



Book Review: *Service Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality: Insights from Asia*
(Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management Series; Springer, 2021;
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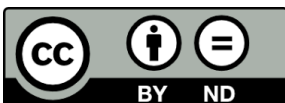
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Rising demands in an ever more competitive, experience-centric global market are forcing tourism and hospitality businesses operating in Asia to focus on redesigning and delivering superior services to achieve customer satisfaction through service excellence. The book “Service Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality” examines insights from Asian dynamic and competing business environments and outcomes, and how they challenge and address tourism and hospitality businesses operating with four key perspectives: designing the service, managing customer-oriented operations, leveraging digital technology, and managing resources. It is emphasised that service excellence is a critical factor in creating customer satisfaction, loyalty, and value.

Edited by K. Thirumaran, Dirk Klimkeit, and Chun Meng Tang, this book brings together an impressive collection of empirical studies, conceptual discussions, and industry observations that reflect Asia's unique cultural, economic, and market environments in tourism and hospitality services. Authors from diverse academic and professional backgrounds offer a comprehensive and practice-oriented examination of service excellence across hotels, restaurants, tourism attractions, educational institutions, and digitally enabled service platforms.

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The book comprises 222 pages of English prose, divided into 12 chapters and four thematic parts. The book covers the full spectrum of service excellence. Consistent with the previous work of Ranasinghe et al. (2025), adapted from the academic contributions by Peiris et al. (2020), Iddagoda and Dewasiri (2020), and Rathnasiri and Dewasiri (2024), I use these works in reviewing this edited book.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Part I of the book titled “Designing Services” emphasised service design in the contexts of hospitality and tourism sectors. The first chapter, titled "Service Design in Franchise and Independent Japanese Restaurants (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam)," emphasised how Japanese franchise restaurants design their services. Studies highlight it as an unexplored area in emerging markets, such as the Asian context. As the main findings, the study highlighted that formalised training, standardised menus, and strong branding are key to the success of franchises. In contrast, independent restaurants rely heavily on owner expertise, localised adaptation, and agility. The study uses an interview strategy that emphasises cultural authenticity, staff skills, and physical elements that contribute to the service experience. However, there are a few limitations, including a lack of theoretical integration with service models such as SRVQUAL and service blueprint, a limited sample size of six restaurants, and a lack of integration with service outcomes and customer experience.

The second chapter of Part I, titled "Creating Excellent Guest Experiences: Servicescape and Processes," identified significant contributors to delighting customers within the servicescape and process flow, based on one hotel and two resorts in Malaysia. Servicescape, comprising layout, ambience, décor, and other environmental attributes, creates unique value and enhances guest satisfaction. Perception of Servicescape impacts the sync between customers and employees. Process management is another important dimension

of management processes. Core processes and support processes are key aspects, and process reengineering, optimising operational processes, and services are emphasised to drive guest satisfaction and value creation. Guest flow management is important in maintaining waiting times and handling rush during peak hours to ensure service excellence, where servicescapes lacking process flow create experience dissonance. However, this chapter could further integrate service models explicitly and bring more methodological rigour by improving the credibility of observation methods and integrating cultural aspects that impact the design of the service scape in creating customer experience.

The final chapter of Part I is *Managing Customer Expectations in Four-Star Hotels (Malaysia and Singapore)*,” which gives more cultural integrations toward service experience. Hence, service expectations vary across cultural dimensions; service providers need to align with these diversities when designing services. High-quality services that meet required standards determine service excellence. Understanding guests' expectations and integrating technology into hotel services, such as the hotel Management Information System (MIS) and up-to-date systems, would reduce errors and enhance operational efficiency. Apart from that, cultural sensitivity and service customisation across diverse cultures lead to satisfaction. This chapter also emphasises emotionally moving services that integrate and embed the staff's minds, thus creating a pleasant attitude and environment that leads to consumer satisfaction. This chapter provides important practical insights; however, it could integrate other theoretical perspectives on service quality and customer experience.

Part II of the book is based on *Managing Customer-Oriented Operations*. Considering the main arena, this chapter is outlined with three subchapters as follows. Overall, Part II provides valuable theoretical integration and practical implications for managing customer-oriented operations in

tourism and hospitality.

Chapter 1 of Part II is based on *Measuring Customer Delight in Tourism and Hospitality Operations (Singapore & Malaysia)*. Delighting them is beyond mere satisfaction, as empirically demonstrated by identifying individual phases of customer delight. Identifying service aspects and observing customer behaviour during the customer journey at each touchpoint is important. This chapter emphasises the main stages of customer delight: aligning the measurement with service excellence drivers, designing the measurement, completing the measurement, and, finally, evaluating the findings and implementing measures in accordance with Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle. Overall, the chapter is theoretically significant in measuring guest delight driven by service excellence, despite traditional theories such as SERVQUAL. This is more relevant for practitioners, such as measuring and integrating customer delight into customer relationship management systems in hospitality and tourism.

