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A Qualitative Approach to Measure Customer Experience and Its Impact on Customer Service Satisfaction in the Hospitality Industry

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Firms in the hospitality industry are relying on customer experience (CX) to create a competitive advantage and fulfil the ever-changing needs of customers. CX research in the hospitality industry is scarce, and to advance the research on this topic, we aim to conceptualize CX and explore its key dimensions in luxury hotel segments in the context of Pakistan. A qualitative approach- in-depth interviews were conducted with senior managers of big luxury hotels in Pakistan to explore the dimensions of CX. The conceptualized framework derived from grounded theory encapsulates five elements of CX: 1) personalization, 2) visual-sensory experience, 3) services, 4) automation, 5) user's security and privacy. Study results further reveal that customers with international exposure give high importance to features like automation and privacy & security aspects in service design delivery. Whereas, local guests prefer customization, personalization, and visual sensory cues in services during their stay in the hotel. However, service quality remains a critical factor for all guests. The conceptualized framework informs managers' decision-making regarding service design and delivers a unique experience to their guests.



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Introduction

Hoteliers and managers rely on customer experience (CX) to compete in the hospitality industry (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Hancock 2021). Hospitality industry is one of the highly competitive industries which requires constant innovation in product design and services offering from reservations system to items on touch menu pad. In a market-driven economy, customers enjoy a central position, so is the CX in creating competitive advantage. All innovative businesses are built around great CX and it creates value for customers (Niedziółka, 2018). Recent technological trends have changed consumer decision making and behavior in choosing destinations, lodging and

dining experience to optimize their leisure experience. Customer experience management offers numerous benefits including brand differentiation (Schmitt, 2010); customer loyalty (Klaus and Maklan, 2013) and competitive advantage (Havíř, D. 2019).

The concept has been used in variety of expression in previous studies such as customer experience (Veloso and Gomez-Suarez, 2023; Gahler et al., 2023), customer experience management (Kandampully et al., 2018; Hwang and Seo 2016), user experience (Zhang & Qi 2019), guest experience (Ugwuanyi, et al., 2021; Zarezadeh et al., 2022), and brand experience (Khan & Rahman, 2017; Gómez-Suárez and Veloso 2020; Vlahovic-Mlakar & Ozretic-Dosen 2022). Various researchers in the past has focused on customer experience research and topic has been examined with co-creation (Ponsignon et al., 2015); services quality (Bueno et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2021); hospitality and tourism industry (Kim and So, 2023), and management in hotels (Rahimian et al., 2021). CX in hospitality industry has been examined with multiple variables such as brand loyalty (Guan et al., 2021); customer satisfaction (Kim & Kim, 2022); brand experience (Khan and Rahman, 2017); brand experience and word-of-mouth recommendation (Gómez-Suárez and Veloso, 2020).

Literature reveals that CX in hotels can be influenced by three service dimensions: core, servicescape, and employee (King et al., 2013). Ryu and Jang's (2008) revealed six service quality factors for restaurants including aesthetics, ambience, lighting, service product, layout and social. Similarly, Morgan et al., (2008) investigated the role of employees, processes, and physical evidence on managing customer's dining experiences. Nixon and Rieple (2010) concluded that service design and systems help employees to foster customer engagement. CX research has been adapted and applied to hotels (Khan and Rahman, 2017) and peer-to-peer accommodations (Zhang, et al., 2020).

The hotel is a key element of the hospitality and tourism industry, which provides CX that promotes tourists' psychological well-being (Xie et al., 2022). The industry is regulated by multiple organizations, from world tourism organizations and intentional hotels and restaurants associations. Classification standards are created by consumer bodies and travel agencies, government and professional bodies such as consumer guide (AAA, RAC), global distribution system (GDS) (Amadeus, Sabre, Galilo), computer reservation system (CRS) and brokers, hotels chain, tour operators and international organization for standards(ISO).

