

Направление «Менеджмент»

Профиль «Экономика впечатлений: менеджмент в индустрии гостеприимства и туризме» Код – 055

Время выполнения задания - 180 минут

Прочитайте статью¹ и сделайте ее критический анализ на русском языке.

Marketers in the hotel industry strive to perform up to customers' expectation and deliver an exceptional service. Therefore, they constantly seek to gain insights on service quality through investigation on customers' experience, such as on what customers like and what they dislike (Crotts et al., 2008). Nevertheless, a customers' experience is an experiential product that involves the intricacy and resiliency of subjectivity. Furthermore, the task of creating a great experience is even more daunting at a global stage as many hotels enter foreign markets and find themselves in whole new cultures. Consequently, understanding what constitutes a valuable customer experience becomes a question to be tackled for firms seeking to be successful in the global market.

The present study explored customer delight in a lodging experience. The topic of customer service and customer experience is highly relevant in the hotel industry and therefore warrants further empirical study. The objective of this study was to examine the phenomenon of customer delight from a cross-cultural perspective. Specifically, it aims to explore the factors that drive a delightful experience and to uncover the difference existing across various travelers.

Customer delight

Key drivers of customer delight

Customer delight has been defined from three different perspectives in the current literature. One definition stresses the confirmation–disconfirmation paradigm. The next group of research stresses the emotional components. Finally, the last school of thought emphasizes human needs.

Existing literature commonly addressed that the construct of delight bears two characteristics: (a) delight occurs as a result of memorable, positive reproducible events. As opposed to satisfaction, delight lingers for a longer period of time, and (b) delight is more strongly associated with customer loyalty and intent to repeat purchase. Compared to merely satisfied customers, delighted customers tend to be more loyal and more likely to be retained.

Key drivers of customer delight have been defined as service attributes that contribute to a delightful experience (Crotts et al., 2008). Such factors have major impact on customer evaluation and behavior which include satisfaction and repeat purchase intention. Some customer delight drivers might be context-specific rather than universal. From the perspective of customer experience management, it is strategically meaningful to explore what these key drivers are as evaluation with different components of an experience may have remarkably different impacts on the overall evaluation. In a guest's mind, one under-performed area may not be the deal-breaker to the lodging experience. Rather, the entire experience can be spoiled if the perceived key areas do not perform well. Despite the association of delight drivers with customer experience, very few studies have actually dedicated to empirically examine this phenomenon and no study to the author's knowledge has explored it in a hotel setting.

Among existing empirical evidence, the study by Crotts et al. (2008) investigated key delight drivers in the context of a food and wine festival. Using data collected from 310

¹ На основе статьи Torres., E.N., Fu, X., Lehto, X. Examining key drivers of customer delight in a hotel experience: A cross-cultural perspective // International Journal of Hospitality Management, Vol. 36, 2014, pp. 255–262

participants, the authors identified “diversity of wines and food tasting” and “quality of the food samples” as two major factors that contribute to participants’ delight. Also noteworthy is that, although respondents mentioned negative impressions of the festival such as “lack of seating” and “too crowded”, they still rated the overall experience as positive and demonstrated revisit intention. Thus, delight generated from key driver areas is proven to be persuasive enough to counteract negative feelings and dictate the overall evaluation. Torres and Kline (2013) conducted content analysis of letters of guest feedback. As part of their results, they present a typology for customer delight. Accordingly, the following themes were presented: charismatic delight (associated with employee friendliness personality), fulfillment delight (associated with the fulfillment of higher-level needs such as that of self-esteem), problem resolution delight (resulting from the effective solution of a guest problem, especially when it was not the hotel's responsibility), professional delight (resulting from employee professionalism), and comparative delight (emerging from the realization that a hotel is superior to that of competitors).

Seeking a deeper understanding of the experience economy, Hosany and Witham (2010) studied the experience of cruise travelers from three different nationalities. They discovered that esthetics had the highest impact on the guests’ appraisal of the cruise experience, followed by the dimension of entertainment, and escapism. Their study proposed that pleasant experiences will positively impact satisfaction, and this in turn will affect a traveler's intention to spread positive word-of-mouth.

