliation:

Abstract

The capacity of an organization, especially in the hospitality sector, to meet its goals relies on its capacity to adapt to the external market environment. This paper investigates how guest experience, service quality, and the WOW experience affect the hospitality sector. Businesses in this industry depend on their ability to welcome customers and encourage them to make another visit to the organization. This paper investigated how the aspects of consumer service affect how companies perform in the hospitality sector and the role they play in the industry. Additionally, the paper investigates a case study of Ritz-Carlton hotel in New Orleans to assess how these factors are put into consideration. The outcomes of the case analysis show that the organization should involve the input of the employees more in defining customer service quality. Motivation and inclusion in decision-making would improve their capacity to meet the needs and expectations of the consumers.

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Introduction

Companies struggle to establish and maintain a bond with their consumers with the goal of turning such connections to profits. Customer service defines the measures that a firm takes to build on its brand and image through consumer experience, service quality, and the WOW factor. The hospitality industry relies heavily on such experiences since the performance of the firm is dependent on how consumers feel about their services (LeBoeuf et al., 1987). Over the years, the hospitality sector has adapted to the changes in the consumer experiences to meet their growth objectives. Examining the role of consumer experience, service quality, and the WOW experience will demonstrate the implication of these factors in organizational performance.

Definition of Terms

Customer Experience: Consumer or guest experience is the factor of an interaction between the product and consumer experience over time. The expectations of a customer and an interaction with the environment provided in the company define the guest experience (Burns, Warren, & Roberts 2018). Companies learn the needs of their consumers and identify ways to improve their service delivery. Additionally, the experience of a customer or a guest includes the factors that define their physical, emotional, and spiritual environment (Willingham, 1992). Matching the experiences of the customers with the services provided in the firm takes time as the managers learn the needs of the consumer. The experiences of customers before and after they purchase products and services all define the guest experience. Follow-up services include seeking the views of the consumers on the products or services and guidance on how to gain better experiences in the next visit (Torres, van Niekerk, & Orłowski, 2017). Companies identify the touch points of their consumers and use the available resources to improve their interaction

with consumers. Guest experience identifies how the company defines its consumer and models the services in the company to meet the expectations of the buyers.

Quality: Customer service quality is the quantitative measure of how a company meets and fulfills the needs of their consumers through service and product delivery. It encompasses the measure of the customers' experiences, the mean score of the firm in terms of customer opinions, and the perceived level of performance in comparison to competitors. The main goal of a company is to gain profits by building a wide market share. Service quality is the measure to which the company meets its objectives and provides positive experiences to the consumers. Additionally, customer service quality includes how the firm matches its services with the expectations of the consumers. Willingham (1992) observes that the capacity of a company to meet its consumers' expectations defines the quality of a service. However, the author notes that managers must define their goals clearly to ensure that the consumer experience matches the performance and growth objectives. Not all the needs of a consumer can be fulfilled all at the same time since they may not match the goals of the company (Chetta et al., 2017). Additionally, all customers have their unique experiences and needs and the company cannot provide to all their needs. The quality of a service defines how consumers' experiences must be aligned with the goals products and services in a company.

WOW Factor: Companies usually have to go an extra mile in providing services to consumers especially when they feel they are disadvantaged in the market. The WOW factor is a common business slang that refers to how small businesses have to go beyond the expectations of the consumers to operate sustainably (Willingham, 1992). The extra exceptional customer service is a unique aspect to a company and aims at building the consumer's trust and royalty. With time, the minor services are offered consistently to provide a positive experience for all

consumers leading to a building of a market share. Blanchard, Bowles, & Saputra (1993) note that organizations have their unique challenges and weaknesses that affect their performance in the market. However, each company has an ability to identify what the consumer needs and it lacks in the market. The literal definition of the WOW experience is the impact of an additional experience offered to consumers with the expectation that they will return. This experience is common in startups and helps build their brand in a market with more competitive services and products.

Customer Service in the Hospitality and Tourism Sector

Customer service plays a vital role in any organization, industry, or sector of the economy. A company is made up of people who form the internal and the external environments in the organization. However, the performance of an institution is defined by how it meets the needs and the experiences of the buyers (Zemke & Williamson, 2001). Customer service is particularly essential in the hospitality industry since it affects how the management builds customer trust and quality. The level of interaction between the customers and the employees of a hospitality company is much greater than the average time these stakeholders interact in other industries (LeBoeuf et al., 1987). Therefore, organizations are required to identify the needs of the consumers and model their companies to meet the stakeholders' experiences. Over the years, the hospitality industry has developed more effective methods of offering high quality services to customers. Businesses in the hospitality industry have pioneered in developing strategies of identifying the consumer needs and improving their service delivery.