However, CX specific to the hotel industry reveals a research gap (Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023), and therefore this study aims to bridges the gap by conceptualizing CX in luxury hotel segments in the context of Pakistan using qualitative inquiry. Many researchers in the past have used qualitative interviews to examine CX in hospitality (e.g., Sthapit et al., 2019; Cetin & Walls 2016). It is common to use questionnaire surveys and self-report with predefined questions to collect data in users' experience studies (Yang et al., 2019). Narratives and stories provided by consumers themselves are also popular methods in CX research (Buehring & O'Mahony, 2019; Brochado et al., 2020). This study uses a qualitative approach (semi-structured in-depth interviews) with managers to gather commentary, narratives, and views on CX. Despite extensive literature on CX, there is little consensus on the conceptualization, dimensionality and definition of the concept because of its personalized nature. Further literature also highlights that CX remains

complex and inconsistent (Cetin and Dincer, 2014), CX is elusive and difficult to define because of its multiple dimensions (Kandampully et al., 2018). Therefore, this study aims to conceptualize and explore various dimensions of CX in hotel industry of Pakistan. This study will inform hotel managers' decision-making in service delivery design and develop a competitive advantage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer experience in the hospitality industry

CX is a multidimensional concept that involves a highly subjective response of consumers at cognitive, affective and behaviors level to hotel brand stimuli (Wiedmann et al., 2018). Khan et al., (2021) commented that CX is all about managing a broad series of touchpoints in the customer journey from information search to post-purchase evaluations. Pijls et al., (2011) summarize experience of interaction between individuals and the environment. Interaction involves feelings and emotions which stimulate sensory perception of the environment. Veloso and Gomez-Suarez (2023) report that research publication on CX in the hotel industry only got to increase after 2015 and 2019 saw the highest number of publications (11) followed by 2020-2021 with 4 publications in each year.

Meeting customer expectations in hotels leads to positive and memorable experiences. Moreover, positive feelings encountered during a service delivery result in increased overall evaluation of services and the brand (Kim and Moon, 2009; Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2011). CX literature shows that customers' choice of hotels is mainly driven by positive experience with a brand instead of other factors such as quality, value for money or convenience (Chapple et al., 2023). It shows that the significance of CX is services design. Khan and Rahman (2017) identified five variables related to the hotel brand experience: 1) Hotel location, 2) Hotel stay and ambience, 3) Hotel staff competence, 4) Hotel website and social media experience, 5) Guest-to-guest experience. Kim and So (2023) examined CX in the hospitality and tourism industry with emphasis on various activities such as lodging, catering, tour operators and leisure activities, among others.

Rehman et al., (2022) conducted a bibliometric analysis of 188 papers in the tourism and hospitality industry published in a web of Science database from 2008 to 2021. They came up with six conceptual categories: 1) CX in the physical environment, (2) Technology-oriented CX, (3) CX as driver of well-being, (4) Emotional value in the consumption experience, (5) Behavioral intentions-oriented CX, and (6) Total customer experience. Pijls et al., (2011) explained that experience can be defined into four different ways: 1) experience as a memorable event, 2) experience as affective and/or cognitive responses, 3) experience as multiple moments, 4) experience as a result or as a process.

Firstly, experience can be perceived in terms of memorable events such as memorable dining experiences (Ataf & Al-Balushi, 2024; Adesina et al., 2022). Secondly, experience as affective and/or cognitive responses refers to the complexity of emotions and experiences are perceived as feelings which can trigger expressions like joy, laughter, sadness etc. (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009). Experience has both a cognitive component, an emotional and a physiological component. Thirdly, experience as multiple moments have been advocated by several researchers. Service is

seen as a journey and total experience that comprises multiple components and touchpoints. Total experience entails all actual real-time encounters with service brands.

CX results from customer's interactions with a firm at all touch points (Kandampully and Solnet, 2024). Hassenzahl & Tractinsky (2006) commented that user experience results from the interaction effects of three elements: 1) user's characteristic, 2) the characteristics of the product or service, 3) the context in which this interaction takes place. This is one of the reasons, every customer gets a different experience and gives subjective meanings to those experiences. Customers experience results from cognitive, emotional and social responses. It is also believed that situational factors like presence of other customers, atmosphere, stakeholder and suppliers are out of control of a firm and thus influence customer experience (Kandampully et al., 2018). Most of the service quality model features cognitive components, while less focus on emotional aspects (Brunner-Sperdin and Peters, 2009).