The influence of culture

One of the most important theories regarding the role of national culture in management comes from Hofstede (1993). In order to clearly delineate the cultural differences, Hofstede (1993) proposed five dimensions, including power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term/short-term orientation, which have become a well-cited framework for many studies on service experience.

To understand the impact of culture in customer satisfaction, Crotts and Erdmann (2000) studied international tourists after their visit to the United States, utilizing the masculinity/femininity dimension developed by Hofstede (1993). High masculinity cultures tend to emphasize competition and assertiveness, whereas cultures of high femininity tend to stress concern for other and interpersonal relations. The researchers discovered that guests from high masculinity cultures were more likely to be critical of various aspects of their experience such as airport facilities. In contrast, those from national cultures with low masculinity (i.e. high femininity) tended to offer more positive evaluations of their experience. In terms of loyalty, travelers from high masculinity cultures displayed greater defector tendencies, while those who traveled from high femininity cultures were more likely to be loyal (Crotts and Erdmann, 2000).

Another study by Tsaur et al. (2005) examined the service quality dimensions of SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988) in relation to the cross-cultural impact. In the dimensions of tangibles, reliability, and empathy, tourists from the English heritage cultures tended to perceive better service quality, more so than their Asian and other European counterparts, while in the dimensions of responsiveness and assurance, the Anglo-Saxon group perceived better quality than the Asians.

The impact of customer delight

For years, customer satisfaction has been used as the benchmark of success in managing customer relationships. In recent years, customer delight has been studied as the new standard of managing guest relations. Some researchers have proposed that as the level of satisfaction increases, loyalty among customers increases. In light of this, it has been revealed that very satisfied customers were more likely to be loyal than customers who said they were satisfied (Kumar et al., 2001). Customer delight has also been found to have a stronger impact on affective loyalty when compared to customer satisfaction (Kim, 2011). Finn (2005) argued that previous studies that sought to understand the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty have

produced mixed results due to the possibility of a non-linear relationship. He proposed that at extreme levels of satisfaction or arguably delight, the relationship to loyalty is potentially stronger (Finn, 2005).

If customer delight improves customer loyalty, then business results should follow. In fact, Patterson (1997) argued that companies with loyal customers can succeed with prices 7% higher than their competitors. Nevertheless, providing excellent service is not always cheap. Rust and Oliver (2000) acknowledged the importance of customer delight, but also realized the potential costs. Accordingly, they created a mathematical model has been proposed to explain the circumstances by which delighting customers may result in more profit for a firm (Rust and Oliver, 2000). Given the existing literature in the field of customer delight and seeking to expand the body of work, the following research questions are proposed:

- Are there similarities and differences in the elements that trigger delight across cultures?
- What can service providers to provide an experience that would delight all their guests?

Methods

In order to investigate the key drivers of customer delight, the researchers conducted interviews with hotel guests. More specifically, the present research combined qualitative open-ended questions with close-ended questions that can be quantified. Before conducting interviews, the researchers developed a protocol based on the instrument developed by Crotts et al. (2008), which used four questions to capture the key drivers of customer delight. They are Q1: What are the three things you enjoyed most about your visit? Q2: What are the three things you enjoyed least about your visit? Q3: I thoroughly enjoyed my visit (on a scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”) and Q4: The probability that I will visit again next/year is (on a scale from 0% to 100%). In addition to these questions, the researchers also asked questions regarding some of the customer delight typology identified by Torres and Kline (2013), namely friendliness, professionalism, fulfillment of esteem needs, and problem resolution. The full interview protocol can be seen in Appendix A. It is noteworthy to state that the instrument is not an exact replication of the methodology used by Crotts et al. (2008); rather, it draws key questions from the study with regards to customer delight.

