

Versatility in Hospitality Industry Around the Globe A Case Study on Trends and Skills in the Service Sector in Malta

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Abstract: *The tourism sector is influenced by many factors, which affect not only the tourism economy but also induce changes in tourists, transforming their behavior. Hotel establishments, Part of the tourism system, operate in an environment that suffers influences and is highly competitive. Due to this, it is important to have strategic planning that allows anticipating changes or threats, namely paying attention to consumers' needs and expectations. The goal of this study is to analyze consumer behavior regarding hotel establishments, identifying trends that are influencing the sector, from the demand perspective. Methodology – An online questionnaire was applied to guests of hotel establishments, with 305 valid answers. The questionnaire was developed in line with the decision-making process, by identifying the motivation, planning process, reservation, satisfaction, recommendation, and perspectives on the future of the hospitality industry. It also includes questions to draw the socio demographic profile of the consumer. Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analysis of the collected data was performed through the SPSS software. Findings – Results suggest that the Internet is relevant for tourists to plan and book their stay, and the most significant attributes for their decision-making are service quality, price, and location. It was further concluded that technology and personalization are the areas that create more expectations in the consumers concerning the future of hotel establishments. Considering the characteristics of the new generations, namely the millennials, who have higher technology requirements, hotel managers should consider a greater integration of technology in their establishments to increase the quality of the guest experience and, consequently, their satisfaction. In addition, it is recommended that hotel establishments not only sell rooms but an experience, which should be more personalized and integrated with the local community. Contribution – The empirical study allowed obtaining a broad view of how consumers behave in the pre and post-experience, as well as knowing the attributes that they consider important for the choice of accommodation, and their satisfaction. This analysis allows managers to deepen their knowledge about their clients, better understanding how they plan and book their stay, as well as identify the strengths and weaknesses of the accommodation, useful for understanding where they should allocate or withdraw resources..*

Keywords: Tourism, Travel, Food

I. INTRODUCTION

The “single largest employer, supporting one in every 11 jobs worldwide”, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council, and seen as a “catalyst for economic development and job creation” (Ernst & Young – Global Hospitality Industry Insights report for 2016), the hospitality industry has recognized the world over as a booming sector.

This vast sector comprises many diverse and rewarding hospitality careers. The food and beverage (F&B) segment, for example, is the largest area of the hospitality industry. Ranging from high-end restaurants to fast-food eateries and catering, F&B is a dynamic market across all continents. Highly linked to F&B is the accommodation segment, including hotels, bed and breakfast enterprises, and other lodging options, as well as the travel and tourism category, which encompasses airlines, trains, cruise ships, and amusement parks. You may also decide to pursue hospitality careers in event companies, spas, convention centers, and more.



So which trends should you pay attention to when starting in this highly competitive, flourishing, and multidimensional industry? Furthermore, how can you acquire the skills that will help you understand and analyze these trends and the challenges that accompany innovative ideas? Read on for an overview of the key hospitality trends you need to be aware of, and the skills that will help you keep pace.



II. KEY TRENDS AND SKILLS TRANSFORMING THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY.

2.1 The Use of New Technologies

First off, knowing how to use new technologies to your advantage is of paramount importance in today’s global hospitality industry. From mobile check-ins and geo-location to special discount apps, online advertisement, and a digital concierge system, you will have to make sure that your customer’s experience is unique. In an article published on Hospitalitynet.com, Navis, an award-winning hospitality technology company, explains that “in 2016, 51.8% of travelers who book trips via digital means will do so using a mobile device.”



Linked to new technologies is the use of social media. Making sure that establishments are visible on Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook or [1] is crucial in the hospitality industry. Why? Because social media networks are an

integral part of the customer’s experience. While Hyatt Hotels launched a concierge service on Twitter a few years ago, allowing customers to find nearby parks, for example, the [2] located in Las Vegas provides a complimentary glass of champagne to all users who check in on Foursquare. Social media can also be used to send promotional offers to customers like discount coupons for hotels or restaurants.

Also, because slot machines don’t appeal to the millennial generation as much as to previous generations, casino operators are thinking of ways to integrate social media within their gaming platforms and day-to-day operations. As explained by Ernst & Young in their “addressing this issue is critical to the long-term success of the gaming industry, as modern casinos earn approximately 70%-80% of their gaming revenue from slot machines.” The casino industry is therefore analyzing how hotels like Caesars Palace can rearrange their floor layouts, and slot manufacturers are evaluating how their games can become more interactive and social.