Brand experience can be conceptualized as "sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments." (Brakus et al. 2009, p.53). Brand experience offers differentiation and consists of four dimensions: 1) sensory, 2) affective, 3) intellectual and 4) behavioral. Sensory stimulation and visual aspect refers to aesthetic sense of environment (Beckman et al., 2013; Huaman-Ramirez and Merunka, 2019). Affective dimension refers to feelings and emotional response of consumers. Intellectual dimension refers to analytical and imaginative response which simulates curiosity (Schmitt, 1999; Beckman et al., 2013; Huaman-Ramirez and Merunka, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative inquiry, mainly interviews to examine the given research problem from the perspective of hotel managers. The study relies on commentary and views of hotel managers because they are people who are really involved in designing and delivering customer experience. For the purpose of this study, the researcher seeks the derivation of emerging categories among hotel managers to conceptualize the CX. The process of data analysis involves coding the interviews text, performing thematic analysis, search for meanings, interpretation and conclusion. Qualitative research is based on finding meanings, guided by definitions, theories and personal feelings. Thematic analysis through coding is the manner in which text and words are units of analysis and the method is suitable to analyze recorded interviews. (Collis, Hussey, 2009, 164-165). Content analysis is a research method that systematically describes, categorizes, and makes inferences about communication messages (Croucher, Cronn-Mills, 2018, 176). Thus, it allows the researchers to identify and count the occurrence of specific dimensions or characteristics of text and draw conclusions (Hansen & Machin, 2019, 92). In this context, grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) informs our qualitative inquiry and data analysis. Grounded theory strategy is characterized to compare the data and perform theoretical sampling of groups to unveil similarities and differences. Personal interviews were conducted with hotel managers of PC hotels and Nishat hotels, in Lahore, Pakistan.

The research asked in depth questions and convenience sampling techniques were used to collect the data. Pakistan's tourism and hotel industry is valued approx. \$20 billion in 2020 (Moosvi, & Ali, 2022). Main luxury hotels in Pakistan includes Pearl Continental Hotel, Nishat Hotel, Serena Hotel, Marriott, Avari Hotel, and Faletti's Hotel. Pearl continental (PC) hotel is a chain of high-end hospitality, owned by Hashoo Group. They operate the five-star Pearl-Continental Hotels and Marriott Hotels in Pakistan. Nishat Group, a Pakistani multinational conglomerate company headquartered in Lahore, Pakistan. Their boutique hotels differentiate on luxury, food, décor and recreation of European experience. Nishat hotels are known for their contemporary design, digitalization, and popularity with the fashion industry and Gen-Z. Whereas, PC is known for its royal look, heritage and corporate personalized experience. Their target audience is bureaucracy, sports and traditional families.

The dimensions of customer experience were explored through in depth interviews with senior managers of luxury hotels in Lahore and Islamabad, Pakistan. Both cities host the largest number of international and local tourists. Interviewees were asked to explain the consumer's preferences, attitude, behaviors, motivations, and factors affecting their choice of hotels. For example, 1) what are the key features of your customer services design? 2) How do you ensure that a customer really enjoys staying with you and gaining a memorable experience? 3) Which aspect of your services/product/experience do you focus more on and why? 4) How do you manage the needs and expectations of different customers' segments? 5) What are the biggest challenges the hotel industry is facing now and in the coming years? 6) How do you create value for your customers and strategies for your brand differentiation? Interview data was recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Saturation was reached after five interviews with managers. The researcher labelled and coded the major ideas in the text into codes and subcodes. These codes were merged together to form a category and sub-categories. Finally, the emerging categories were grouped under major themes for thematic segmentation and conceptualization of research questions.

RESULTS

Developing a coding scheme

In content analysis, the coding frame and the coding process can be adjusted and adapted as the analysis progresses (Croucher, Cronn-Mills, 2018, 162). The coding process systematically places the data into a coding frame and streamline the data into manageable form. The qualitative content analysis comprises three main elements as coding, categories and themes.

- **Codes** are basic labels assigned to a phrase or segment of text in the data.
- **Categories** are broader groups of codes which help to reduce the process and data into useful structure or segments.
- **Themes** are high-level clusters of categories

In the first step, key words and/phrases were chosen as units of analysis for coding. We examine the text and found key words as shown in the table 1.1