The guest experience, service quality, and the wow experience are all factors of service delivery that define the competitiveness of an organization. A business is required to align its service delivery factors with the needs of their consumers (Teng, 2019). To match the consumer

needs with the expectations of the company, the firm must collect information on the expectations of the consumers and measures to abide to their needs. According to Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal (2016), technology has significantly improved the capacity of companies in the hospitality sector to collect, store, and use data to improve the experiences of their customers, service quality, and achieve the WOW experience. Big data analysis allows businesses to use the available technology to facilitate the adaptation of their companies to meet the service needs of the market (Torres et al., 2017). Moreover, companies can align the needs of the market with the services and products they offer to the guests. The collection of big data allows business entities to align their services with the needs of the consumers while improving profitability through low operation costs.

It is critical to note that the quality of services offered to consumers comes at a cost to the company. These costs include purchasing products, employee training, customer experience research, and hiring experts to perform various tasks to improve consumer service. Therefore, the managers must match the returns from such activities with the cost of providing the services to the consumers (Torres et al., 2017). In this case, technology plays a key role in ensuring that the returns from business activities match the costs of production. Additionally, the organizations are required to carefully select and identify the kinds of service improvement that have the highest returns. Differentiation to target specific consumers is essential especially in a flooded market with several consumer segments (LeBoeuf et al., 1987). The provision of products and services to the consumers in the hospitality industry determines how these organizations serve the need of the customers.

The initial step towards providing high quality consumer experience is identifying and defining the principles of service in a hospitality company. There are diverse ways of improving

the experience of guests and they stem from different practices and types of activities in the organization (Willingham, 1992). The company must decide how their customer experience will be improved and the measures the firm will take to meet the needs of the consumers. Second, the business must bring the staff members on board with the intended changes towards improving the experiences of their guests (Torres et al., 2017). Consultation with the employees and changing the principles of customer service to improve the performance of the company are essential steps in the achievement of these goals. Additionally, the members of staff are in close contact with the employees and are aware of their needs and expectations from the company. Therefore, their input would prove useful in developing customer experience strategies.

Through employee training, the company gains an advantage over competitors by empowering the workers to identify the needs of the consumers and providing quality services. Over the years, businesses in the hospitality sector have defined methods of abiding to the consumer experiences (Burns et al., 2018). However, the most essential resources in the achievement of these goals are the members of staff. Their interaction with the employees provides them with the capacity to provide the services required by consumers (Torres et al., 2017). Guest experience is a combination of a wide range of factors that revolve around the employees' capacity to meet the needs of the consumers. In particular, the managers must ensure that employees abide to the company's principles on cleanliness and the impact on the guest experience. While many other factors affect the experiences of the consumers, cleanliness by far ranks the most essential resources in the industry.

In addition to the guest experience, organizations in the hospitality industry must ensure that they equip their companies with high quality service delivery. In the recent years, the quality of services has been defined as the life and sustainability of a hotel or tourism company. The

capacity of the management, employees, and the shareholders to clearly define measures to achieve high quality services is essential to the competitiveness of a hospitality company.

Moreover, the services offered to consumers are more essential to the organization than any other activity in the company (Chetta et al., 2017). For instance, the consumers will not rank a business in the industry based on the products that they sell but based on the services. How the food is delivered and the after-sale services in a company are more essential than the actual product sold to the consumer. While customers may want quality food and value tasty meals, they may not prefer a dirty eating environment even when the products are better. Employees must further be included in the company's attempt to improve service quality among the consumers.

Customer service impacts on the performance of a company in a wide range of ways including the loyalty of consumers, competitiveness, and guest satisfaction. In addition to profitability, companies in the hospitality sector strive to establish a strong and competitive brand as opposed to a weak business image. The perceived service quality has significant implications on overall performance and affects how the companies perform (Chetta et al., 2017). The challenge with service quality is that it is challenging to measure accurately and define its value to the company. Over the years, businesses have developed methods to measure service quality but most often fail to define the actual value to the company (Chan, 2019). Therefore, the employees and managers of an organization are likely to perceive a higher service quality of the firm than the customers. On the other hand, it is the quality perceived by the consumer that matters the most and impacts on the performance of the company. Businesses in the sector have to collect updated data from the consumers on service quality and methods of meeting the needs of the buyers.

In addition to the expectations of a consumer, businesses in the hospitality sector take measures to go the extra mile by offering more to the guests. The WOW factor defines how organizations make their guests feel welcome and more importantly, the methods they make to make a guest want to come back again to the facility (Teng, 2019). As an added advantage, this factor is an essential tool to small businesses that intend to define their services more in response to a competitive market. Additionally, it plays an essential role in providing to the needs of the consumers and meeting their expectations (Chan, 2019). Companies in the hospitality sector have to redefine their services especially after market changes places them at a disadvantage compared to other businesses. Therefore, a firm that has just undergone unpleasant changes in the market such as a drop in their brand value or a decline in competitive advantage could resort to creating a WOW factor in response to the market changes.