2.2 Collecting Data To Improve Customer Experience.

Another trend that future leaders of the hospitality industry must look out for is the use of advanced analytics, revenue management systems, and customer segmentation, to increase loyalty. Customer loyalty programs have been around for years and while they are very useful to attract and retain clients, these programs need to evolve. As mentioned by Ernst & Young in [3], by using these data-collectors, “organizations can constantly surprise and delight customers by delivering unexpected rewards to them (e.g., upgrades, refreshments, entertainment, and unique experiences).”

Data collection is important but so is the action that hotel brands perform with the large amounts of details generated. Hotel brands must remember the 4 main pillars of data.

1. Data Collection
2. Data Analysis
3. Training staff members to be experts in handling data
4. Constant tracking of metrics

A combination of these 4 steps will help hotel brands drive loyalty and create conversions for increased revenue. The key lies in how you bring all these elements together to add power to your customer information and subsequently, create enhanced guest experiences.

2.3. Considering Sustainability



As sustainability is now a global matter, the hospitality industry needs to identify ways to comply with regulations and place this core subject at the heart of its strategies. While hotel groups such as Marriott, Hilton, or AccorHotels aim to reduce their environmental impact, economic and social dimensions also come into play. In an article published on Hospitality.Net, Arturo Cuenllas, Founder of Conscious Hospitality, a hospitality educational consultancy in management, leadership and sustainability claims that “sustainability must be definitively seen as a new quality management dimension, a source of innovation and as a new paradigm for the twenty-first century, though it still needs to keep up with other strategic variables such as providing memorable experiences, offering a good product and an



outstanding service. And, of course, sustainability still needs to fulfill the classic economic axiom: to offer great value for money.”

2.4 Social Media Engagement



Social media strategies for hotels are currently just as important as in other sectors. The effective use of social media marketing in the Hotel Industry can elevate your brand profile, increase website traffic and boost reservations. Engaging with hotel guests via social media is a great way to gain valuable feedback and encourage customer loyalty.

Social media has evolved into a crucial advertising platform for the Hospitality industry. Greater computer literacy, widespread cell phone usage, and access to the internet have all led to almost universal adoption of social media by the public. Social media offers unprecedented levels of connection between businesses and their consumers. Social media has changed the ways that businesses engage with branding, marketing, and advertising. As well as technological development, changes in transportation and the ways people travel have also transformed the hospitality industry and its consumer interactions, with social media as a driving force.

2.5 Gain Practical Experience with Projects, an Internship, and Company Visits

Because putting into practice your theoretical knowledge is essential to your future career, the MSc in International Hospitality Management features different projects throughout the year. From developing an entrepreneurial business project and creating a virtual company, to working on a hospitality concept (such as a restaurant) and completing an in-company project, you will present your newly acquired knowledge in a concrete format.

You will also benefit from a four- to six-month internship, which will enable you to gain tangible experience and boost your hospitality career prospects. Previous cohorts have interned with Hotel Pullman Paris, The Ritz Carlton Tenerife, Mama Shelter Paris, ClubMed, the AccorHotels group, and the Fairmont Hotel in Monte Carlo.

2.6 Labour Efficiencies

Organizations understand that labor is a big component of the recovery process. Hospitality, including lodging, gaming, and F&B, is a labor-intensive industry. The pandemic forced resorts, restaurants, and casinos to operate with a minimum workforce and make the tough decision to cede major operations. Some positions may not come back, others can be more efficient, and a few can be done remotely.

All the segments of the industry have been forced into maintaining a smaller workforce, which has allowed for effective cross-training and higher productivity. Many employees were asked to step out of their current roles and take on a few others, covering multiple positions at a time. Although stressful, this labor shortage allowed the industry to take a step back and look at where it can streamline efficiencies.



III. CONCLUSION

The pandemic is driving change in the workplace and shaping consumer behavior. As we face uncertainty around the Delta variant, the industry will continue to struggle with labor shortages and rebuilding business levels. In addition, the pandemic has unveiled volatility within the supply chain.

Not only are hospitality managers and executives expected to respond to the current challenges and seize opportunities, but also to focus on operational agility to understand how consumer preferences and employee perceptions have evolved. Now is the time for the industry to act, embrace technology, leverage labor, and adapt to the new normal.

In terms of expectations regarding the future of hotels, in line with the literature, personalization, and technology emerged as the most relevant categories for the consumer. The importance of a more consumer-friendly experience is related to the changes that emerge in the consumer and that lead to an experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). In turn, technology is important for the consumer at the planning, booking, and recommendation stages, and it is expected to continue in the future. Consumers expect technology to streamline and facilitate processes, such as its use for light and temperature control systems, emphasizing that it should be focused on consumer satisfaction.

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