Table 1.1: **Keywords and Segments**

keywords	Phrase/ segments
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Technology	“...integration of latest technology in our product and services has really enhance consumer perceptions of services”
Data analytics	“...hotels are relying on data analytics to understand customers’ needs to better design services”.
Integration	“...I believe connectivity and integration are the main elements of automation process in hotel industry”
Online behavior	“...customer reviews on websites and other digital platforms are like e-word of mouth and influence customer choice of hotels”.
Personalization	“...in our culture, handshakes and physical touch increase consumer perception of warmth, empathy and exclusivity in hotel customer services”.
Experience	“....business travelers want a comfortable and relaxing environment, while leisure travelers want entertainment and immersive experiences”.
Customer services	“...customer service in the hotel sector involves integrating multiple elements to create a seamless and enjoyable experience”
Local guests	“...local travelers want themed restaurants, themed accommodation and cultural food”.
Foreign guests	“....our international guests want a safety and relax environment and not much demanding”
Show-Biz guests	“.... provide luxurious amenities such as spacious suites, private dining options, specific requests, such as arranging private events”.
Sports	“...prefer state-of-the-art fitness centers, swimming pools, and access to sports facilities. They have special dietary needs with customized meal plans and nutritional options”
Business	“...provide comprehensive business services, including meeting rooms, conference facilities, and business centers equipped with office supplies and technology. Offer express check-in/check-out services and flexible booking options for busy schedules”.
Families	“...offer family-friendly amenities such as adjoining rooms, kids' clubs, play areas, and babysitting services”
Services	“...staff-customer interaction quality is very important and staff is trained for friendly behavior, problem solving”

Ambience	“...customers prefer visually appealing objects, lighter tone of music, language style, multi channels communication and excitement, energy in the atmosphere”.
Visual	“...we incorporate artwork, sculpture, paintings, and decorative pieces to reflect our brand identity and local culture”.
Facilities	“...customers feel delighted when they see the soft and elegant texture of pillows, lines, high quality mattresses, cozy blankets and dark shades of soft carpets”.
Gen-z	“...majority of gen-z cannot afford PC and Serena, so they prefer something more practical and contemporary brands in hospitality”.
	“Standalone stylish properties and new premium chains like Nishat are actually targeting generation-z and consumers who want ultra-modern facilities, style and ambience”.
Trends	“New format is hotels adjacent to shopping malls where customers want combo-shopping+ hoteling like in Dubai. In Pakistan we have Emporium Mall+Nishat hotel, Centaurus Tower Islamabad Hotel”.
Sustainability	“...we implement eco-friendly practices such as energy-efficient lighting, water conservation measures, and waste reduction programs”

Source: Author’s illustration

Wordcloud

Key words were also extracted using the word cloud tool by jasondavies.com. In the software setting, number of words counts were chosen 250, orientation from -60 to 60 and type as spiral which produced the following results.



Source: Authors’ illustration of word cloud (Fig 1.1 World Cloud)

When using world clouds, the larger the words, the more frequently they are used, the more significant they are. We can frequently see key words such as experience, services, customers, technology, hotels, security, safety, online, value, design. preference, needs, guest, rooms, dinning, staff etc. Second, the measurement of coding was based on frequency or words count as

depicted in table 1.2. Further, categories of codes and coding sheet was created to support data analysis as shown in the Table 1.2