Case Analysis at the Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans

In response to the research on the importance of customer service in the hospitality sector, a case study was conducted to assess how companies achieve these goals. During the research, aspects of consumer service including experience, quality, and the WOW experience were assessed to determine how the organization was meeting the needs of the guests. A visit at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in New Orleans proved that consumer service is an essential aspect of the hospitality sector (Ritz-Carlton, 2018). Therefore, companies have invested differently in the attempts to meet their expected growth and meet consumer interests. In this research, various factors affecting how customers perceive the services of a company were put into consideration. Additionally, the assessment indicated how this particular company was responding to the needs of the consumers (Torres et al., 2017). The performance of the hospitality sector is rooted on the level of satisfaction that the consumers feel about the products and services in the company.

One of the aspects that the facility has invested in is clear organization of services to avoid mistakes that affect the consumer experience. The hospitality sector has no room for issues that could make the guests feel unwelcome or lead to confusion in the facility (Teng, 2019). The hotel has invested in a computer program that holds and organizes all the data for a particular guests including their room number, the booking details, and any services they order. Upon booking the hotel, the information of a guest is stored in a central location accessed by all the authorized persons (Ritz-Carlton, 2018). This helps to protect private information while using the rest of the data to improve the overall quality of services to the customers. Additionally, the hotel has highly trained and qualified personnel who initiate a connection between the consumer and the touch points in the facility. The goal of employee training is to facilitate brand development and ensure that all the consumer needs are met to the highest level.

The services at the facility are offered by employees specialized with the tasks assigned to them by the management. Each department has its unique methods of offering the best experience to the consumers. However, the services in the facility are unified to meet the central objectives of the organization and ensure that the needs of the guests are met (Teng, 2019). The company has devoted resources towards meeting the experiences and expectations of the consumers. While profitability is the key goal, the firm demonstrates devotion towards achieving the expectations of the consumers. With the unified computer system, Ritz-Carlton hotel in New Orleans collects big data on the experiences of the consumers. Each guest is allowed and encouraged to leave an anonymous feedback on their experience at the facility (Ritz-Carlton, 2018). This program has significantly changed how the company interacts with the consumers and the measures used to facilitate the growth of the company's brand. Organizational

performance significantly depends on how consumers interact with the touch points in the company.

The facility has invested in measuring the service quality as a means to improve performance and profitability. The organization has invested in the employment of consumer data to assess their views on the services and improve overall performance. While most businesses depend on the managers and employee to assess service quality, the company relies on the feedback from consumers. The goal of the company is to provide high quality services modeled to meet the needs of their clientele (Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016). However, these needs can only be met if the company devotes efforts to achieving the growth objectives defined by consumers. For this reason, the most essential aspect of service quality in the organization is cleanliness and orderliness in the rooms and in the dining places. Businesses in the hospitality industry have to abide to the factors that are of most value to the consumers. Ritz-Carlton hotel receives guests from different parts of the world and from a wide range of cultures (Ritz-Carlton, 2018). Therefore, the organization has established a diverse menu including foods from different parts of the world. To complement this development, the organization employs workers from different cultures and this makes the consumers feel part of the organization. Staying at the hotel feels as being part of a community rather than conducting a business transaction of purchasing a service.

Each company has its unique method of providing a WOW experience to their guests. At Ritz-Carlton, the customers are treated with opportunities to interact with other guests, share experiences, and conduct activities in groups. This is a unique service offered by the hotel where the guests are encouraged to connect with each other families interact, and people make friends. The organization uses these functions to improve the experience of the guests while making them

part of their strategy (Chan, 2019). During the stay in the facility, the management organizes group visits for willing guests who are treated with tours around the facility and in tourist destination in New Orleans. The facility encourages the guests to participate in group activities by charging lower prices for the participants of the events.

Recommendations

Ritz-Carlton hotel in New Orleans has invested in meeting the needs of the consumers and improving consumer services. Additionally, the organization has taken measures to meet the consumer expectations by addressing the issues that the guests raise. Collecting anonymous feedbacks from consumers has facilitated the company's capacity to meet the employee needs and increase profitability. This facility could make several improvement on consumer service quality, experience, and the WOW experience. Customer service is dependent on the employees and should be modeled to respond to their concerns. The workers are in close contact with the guests and they should be motivated to creatively increase the quality of services they provide to the consumers (Chan, 2019). Additionally, the organization should provide the employees with greater mandate to use their experience to meet consumer expectations. The performance of the organization could be improved by empowering and motivating individual employees.

Conclusion

The research and case analysis show that consumer service factors have significant implications on the performance of an organization. The essence of these factors increase in the hospitality industry as they have direct implications on how companies perform. Employees play a significant role in improving the capacity of organizations to meet the needs of their consumers. It is clear that organizations should use the available resources, especially their employees to improve the guests experience. Creativity and motivation among the employees

plays a critical role in how hospitality and tourism organizations meet the expectations of their consumers.

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