Chapter 2 of Part II is based on *"Providing Personalised Service Excellence: Findings from Tourism and Hospitality Businesses in Asia."* This is based on multiple cases from a Thai dining tour, a Borneo wildlife tour, and a Korean-inspired café. Mainly, this chapter emphasises personalised service excellence through service customisation that leads customers to be delighted, and the challenges of personalisation. Maintaining a proper relationship with customers requires four key elements of communication, trust, intimacy and rules, which also support Deloitte's development of a personalised service. Aligning with theoretical justifications, this chapter collected data from cases selected in Malaysia or Singapore. Standard Products and Services "one-size-fits-all" approach in Mass Personalisation, Mass Customisation, and Bespoke are identified as different levels of personalisation. This shows the importance of incorporating policies to personalise services and foster loyalty and satisfaction. The chapter, enriched with contextual cases, could be further

developed with more methodological rigour and integrating a balanced view of physical digital integration in personalisation.

Chapter 3 of Part II examines Generation Z's Perspective on Tourists' Knowledge Sharing and Service Excellence in Tourism, focusing on both online and offline knowledge sharing. As true natives of technology, Gen Z has a main interest in technology, an insistence on ease of use, and a feeling of safety and a temporary escape from the realities they face. Therefore, this emphasises the importance of considering Gen Z in tourism decision-making. Knowledge sharing is an exchange of knowledge, skills, experiences, needs, and interests. In tourism, social media plays a key role by enabling the sharing of knowledge about destinations, transport sites, food, and hotels on digital platforms. Overall, Generation Z's willingness to share knowledge is related to delivering on promises, providing a personal touch, going the extra mile, and handling problems and queries to create service excellence. The success of service excellence depends on the customer's experience and knowledge sharing. Hence, Gen Z plays a critical role here; decision-makers in tourism need to encourage knowledge sharing to achieve service excellence and competitive advantage. Overall, the chapter is well-structured, contextually relevant, and theoretically applicable to knowledge-sharing and service-excellence theories; however, it could be further enriched with cross-generational aspects and greater methodological rigour.

Part III of the book, *Leveraging Digital Technology*, comprised three chapters, namely. With the evolving nature of services, the integration of technologies enables the creation of service excellence and competitive advantage, as discussed below.

Chapter 1 of Part III, *Two to Tango: Entrepreneurs and Robots' Users in Hospitality Service Innovation*, addresses the growing role of service robots in hospitality and outlines a collaborative drive for service innovation among entrepreneurs, technology providers, and customers. This chapter examines

how robots will be integrated into service encounters to enhance efficiency, consistency, and experiential value, ensuring service excellence. By adopting both cultural and user-acceptance views, the chapter shows that the successful diffusion of robots depends not only on technological capability but also on customer readiness, contextual fit, and managerial strategy. The contribution is highly relevant to digital transformation in hospitality, offering practical insights for entrepreneurs on balancing automation with the human touch. In general, this chapter adds conceptual and managerial value by positioning service innovation as a co-creation process between humans and intelligent technologies, rather than as a complete replacement for human service roles.

Chapter 2 of Part III is *Achieving Positive Hospitality Experiences through Technology: Findings from Singapore and Malaysia*. Customer experience, as a key aspect of the hospitality industry, is shaped by digitalisation and online platforms. The chapter also elaborated this with findings from Malaysia and Singapore. Overall, the chapter emphasised that self-service kiosks, mobile applications, service robots, digital payment systems, and automated service platforms play a pivotal role in shaping customer experience. Integration of technology has shaped the experience across functional, emotional, relational, cognitive, and social aspects, with emotional aspects dominating, thereby affecting the tourism industry's ability to attract prospects. Technological implementations of VR, IoT, big data, and social media could integrate across the entire customer journey, from pre- to post-visit. It is also emphasised that digitalisation creates challenges; hence, digital technologies lead to automatic rankings that drive industry competition. Overall, this chapter provides practical implications for industry decision-makers in integrating technology to gain a competitive advantage. This could be further enriched by supporting insights from empirical validation of proposed aspects of technology-integrated experience creation.