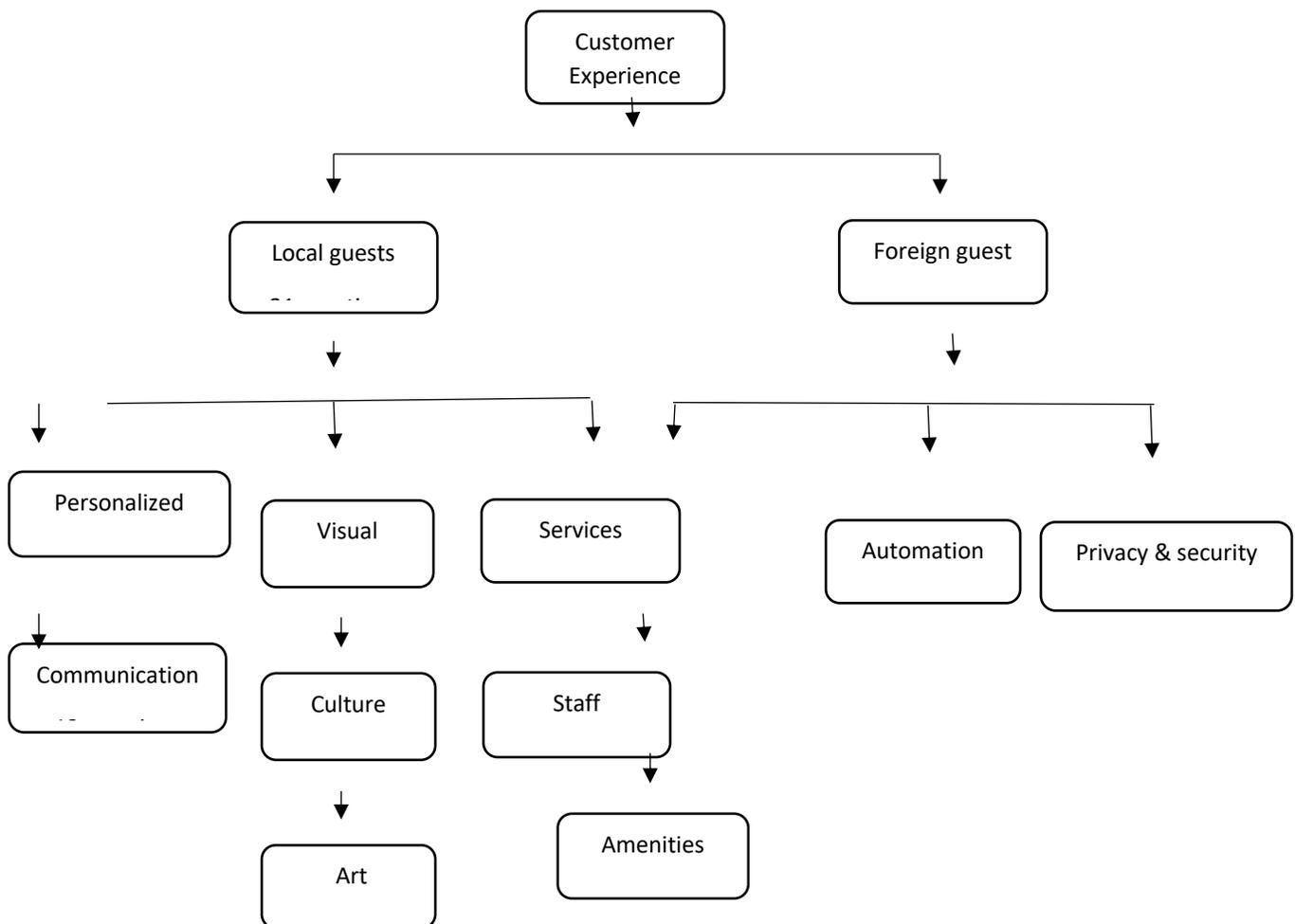
Table 1.2 **Coding Scheme**

<i>Categorize</i>	<i>Meta-Code</i>	<i>Key words</i>	<i>Codes</i>
<i>Automation</i>	A	technology	A1
		integration	A2
		innovative	A3
		digitalization	A4
		emerging/new possibilities	A5
		sustainability/eco-friendly/recycling	A6
		efficient use of resources	A7
		online platforms/apps/websites	A8
		online booking, online reviews, mobile check-inn.	A9
		Gen-z	A10
<i>Personalization</i>	P	customization	P1
		personal communication	P2
		services and staff friendliness	P3
		amenities and facilities	P4
		special treatment	P5
		customer's insights	P6
		empathy and warmth	P8
		relationships	P9
<i>Visual-sensory</i>	V	feelings & emotions	V1
		memories/immersive experience	V2
		ambiance, atmosphere & music	V3
		food and culture	V4
		aesthetic sense, artwork, paintings & decorative piece	V5

<i>Security & privacy</i>	S	special events & activities	V6
		signage & navigation	V7
		dedicated floors/zone	V8
		safety	S1
		data protection	S2
		Secure payments	S3
		privacy	S4
		multiple security checks	S5
		hassle free transaction	S6
		Health and hygienic	S7

Source: Author’s illustration

Fig 1.2 Hierarchical coding and construction of themes



Source: Author's illustration.

DISCUSSIONS

In-depth interviews with senior managers at the luxury hotel segment in Pakistan lead to the identification of five dimensions of customer experience as: 1) personalization, 2) visual-sensory, 3) services, 4) automation, 5) privacy and security. We extend the discussion on our findings as following.