The present research sought to obtain descriptions of factors that contribute to a delightful experience. The researcher's intent was not to give a sweeping generalization of the difference between guests of different cultures, but to provide insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The interviews were conducted in an upscale hotel in the Central Florida area during a period starting on January 2013 and ending on March 2013. Guests of different cultures were approached for qualitative interviews. A total of 228 interviews were conducted during this period (for more results on respondent demographics, please see the results section). At this point, saturation point was reached. Prior to the interviews the researchers obtained permission from the hotel's management as well as the university's Internal Review Board (IRB).

The data was recorded in the form of written notes and shortly thereafter transcribed. The interview transcripts were coded independently by three trained coders. The first rater coded all 240 letters. The second and third raters' coding assignment was as follows: (a) all the European letters, (b) all the Latin American letters, (c) all the Canadian letters, (d) a random sample of the American letters (a sample of the U.S. letters was used due to their larger size). All raters had expertise in the area of customer delight. A codebook (see Appendix B) was developed as a result. Following the development of the codebook, letters were coded using a process of content analysis. According to Iverson (2000, p. 32), content analysis has many advantages, among which its primary strength lies in its ability to analyze and interpret people's account of an event without taking away its power or eloquence. Usually involving multiple steps, content analysis is a process which starts with the development of categories and then follows with the coding of the content and ends with narrative demonstration or statistical analysis of the data. This method

is considered to be especially suitable for enhancing knowledge of a real-world phenomenon that has not received deserved attention.

The data analysis followed both an inductive and a deductive process. The codebook was initially developed based on the review of related literature. For example, Torres and Kline (2013) in their research developed a codebook for content analysis. This study used a modified version of such codebook. Additionally, as the coders read the letters; new themes emerged. Consequently, the codebook was modified to contain all of the relevant themes from the letters of feedback, as well as the information from the relevant literature. In light of this, the process both utilized information from the literature and also utilized the transcripts themselves to draw additional themes and patterns. The codebook can be found in Appendix B.

Following the independent coding of all three raters, an assessment of reliability took place. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using the percentage of agreements and kappa value. Based on the initial coding, the raters agreed on 82% of all the codes during the first round of coding. Then all three reviewers met and analyzed the areas of agreement and disagreement, ultimately making final coding decisions. During the second round of coding, raters agreed on 90.1% of coding instances. The assessment of reliability showed substantial agreement among the raters, as demonstrated by a kappa value of .727. In other words, the study attained an acceptable level of agreement with an acceptable kappa value.

Results

Respondent profile

During the course of the present research, guests were interviewed in the public areas of an upscale hotel in the central Florida area. From the total amount of letters ($n = 228$), 140 respondents were from the United States; 38 were from Northern Europe, namely Germany; 19 were from Latin America, namely Brazil; 19 were from Canadians, and 12 were from other countries. A total of 52% of guests were male, and 48% were female. The interview protocol (Appendix A) inquired among other things, about a guest's delightful experiences. If the guest did not have a delightful experience at the research hotel, they were asked to recall a delightful experience in another hotel. Among the interviewed guests, 58% commented about a delightful experience in the study hotel, whereas the remaining 42% conveyed a story about other hotels they had previously experienced. Among those who recalled their experience at the study hotel, 68% stated that it was their first stay in property, 17% indicated it was their 2nd to 5th time, and 14% had stayed at the hotel for 6 or more times.

Content analysis results

American guests. The researchers analyzed the interview transcripts using the codebook (Appendix B). During the coding process, it was apparent that guest from different countries exhibited different patterns of preference in terms of the desired amenities, style of service, and importance assigned to various divisions within the hotel. The first set of interviews was that of the United States. The frequency and percentage of occurrence of each code can be found in Table 1. Guest from this country placed great importance on service that is both accommodating and flexible (54%), friendliness of the service providers (53%), professionalism (41%) and the satisfaction of needs, especially those of self-esteem (40%). All of these codes combined paint a picture of a guest places great emphasis on the inter-personal aspects of the service experience. More so, guests from the United States assigned great value to the satisfaction of individual needs, namely through experiences that would make them feel valued, special, and treated as an individual. The most frequently mentioned department was the front office (31%) followed by housekeeping (24%). The top amenity desired by American guests was a superior room (26%). Another noticeable pattern among American customers is the great value placed on complementary items, extra services, and upgrades. This in turn might be indicative of a culture that places great emphasis on value and in which sales promotion is a customary form of marketing.