Chapter 3 of Part III outlined the Topic *E-Service Quality: Evaluation*

of Tourism Websites. This emphasised the e-service quality based on tourism websites. E-service quality is a fundamental aspect of the online tourism experience that leads to user satisfaction, destination choice, and the intention to revisit. The main dimensions of e-service quality are information quality, aesthetics, functionality and usability, security and privacy, and interactivity and engagement. Virtual Tours, interactive maps, and multimedia storytelling are some platforms creating an e-service experience. Different dimensions, such as technical, marketing, internal, and customer perspectives, are important in assessing websites. Main technical qualities to assess websites include link checks, HTML checks, browser compatibility, load times, and link popularity. This chapter provides useful insights into tourism website design; hence, websites need to be developed to provide information about destination visits. Part IV of the book is based on Managing resources in managing service excellence. This part comprises three chapters that elaborate on insights from resource management to enhance efficiency and service-related outcomes.

Chapter 1 of Part IV of the book is based on Hospitality and Tourism Management: Adopting Lean Six Sigma, Achieving Service Excellence. This emphasised the applicability of Lean and Six Sigma towards the tourism and hospitality sector, ultimately creating service excellence. Non-value-adding items considered as waste must be removed to create efficiency and gain a competitive advantage. However, due to the intangible nature of the services, improvement is difficult. This identified two cases: the first emphasised the importance of listening to and learning from customers, and provided guidelines using the Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve and Control (DMAIC) model. The second case focuses on enhancing employee skill levels and motivating them to live by a lean philosophy. This provides useful insights for decision-makers in hospitality and tourism on enhancing service excellence through Lean and Six Sigma. This could also be further enriched by incorporating additional insights through test results and outputs, supported by

the theoretical rigour explained within the text.

Chapter 2 of Part IV is based on Shifting Paradigms in Human Resource Management while Striving for Service Excellence in the Tourism Industry. This emphasises that Human Resource Management (HRM) drives service excellence in the tourism industry. Employees are expecting various things, such as work-life balance, career growth, equality, and technological assistance. In a changing environment, HR expectations also differ; it is important to train Human Resources to adapt to new technologies. There is a role for employees to play in being human-centric. An organisation's behaviour, as part of its culture, towards customers influences employees' attitudes, which ultimately leads to consumer satisfaction. This highlighted the important aspects of the Operational Integration and Cultural Integration (OICI) model. Thereby, under operational integration, HR practices of recruitment, targeted training, and performance rewards need to be integrated, along with cultural integration through cohesiveness, collaboration, and sustainable relationships within the organisation. This leads to higher employee engagement, enabling the retention of talented employees and improving their satisfaction and productivity. This ultimately creates customer satisfaction and loyalty, helping to achieve organisational goals and providing valuable insights for practitioners in hospitality and tourism.

Chapter 3 of Part IV is based on Towards Service Excellence: The Zone of Tolerance for Hospitality and Tourism Education in Malaysia. The chapter emphasised that the zone of tolerance is the difference between desired service and adequate service: if the service falls within this range, customers are satisfied; moving beyond the range leads to customer delight; and if the service falls outside this range, it results in dissatisfaction. It is found that hospitality and tourism students have a low zone of tolerance. The chapter emphasised both academic and non-academic service quality in hospitality and tourism education from the student perspective. This chapter is significant as it proposes

a holistic service quality framework. The findings indicate that lecturer competency and structured curriculum delivery are strengths. At the same time, major gaps exist in administrative responsiveness, outdated facilities, limited support services, and the disconnect between classroom learning and industry demand.

EVALUATION

Thirumaran et al. (2021) give useful insights into Service Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality in Asia. It showcases case studies and research findings from various geographical contexts in Asia that provide substantial theoretical and practical relevance for the Tourism and Hospitality sectors, enhancing service excellence by promoting well-designed servoscapes, managing customer-oriented operations, leveraging digital technologies to enhance service experiences, and managing resources effectively and efficiently. Each chapter is clearly written in a concise yet engaging manner, drawing the reader's attention through insightful empirical evidence.

Certain chapters are rooted in a sense of methodology, weaving theoretical perspectives into the setting and findings that empirically support the context. Other chapters follow a conceptual vein, applying a literature structure that identifies pivotal thoughts within the setting. Although certain chapters are theoretically grounded, other chapters apply themselves to service-focused applications and technological innovations. Overall, it is evident that convergence of research, theoretical perspectives, and application findings within the setting that is pertinent to the hospitality and tourism sectors.

CONCLUSION

It is relevant to academics, postgraduate students, policymakers, and practitioners who seek a deeper understanding of service excellence in the hospitality and tourism sectors. Each chapter in the book demonstrates how cultural, technological, and human resource perspectives are integrated across

diverse contexts in Asia to design, manage, and innovate operations that improve customer experiences. It also explores, through a multidisciplinary approach, how jointly service design, digitalisation, customer-oriented operations, and resource management affect high-quality service delivery. Overall, the editors have successfully integrated empirical research, theoretical insights, and practical applications to advance both academic and practical understanding of service excellence in hospitality and tourism.

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