1. Personalization

Personalization is at expense of standardization which offers flexibility in services and meets various needs of different customers. Implementation of personalization strategies in the hospitality industry is challenging but researchers are continuously searching for effective implementation of services personalization. (Cavdar et al., 2021). It is difficult to conceptualize because of differences in actuality and how personalization is perceived (Lei et al., 2024). Personalization may not necessarily result in positive CX due to mismatch between actual and perceived personalization. Compromise on accuracy of customer needs does not produce desired results. However, with technological advances such as use of big data and AI, customization has become easy and makes CX unique. Customization refers to tailor-made services and it plays significant role in delivery of high quality services (Ding and Keh, 2016). Further, Ariffin & Maghzi, (2012) commented that personalization is one of five dimensions of hotel services. Customization or personalization can be implemented by understanding customer behavior, preferences, buying patterns, and other information that inform customer decisions making process. Literature lacks clarity on how to personalize the services for improved customer experience (Lambillotte et al., 2022). Despite personalization being a subjective and complex form, previous research recognizes efforts and surprise two key dimensions of personalization. (Lei et al., 2024).

Luxury hotel segment is characterized by customization and personalization. The results revealed that local guests were more likely to revisit the hotel only if the services offered have an element of personalization. Personalization gives local guests a sense of exclusivity and special treatment. In this regard, hotel staff play an important role in customized services delivery. These are psychological attributes of services that lead to developing a positive attitude towards hospitality brands. Personalization operates at two levels; first, taking care of individual preferences with regard to check-ins and out, room amenities, dietary & food requirements facilities etc. Second aspect is about personalized communication and interaction quality with guests such as from meeting and greetings at the lobby to sending personalized emails at pre and post purchase stages. In recent times, digital communication and use of Chabot conversation is increasing in the hospitality industry and thus providing a different experience to users. However, AI-based conversation through catboats may reduce the sense of human touch and element of personalization which is a further area of research in the context of the hospitality industry of

Pakistan. Followings are key phrases from the interviews showing the significance of personalization

“Understanding customer need is the first step in personalization. Customers feel pampered and delighted when staff provides them what they need before they ask for it”

“We have personalized communication with our repeat customer through proper communication program with allow us in advance to personalize their booking”

Our guests prefer personalized communication, for instances special physical gestures at the entrance, dedicated welcome message, preferential treatment at reception, customized room setting, in-room entertainment and facilities tailored to their personal preferences”

“In our culture, hand shake and physical touch increase consumer perception of warmth, empathy and exclusivity in hotel customer services”.

It is clear from the interviews that personalization in services creates unique experiences and satisfaction for customers. Customization in services is dependent on the employee's attitude, behavior and willing to understand and solve customer problems. Customers value personalized communication and interaction with hotel staff and guests to create a positive CX. Staff is at the front foot in hotels to create memorable customer experiences. Therefore, it is not enough for hotels to just have beautifully designed signature properties, what really creates a difference is the well trained staff to take care of customers, personalized communication and build relationships.

2. Visuals and sensory experience

It's important to remember that what's valuable to the customer is what he notices, not what he's actually given (Szymura-Tyc 2006). Sensory experience is evaluated at both levels: cognitive and emotional level but emotional dimension predominates in the tourism sector (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018). Brakus et al., (2009) comprehend that sensory simulation is a key element of brand experience. Sensory components include sense of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste that leads to feelings such as arousal pleasure, excitement and satisfaction. Literature highlights that luxury hotels emphasize both ambiance (comfort, decor, cleanliness, designs, landscaping, air quality) and multisensory cues such as temperature, scent, and visual cues (Walls et al.,2011).

Visual aspects play an important role in brand recall as they are easy to remember and help to configure the esthetic sense of the environment (Beckman et al., 2013; Ramirez and Merunka.,2019). Tourists usually travel for pleasure and fun. Therefore, hotel brands need to focus on emotional and sensory dimensions when designing customer services. Literature also shows that hotels need to generate unique experiences for customers that positively influence their behaviors (Sukhu et al., 2019). Customers only take away positive emotions and memories from the overall experience (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018); which then foster the relationships between consumers and brands (Huang, 2017). Literature suggests that certain psychological factors such as hedonism, ambiance, escapism, and convenience affect guests' experience (Aeberhard et al., 2020). Interview commentary also shows the significance of sensory and atmospheric cues that influence guest's experience as follows.

“Customers’ prefer visually appealing objects, lighter tone of music, energy in the atmosphere and language style and diversity”

“Customers feel delighted when they eat in our boutique restaurants. Our dining services surprise our guests for loyalty”.