Table 1. Coding of interviews

	United States, n=140		Northern Europe, n=38		South America, n=19		Canada, n=19	
Code	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1. Room	36	25.7%	14	36.8%	4	21.1%	5	26%
2. Lobby	2	1.4%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
3. Entertainment facilities (i.e. pool)	16	11.4%	6	15.8%	2	10.5%	0	0%
4. Facilities (i.e. gym)	4	2.9%	2	5.3%	0	21.1%	0	0%
5. Overall superior facilities	21	15.0%	9	23.7%	4	0%	4	21%
22. Amenities – others	28	20.0%	2	5.3%	0	0%	2	11%
23. Complimentary items and upgrades	26	18.6%	3	7.9%	1	5.3%	2	11%
6. Surprise	9	6.4%	1	2.6%	0	0%	6	32%
7. Friendliness	74	52.9%	24	63.2%	12	63.2%	15	79%
8. Problem resolution	37	26.4%	16	42.1%	1	5.3%	8	42%
9. Professionalism	58	41.4%	16	42.1%	9	47.4%	11	58%
10. Needs fulfillment	56	40.0%	13	34.2%	3	15.8%	8	42%
11. Accommodating/flexible	75	53.6%	17	44.7%	4	21.1%	6	32%
12. Personalized service	22	15.7%	1	2.6%	1	5.3%	3	16%
13. Efficiency/timeliness	29	20.7%	6	15.8%	7	36.8%	6	32%
14. Front office	43	30.7%	8	21.1%	0	0%	4	21%
15. Housekeeping/cleanliness	33	23.6%	5	13.2%	2	10.5%	7	37%
16. Room service – culinary	3	2.1%	2	5.3%	5	26.3%	0	0%
17. Room service – service	4	2.9%	3	7.9%	4	21.1%	0	0%
18. Restaurants and lounges – culinary	13	9.3%	3	7.9%	10	52.6%	2	11%
19. Restaurants and lounges – service	21	15.0%	6	15.8%	1	5.3%	1	5%
20. Guest services (i.e. concierge, bell)	18	12.9%	1	2.6%	0	0%	7	37%
21. Banquets	1	0.7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

Northern European guests. During the course of the study, the researchers interviewed several European guests ($n = 38$). Most of these guests were visiting from Germany. The frequency of codes from the content analysis of these interviews can be found in Table 1. Guests from this region placed great importance on friendliness (63%), service that is accommodating and flexible (45%), problem resolution (42%) and professionalism (42%). With more accounts of problem resolution than any other cultural group, Northern Europeans seemed to: (a) notice problems with rooms and service more often, and (b) place great emphasis on finding practical solutions to any issues they encounter. Northern Europeans also placed more emphasis on the hotel room (37%) than guests from any other region. The most cited service department was the front office (21%) followed by restaurant service (16%).

South American guests. Guests from South America were also interviewed during the study. Most of the guests from this region came from the country of Brazil. Some of the most frequently mentioned codes were friendliness (63%), professionalism (47%), and efficiency (37%). In fact, South Americans seemed to value efficiency more than any other group interviewed. A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be a contrast effect. North

American culture has been typically characterized for their stricter adherence to deadlines, and punctuality. This in turn may be reflected in the service of the hotel, which may be outside of the norm for South American customers, who might be accustomed to a slower phase of service. A key finding of this study is that Latin American guests seemed to recall more delightful experiences regarding food and beverage. In fact, 53% of all South Americans expressed their delight with food from the hotel's restaurants, and 26% expressed delightful experiences regarding the food received at their rooms. This is more than any other cultural group studied during the present research. See Table 1 for a complete listing of the codes, frequencies, and percentages for the South American guest group.

