

Book Review

Noe, F.P., Uysal, M. & Magnini, V.P. (2010). ***Tourist Customer Service Satisfaction: An Encounter Approach***

New York: Routledge Press

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Provision of high quality service to customers is the central goal that all service businesses struggle to accomplish from time to time. The ability of a service provider to deliver high quality service is considered an essential strategy for success and survival in today's competition. Service encounter is considered to be one of the factors influencing customer perceptions of service quality, satisfaction and consequently loyalty. Numerous studies indicate that, in general, the hospitality industry is one of the sectors, with a relatively high level of customer contact. The higher the level of customer contacts, the more numerous and longer the service encounters between customers and frontline service employees. Understanding the encounter theory and its application is therefore considered to be fundamental for service providers.

The book is built on the premise that service delivery is a complex undertaking as it involves social exchange between service providers and consumers (participants) who in most cases have never met before. How these participants communicate both verbally and non-verbally in the process of social exchange is of particular importance in the hospitality industry. The social exchange process reflects how individuals feel about a relationship with another person as determined by their perceptions of the balance between what they put into the relationship (e.g. money, time) and what they get out of it (e.g. good service). In travel and tourism, the exchange process is more intricate due to the time factor. Time is considered to be a critical issue in tourism since tourists stay in a particular destination for a relatively short time before going to another destination.

The book consists of 9 chapters and an index. The first chapter is preceded by an introduction that provides a comprehensive overview of the book. The first chapter introduces the attribution theory and explains its rationale as a model suitable to examine the customer-provider relationship. Chapter two focusses on service providers' roles and discusses how those roles are influenced by the social situation. The chapter firmly differentiates between an interactive encounter and a relational service situation. Chapter three describes the importance of market segmentation in

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service delivery. This chapter also examines and discusses the relationship between quality standards and customer expectations. Chapter four explores the manager's role from a social interaction perspective. It discusses and enumerates the types of interactive roles a manager must try to master. The last part of this chapter focusses on the importance of front line employees in maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty. Chapter five focuses on how to properly position the travel provider in the mind of the consumer. The chapter pays special attention to the question of employee empowerment and in managing accurate and useful customer information. Chapter six deals with how hospitality firms can simultaneously appeal to their frontline service providers and to travelers. It also focuses on the importance of having a proper service failure recovery system. Chapter seven describes how service providers should react, project, and promote a positive posture or attitude when interacting with the customers. The chapter describes how the use of verbal and non-verbal communication during service provision can enhance or destroy the image of the service provider. Chapter eight articulates issues that are not only important in ensuring customer satisfaction but are also important for achieving a more complete state of customer loyalty. In this chapter, the authors argue that firms must possess an understanding of which service-related amenities customers value the most and what truly drives their loyalty. The last chapter in this book focuses on the techniques that a firm can use to enhance employee selection process. It also explores the use of technology to enhance service provision.

On the content of the book, authors apply the encounter theory to explain the nature of interaction in the hospitality industry. Similarly, authors consistently insist on the importance of frontline service providers to understand the concept of cultural differences as one of the important keys in providing high quality services (e.g. p. 41, 86, 97, 123 and 139). In supporting this argument, the authors contend that in Western cultures such as American and Western European, people are more individualistic in character and thus more independent whereas in Eastern cultures such as the Chinese people exhibit a more collective behaviour and thus are more interdependent. This implies that people from different cultures may have different service requirements and therefore, service providers need to pay attention to cultural differences during service provision. Similarly, the authors consistently insist on employee empowerment as one of the critical issue in service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty (e.g. p. 16, 30, 62, 77, 86, 93, 165). Employee empowerment is viewed as an important factor in eliciting and facilitating intrinsic motivation which positively contributes to service delivery. The authors argue that in most cases tourists interact with only the frontline employees and not the management. Therefore, promotion of frontline employees' performance and self-esteem through empowerment is highly important in service provision. The authors make their case that in order to achieve a high level

of customer satisfaction and loyalty, service providers, particularly employers, should consider their employees as internal customers if they want their employees to deliver high quality services to their external customers (e.g. p. 64, 81 and 104).

The authors have considerable experience in marketing, hospitality and tourism management. They have published widely on these topics in various books and journals and have successfully used their experience to substantiate their arguments. Throughout the book, the authors provide a wide range of examples from empirical studies to support their arguments. Similarly, concepts and arguments are presented from a well-integrated perspective. The authors adequately provide appropriate linkages among the chapters and make use of examples, concepts and theories from previous chapters to avoid repetition in subsequent chapters. Additionally, authors provide useful definitions of important terms or theories and make clear distinctions among related concepts (e.g. in ch. 1 p. 5 on *categorical symbols* and *self-expressive symbols* and p. 8 on *gestures and postures* body language).

However, there are a few criticisms regarding the book. On p. 108, the authors recognise the importance of firms to view customer complaints as an opportunity to build customer loyalty. Yet, they fail to describe the appropriate procedures through which such complaints should be handled; this is perhaps the major drawback of this book. Similarly, the authors fail to address the question of seasonality in the hospitality industry and how service providers should address it. The annual peaking of tourism activities during a few hectic weeks or even months can cause inefficiencies within the industry and can place a great deal of pressure on the physical and social resources of a destination.

In conclusion, the book is an exciting and outstanding one, in that it explains in detail what service providers are supposed to do in order to enhance their role. The book is unique in its approach. It provides many theories and shows how these theories can guide service providers' practices. Overall, the authors are commended for their work. Tourism scholars, students, researchers and practitioners will highly appreciate this book.