“We provide sensory experience through our facilities such as design of our sofas, chairs and bedding offer comfort, luxury, and style. Customer feel delighted when see the soft and elegant texture of pillows, lines, high quality mattress, cozy blankets and dark shaded soft carpets”

In conclusion, it is evident from the research, in luxury hotel segment, emphasis on the service and intangible provides more care than the physical attributes or its amenities (Aeberhard et al., 2020). Luxury hotel segment needs to focus on both ambience and multisensory cues to get a favorable response from guests. Visitor’s response to environmental cues is encoded with meanings and emotions that in turn drives a memorable experience. In general, experience is not static or long lasting; it tends to fade away after some time. Therefore, hotels need to understand consumer wants and design distinct experiences based on consumer interests. Luxury hotels are driven by services and experience, which are prime factors in customer satisfaction and loyalty intentions. Hotels display decorative pieces, artifacts, stylistic furniture and playback music in lobby and restaurants to psychologically appeal to visitors. Design and décor contribute to great extent in the sensory and visual experience of guests. Luxury hotels use aesthetic appeals to increase customer artistic value and pleasure. Hotel ambience and overall atmosphere play a vital role in a positive CX.

3. Services

Service quality affects customers’ attitude and behavioral loyalty (Chikazhe et al., 2021). Services in hospitality have become one of most important factors for customer satisfaction and gaining competitive advantage. Hotel services, refers to all those activities aimed to entertain the guests through memorable and friendly experiences that satisfy both their physiological and emotional needs. However, the previous researchers have examined the conceptualization of service in hospitality (Tasci & Semrad, 2016; Munasinghe et al., 2022). Services quality serve the most important functions such as customer satisfaction, and brand image, customer retention (Ashraf et al., 2018). To create memorable CX, hotels are offering experience-based services which enhance customer’s retention. Hospitality sectors caters to heterogeneous needs of customers and offer products and services to meet high expectations of customers. Therefore, it is very challenging to meet the needs of heterogeneous customers in socio-political and cultural context. Service quality concept was long operationalized and investigated by many researchers in the past (e.g. Parasuraman et al., 1988; Dabholkar, et al.,2000). Services quality scale is not universal and its dimensionality varies from type of services and socio-cultural context.

In general, service quality encompasses tangible and intangible aspects. Tangible elements include physical surroundings of the place where the service is delivered. For example, room furnishing, and décor. While intangible aspects include employees’ knowledge, politeness, behavior etc. Parasuraman et al., (1988) proposed five dimensions of service quality including tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy. Further, Mei et al. (1999) proposed three dimensions including employees, tangible, and reliability in the Australian hotel

industry. Empathy was found to be an important part of services in research. CX quality is much dependent on services and better services gives pleasurable experience in hotels (Khan et al., 2015). Hotel industry offers experience-based services for memorable experience and brand differentiation. Extent literature reveals that overall service quality leads to customer satisfaction. Therefore, offering superior service in the hotel industry drives customer satisfaction and loyalty. The commentary from interviews transcriptions also shows the significance of service quality in the hotel industry.

“In hospitality industry, the services are only considered valued, when customer perceive them credible, consistent and timely”

“Visitors interactions with staff at multiple stages determines customer satisfaction level in the hospitality industry”.

“We take good care of our rooms' amenities, comfort, cleanliness and services. Our guest really enjoys our facilities like swimming pool, spa, fitness center, and dining facilities”

“Our staff is well trained for interpersonal communication, empathy, engagement and problem solving”.

To sum up, services in the hotel industry emphasize staff's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to effectively engage the customers. Services in hospitality are positively associated with guest experience and success of service providers (Mody et al., 2019). Quality is the most important factor in customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Overall service quality creates a positive customer experience and also provides a source of competitive advantage in the hotel industry (Rahman et al., 2020).

4.0 Automation

Business process automation is happening along industries to streamline the process and technology is playing a significant role (Fuhrken, 2022). Automation increases productivity and performance of business (Kromann, et al., 2020) and allows hotels to reduce repetitive tasks and streamline operation (Hotel Tech Report, 2021). Automation makes the working environment more fulfilling in the front office, food & beverage, and housekeeping department (Krstic et al., 2015). Previous study shows that human knowledge, services and robotics applications are the most factors influencing automation in the hospitality industry (Jabeen et al., 2022). It is also evident from previous studies that hotel technology normally includes smart mobile phone service, chatbots, microblogs, microblogs (Nyagadza, 2020). Literature defines automation as the process of integrating customers with a website or platform and finding efficient and interactive ways to maintain communication with customers in real time. It's an interdisciplinary approach, which uses interaction between people and machines in order to create value to users (Smith et al., 2014). Hotel managers described automation, one of the key components in user experience. and it encapsulates an ecosystem of technologies, product or services innovation, integration and sustainability. Following statements summaries how the hoteliers are inducting or upgrading innovative technologies in their systems.