Canadian guests. Canadian guests were the subject of several research interviews. Some of the most frequently mentioned codes for this group include: friendliness (79%), professionalism (58%), and problem resolution (42%). Although friendliness was one of the unifying delight characteristics for the various cultural groups, Canadians seemed to be more delighted for this particular reason. Furthermore, Canadians recalled more delightful experiences associated with a pleasant surprise (32%). The element of surprise has been a source of debate among customer delight scholars. Nevertheless, this research shows that some cultural groups are more likely to value service experiences that provide a positive surprise than others. This group also seemed to place the greater emphasis on room cleanliness (37%). See Table 1 for a complete list of codes, frequencies, and percentages for Canadian hotel guests.

Discussion and conclusions

Welcoming all guests is the calling shared by those who work in the hotel industry. The execution of such duty is complex in nature, as guests from different cultures appear to have different preferences and expectations from hoteliers. Guests from the United States place great emphasis on service that is flexible, fulfills their esteem needs, and that is friendly and professional. American guests also seem to emphasize the value aspect of the service experience, as they referred to complimentary amenities, upgrades, and services more than any other nationality in the present research. The results are in agreement with the work of Ma et al. (2013) which proposed that delight can be elicited when guests perceive the experience as important to their personal well-being or special needs. Furthermore, Schneider and Bowen (1999) had proposed that the satisfaction of esteem needs is important means to generate customer delight. The present study restates the importance of this factor, while at the same time suggests that the fulfillment of esteem needs might be stronger for citizens of the United States of America. Hoteliers in the United States might be tempted to provide the same style of service that their American guests seem to enjoy, however, they will likely receive different results from international guests. A complementary amenity of upgrade might be the ultimate expression of a hotel's desire to please the guests from an American perspective; however it might not be such a critical delight factor to a guest from Brazil. By the same token a hotel in Brazil who receives multiple guests from the United States can learn that providing a complimentary item or upgrade, no matter how small, can go a long way toward pleasing their American guests.

Guests from Northern Europe placed great emphasis on friendliness and problem resolution. Furthermore, Northern Europeans placed more emphasis on any other cultural group on finding practical solutions to problems they experienced during their stay. They were also the most delighted with their hotel rooms. While this cultural group stressed the intangibles aspects of the service experience, they were also more prone to those aspects which emphasize practicality and utility of the hotel core product and service. In support of this, research by Hosany and Witham (2010) suggested that esthetic elements were the key toward the creation of an experience.

Latin American guests highlighted both tangible and intangible aspects of their experience. Friendliness and professionalism were two of the top reasons for their delight with the hotel. However, they were also the cultural group that placed the more emphasis on the food.

Both restaurant and room service food were of major importance to South American guests, who seemed to recall a delightful experience involving this aspect more than any other cultural group. Hotels seeking to attract this segment of travelers might do well in providing quality food offerings. An interesting finding of this research is that South Americans were delighted by the efficiency and timeliness of service. Traditionally, Latin American culture has been perceived as a culture in which deadlines and the concept of time in general tend to be more flexible. It might be that having visited hotels in North America, they notice a contrast effect when compared to the countries they visit from. In the previous research by Ma et al. (2013), goal congruence was suggested as a factor that elicited customer delight. Therefore, the specific goals and expectations of these particular guests with regards to friendliness, and food might lead them to highlight such aspects of the service experience more so than other international guests.

Canadian guests placed more emphasis on friendliness, cleanliness, and the element of surprise than any other cultural group. Surprise has been a contentious subject among customer delight researchers. The present research study suggests that surprise might be more present in the members of certain cultures and nationalities. The current study highlights many of the differences that exist among the various cultures. However, it is noteworthy to highlight that some aspects of service are more universal in nature. All cultural groups seemed to place great emphasis on friendliness. This particular path toward achieving customer delight is the one that is most likely to be understood by hotels, and thus the one that hotels must strive to accomplish. As hoteliers seek to expand their customer base, it is critical to know the likes and preferences of various cultural groups.

