

ASSESSMENT OF HOTEL GUEST RELATIONS MANAGEMENT FROM THE ASPECT OF REPEAT GUESTS

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Extended Abstract

Purpose of the Study: One of the greatest challenges facing hotel organizations today is the ever growing volume and pace of competition (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000). Hotels try to develop many strategies to be able to cope with competition. They try to develop strategies to find new customers. This constant search for new customers is called conquest marketing. In the future, conquest marketing will not be sufficient as most hotel industry segments are mature and competition is strong (Shoemaker and Lewis, 1999). Hotels need strategies to keep the present customers. Customer relations has become a field of great interest since hotels aim to attain customer satisfaction and loyalty. As a result of these efforts, the number of repeat customers have been increasing. The purpose of this study is to make an assessment of the guest relations from the aspect of repeat guests and to clarify the factors affecting the repeat guest relations.

Content: Most of the hotels use the term “guest” instead of customer in order to create a familiar, sincere and well-being feeling. Customers are given the utmost importance and many hotels establish special services so as to give the best possible guest service trying to enrich the customer satisfaction. In order to be successful in the industry and to outweigh other competitors, hotel providers must provide customers with unmitigated service satisfaction (Choi and Chu, 2001). Satisfied customers tend to be loyal customers. Highly satisfied customers are much more loyal than satisfied customers (Tepeci, 1999). Pizam, Neumann and Reichel (1978,p.315) give a measure of tourist satisfaction as : “*When the weighted total sum of experiences compared to the expectations results in feelings of gratification, the tourist is satisfied; when the tourist’s actual experiences compared with his expectations result in feelings of distance, he is dissatisfied*”. The satisfaction of the tourist is substantial. A satisfied tourist not only comes again, but also “spreads the word” (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999, p.212).

Customer loyalty is a concept that is in relation with mainly hotel image, brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. Loyal customers will also help promote your hotel by providing strong word-of-mouth, create business referrals, provide references and serve on advisory boards (Bowen and Chien, 2008). Within the hospitality context, there is intense interest in identifying those factors that determine guest

loyalty to hotels because it is generally believed that loyal customers lead to greater profitability. (Martinez and Bosque, 2013). Most hotels offer reward schemes, routinely track their guests' likes and dislikes, and give special deals for repeat customers (Mason et al., 2006).

Guest relations is one of the most critical topics in hotel management. Recently, hotels have been giving a tremendous importance to guest relations as well as creating customer satisfaction. Sustainable customer satisfaction is among the main targets of hotels which is a critical basis for customer loyalty. A loyal guest is defined as a customer who holds favorable attitudes towards the company; commits to the repurchase of the product or service; and recommends the product or service to others (Carev, 2008, p.5). Customer loyalty turns out to be in the form of repeat guests. Repeat guests are the customers who have been coming to the same hotel several times on a regular basis. Hotel attributes attract customers (Tanfoor, Raab, Kim, 2012). Dolcinar and Otler (2003) categorized the attributes into the following areas of the hotel: (1) image, (2) price/value, (3) hotel, (4) room, (5) services, (6) marketing, (7) food and beverage, (8) others, (9) security, and (10) location.

Having a group of repeat guests is quite important from the aspect of sustainability in service quality as well as income and many other related factors. However, the management of guest relations for repeat guests differ from the normal guest relations in many ways. Some of the repeat guests feel themselves as a part of the hotel and start to establish close relationships with the personnel. They feel themselves as belonging to the family which may sometimes cause a special care and way of handling.

Method: This study examines the management of guest relations from the aspect of repeat guests. The research is done with a group of Hotel Managers from the Region of Antalya, located on the southern coast of Turkey, using the qualitative technique of focus group analysis. The findings are analyzed which will help the management of repeat guest relations.

As Dilsad and Latif (2013) state, focus group or focus group interview is a qualitative technique for data collection. A focus group is "a group comprised of individuals with certain characteristics who focus discussions on a given issue or topic" (Anderson, 1990, p.241) According to Denscombe (2007, p.115), "focus group consists of a small group of people, usually between six and nine in number, who are brought together by a trained moderator (the researcher) to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a topic". A focus group interview provides a setting for the relatively homogeneous group to reflect on the questions asked by the interviewer.

Findings: The analysis of the focus group interview provide the following outcomes:

1. **Nationality** : Repeat guests differ by their nationality. Some nations are more familiar to Turkey compared to other nations. They have more tendency to be repeat guests.
2. **Hotel Personnel** : Hotel personnel and their intimate relationships with the guests play the outmost role for being repreferred.
3. **Preference criteria differences by nation**: There are clear preference criteria differences between different nations. Turkish guests give importance to food and beverage whereas German guests give importance to personnel relations.
4. **Special offers for repeat guests**: All of the hotels that are interviewed offer different kinds of service sor benefits for repeat guests.

5. **Expectancy of offer:** When repeat guests are preferring the hotel for many times, they expect more offers and benefits, their level of expectancy increases by year.
6. **Probability of frustration :** The probability of frustration with the quality of service increases as the guest becomes a repeat guest, since he / she knows the previous more quality service.
7. **Being part of the family:** Many repeat customers feel themselves as part of the family and they make close relationships with most of the personnel, they involve with their personal lives as well as bringing them presents every time they come to the hotel.
8. **Careful management of guest relations:** Guest relations with repeat guests are required to be carefully done, since they are quite sensitive and have a high expectancy level, they feel themselves as a part of the family and not as a regular guest.
9. **Repeat guest factors :** Repeat guests prefer a specific hotel mainly for hotel personnel as stated above, however the location, price advantage, service quality, food and beverage quality are among the other factors.
10. **Word-of mouth warriors:** Repeat guests are like the word-of mouth warriors and they intend to make the advertising of the hotel and the destination in every possible surrounding.

Conclusion: The study provided important information related to the management of repeat guests. Hotels want to create customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Repeat guests are important from many aspects. They provide a continuous financial support as well as being apostles for the promotion of the hotel and the tourism destination. They provide word of mouth advertisement and are very willing to talk about their satisfaction.

Management of repeat guests require special care as their level of expectancy is high. Their level of being frustrated increases compared to the previous times of their arrivals. Repeat guests feel themselves as part of the family and want to be close to the personnel. Most of the times, they even bring presents for their families as well as being involved in the private lives of the personnel. Personnel are required to be trained for this sensitive relationship.

As a conclusion, repeat guest relations require a special care and specific services to be given. Repeat guest relationship management should be handled carefully and special attention should be given. Repeat guests view themselves as the part of the family and they need special attention from the hotel management in many ways.

Keywords: Repeat Guest, Guest Relations, Customer Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction

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