“Big hotel chains are using a strategic information system (SIS) for effectively managing their resources and productivity. Enterprise resource planning (ERP) and supply chain management system(SCM) are more frequently used in hospitality industry”

“ERP system helps hotels to implement global policies that ensure uniformity and consistency in resource planning. Auto generated notifications and emails to various department and partners in supply chain ensure availability of material, human resource and financial management”

“Now sustainability is linked to use of technology and operational efficiency, energy conservation, recycling and waste management depends on use of innovative technologies”.

To sum up, literature clearly suggests that technology changes traveler’s behavior (Benckendorff et al., 2014); and it has also enabled them to share their experiences through networking. Induction of information systems and technology has not only educated the travelers but also has transformed their behavior (Tussyadiah, 2016). Automation or technological advancement has become a prime factor in increasing productivity and creating competitive advantage in hospitality. Hotels are trying to keep up with technological trends to meet customer expectations. From a consumer perspective, mobile phone apps, websites, person-to-goods technologies (e.g. voice recognition system) and virtual reality are becoming more common in the hospitality industry. Online platforms in hospitality have not only revolutionized the industry but made it more competitive. Digitalization has created opportunities for co-creation and e-word of mouth has both positive and negative effects on brands. Digitalization has empowered the travelers to book hotels and air tickets online and posting stories and reels on social media by travelers are tools to build brand emotional appeal.

5. User privacy and security

Some destinations have catchy slogans like “safe haven” to attract safety conscious consumers. Safety and security is a basic need of humans and they avoid places associated with risk and danger. Security is a critical factor in determining performance of the hotel industry of Pakistan (Khan, 2012). In literature, safety and security are two different constructs with their own definitions. Safety refers to protection of staff and guests against minor, fatal injuries or hazards, and against unintentional incidents (Enz and Taylor, 2003). While security refers to the prevention of and protection against foreseeable dangers; unlawful activities; and protection of a country, a building, or a person against attack or danger (Oxford Dictionary).

Ensuring guests' safe and secure stay requires safety of property as well as guests. Customers revisit intentions clearly depends on the security trust of the hotel (Diminyi et al., 2020). A business can thrive in a safe working environment and hotels manage this aspect with great security measures. Therefore, it is important for hotels to identify the threats to customer’s safety and security (Chan and Lam, 2013). It shows that a sense of security increases tourist attractiveness, business competitiveness and offers unforgettable experiences for guests. Anichiti et al (2021) examined the impact of safety and security on customer satisfaction and identified eight dimensions: detectors, emergency preparedness, medical preparedness, staff security, guestroom security, pool and beach security, hotel access control, and cyber security. Following phrases from interviews demonstrate the significance and dimensionality of travelers’ safety and security

“Give the security situation in Pakistan over the last two decades, luxury hotels have safe bunker, containers, gate barriers, detectors, and other devices to avoid any security incident”

“Security measures includes, CCTV cameras, fire prevention systems, alarm system, smoke detector, backup lighting systems, 24-hours surveillance, presence of security guards, and testing of security systems”.

“Cyber security and data protection are the key aspects of security in the tourism industry”

Current research also includes health and hygiene, as one of key dimensions of security and safety (Anichiti et al., 2021). Hygiene and contamination risk are major concerns of customers in dining. Cleanliness is part of safety and the hotel industry must ensure food safety. After-Covid-19 pandemic, hotels implemented technological solutions to ensure visitor safety. Using technology reduces human involvement in check-ins and increases customer sense of autonomy, privacy and effectiveness. Hotels have management information systems (MIS) in place to increase service level and its protection of customer information from cyber-attacks and along with other system, it ensures safety of guests.

Conclusion

Customer satisfaction in luxury hotel segments in Pakistan is mainly driven by intangible features such as personalization in services, multi-sensory and visual experience and service quality. Staff training and amenities mainly constitute the services quality dimensions. Technology integration and process automation are necessary to keep up the services level high and operational efficiency. Whereas, physical features include process automation and safety and security. Safety and security were conceptualized with hygiene, food safety, privacy, data protection and physical security.

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