While the present study provides great insight as to the various elements that comprise customer delight from a cross-cultural perspective, it is also noteworthy to state that some limitations exist. The current study employed the technique of personal interview for data collection. While the interviews yielded substantive insights for the phenomenon of customer delight, future research can explore this topic from a quantitative perspective. This study highlights the preferences of guests from four cultural groups. However, more research can explore other cultural groups not explored in this paper. Furthermore, future research can explore other individual differences such as age and gender and their effects on customer delight. The present study explored one segment of the hospitality industry: upscale hotels. Future studies can research customer delight in other settings such as theme parks, events, and foodservice.

Every hotelier would like to see their guests delighted. However, what delights a guest from one culture might not delight all the other guests. In a previous study, Hofstede (1993) challenged the widespread applicability of management theories. While most studies of customer delight explore one particular culture, this particular paper contributes to the theory of customer delight by suggesting that some variations in the key drivers of customer delight exists based on the consumer's national culture. Therefore, it is important to appropriately target various guest groups and cater the service and amenity to their preferences. A series of universal factors of service, such as friendliness are likely to appeal to all guests. Therefore, it is critical that hoteliers pay attention to these above all, and then target specific changes to their service strategy and product offerings to delight guests from particular cultural groups. The calling of all those involved in the service experience is to enhance it such that guests are not only satisfied, but delighted. Scholars and practitioners constantly seek to fulfill the duty of creating a memorable experience. By understanding the effects of culture, everyone can ensure that guests – that is all guests – emerge from the hotel experience truly and completely delighted.

Appendix A. Customer delight interview protocol

Country of origin – Where are you visiting from?

(1) Which service/amenity were you using when you had the delightful experience that you can describe to me?

(2) Could you please describe the circumstances leading up to the delightful experience? What happened during the experience? What specific details do you recall that made this experience particularly memorable and positive for you?

(3) How many times before this delightful experience had you stayed/visited this?

(4) Was there a moment when the hotel staff acknowledged and fulfilled your needs? Please describe briefly.

(5) Was there a moment when the hotel solved a problem with the stay? Describe.

(6) Was there a situation where you experienced an outstanding level of professionalism from the staff? Please describe briefly.

(7) Where you surprised during your experience? Why or why not?

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements (behavioral intentions) on a 1–7 scale, where 1 is strongly disagree and 7 is strongly agree

(8) Would you stay/visit again in the future? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(9) Would you spread positive things to others about this experience? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(10) Would you recommend this ...to others? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix B. Codebook

<i>Product mix and amenities</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>Service department or divisions</i>
1. Room	6. Surprise	14. Front office
2. Lobby	7. Friendliness	15. Housekeeping/cleanliness
3. Pool and leisure facilities	8. Problem resolution	16. Room service – culinary
4. Facilities – gym, and other public spaces	9. Professionalism	17. Room service – service
5. Overall superior facilities	10. Needs satisfied	18. Restaurants and lounges – culinary
22. Amenities – other	11. Accommodating/flexible	19. Restaurants and lounges – service
23. Complementary amenities/upgrades/services	12. Personalized service	20. Guest services (i.e. concierge, bell staff, etc.)
	13. Efficiency/timeliness	21. Banquets
		22. Amenities – others

Пожалуйста, ответьте на поставленные вопросы:

1. Фраза из статьи (стр. 3): «the following research questions are proposed:

- Are there similarities and differences in the elements that trigger delight across cultures?
- What can service providers do to provide an experience that would delight all their guests?».

Если Вы считаете, что данные исследовательские вопросы не раскрыты в полной мере, предложите уточнение использованной авторами методологии.

2. Как правило, научные статьи содержат параграф “Limitations”, однако, в данной статье он отсутствует. Какие “Limitations” Вы можете отметить у настоящего исследования?

3. Каким образом результаты данного исследования могут быть использованы российскими отелями при разработке и реализации стратегии?

4. Какие направления продолжения исследования Вы можете предложить? Укажите соответствующие методологию, методы сбора и анализа данных.

