PERSONALIZED AND BUTLER SERVICE IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING BRAND IMAGE

Dr. Svetla Tagareva

CONFITO Events&Travel, Bulgaria

Abstract. The purpose of the present study is to explore the possibilities of using personalized and butler services in the hospitality industry as a tool for influencing brand image. This research paper focuses on important aspects of the customer experience in hotels. The topic of butler services is examined in detail and the trends in its development will be presented. The research examines issues related to brand image, how theoretical thought develops over time and how it can be positively influenced through the use of personalized service. Butler services are known all over the world, but in Bulgaria, this service is not developed, it is not known, and thus the destination sits aside from the global tourist offer. The research will present an analysis of a survey conducted to give a vision of whether this type of service trigger user demand.

Keywords: Hospitality industry., personalization., butler services., brand image

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1. Introduction

The object of the research is hospitality industry. The subject is the personalized and butler services provided by them. For the purposes of the present article, a survey was conducted for obtaining main framework for future researches in this filed. The main goal is to reveal the main guidelines to the successful implementation of the personalized and butler service in hospitality industry with a view to improving the brand image. The main thesis of the research is based on the statement that the personalized services have significant impact on any sector related to the provision of a service like hospitality industry. According to the author's opinion, butler services are not widely distributed on the territory of the country, good practices are not known and have not been implemented in hotel establishments. On the other hand, the theory of personalized service has been accepted and many sites analyze its significance for building a brand image. The dynamics of the market require a number of hotel establishments to adapt to new consumer requirements and constantly look for new alternatives, first to attract and then retain the attention of customers. The hotel industry is a highly competitive sector, in which many establishments often compete for the attention of the same target group of travelers. The search for innovative ways to attract the attention, trust and

loyalty of consumers is of primary importance for management companies. In this context, the personalized on-site experience takes on a new meaning. Currently, the hospitality industry finds itself between two strong consumer trends - that of globalization and that of asserting local identity.

2. Butlers in the hospitality industry

According Fandya., N, Nurbaeti, Sulartiningrum., S (2017) butler originally came from the western and central world of Britain. In ancient times until medieval times, the harsh beveragekept in jugs of clay or wood, and his treatment became a very trustworthy responsibility. From here comes the word "Butler", which is derived from the French bouteilier (someone who was in charge of the wine cellar), and earlier from the Latin with butticula. He is considered to be the leading member of staff in the household. This was the servant entrusted with the care and responsibility of serving the wine, bearing in mind that some wines were very expensive. It should be noted here that in the past only the select members of society had a wine cellar and access to it was restricted. Households had requirements for the butler to wear a special uniform that set him apart from the rest of the staff. The story of the butler takes us back to the 17th century, but in the 21st century his role is once again as responsible as it was before. According Starkey (1989), cited by Dinana, R Elnasr A.E. Sobaih, Mahmo.M (2015) the butler's job is mainly highly relevant to customized service and focused on creating the proper conditions within the hotel to guarantee guests' satisfaction. Through the butler daily assistance, he is able gather data that contribute to creating the guest's profile, applying and validating different service strategies as required and establishing a scale for the attributes of each service requested, thus determining different degrees of quality in connection with them. According Said. A., (2023) butler service is a highly personalized form of hospitality that is tailored to the individual needs of each guest. The butler, or butler team, is responsible for providing a range of services that go beyond the traditional duties of a hotel staff member. The author assumes that the butler is a trusted employee who responds to the specific requirements of customers without intruding and independently initiating actions. The butler is the figure who gives a new face to the service, transforms it from common to personal, from ordinary to luxurious. He is the employee who adds value to the hotel service by realizing the wishes and dreams of the guests. The modern butler is not only a symbol of a standard of service. He is a highly erudite, refined professional with an eye for detail who successfully manages people and processes. In his book Hotel Butlers, The Great Service Differentiators, Ferry S., (2009) concludes very clearly what the butler's role is in just one sentence „Ask not what the butler did, but what he can do for your hotel". Although it is difficult to cover all the activities for which this employee is responsible, we will list the main ones with the

clarification that each hotel facility can modify and prioritize different aspects of its work, depending on the specifics of its target group. duties are divided into 3 main groups - before arrival, upon arrival, during the entire stay.

Before arrival

Ensures that guests' preferences are provided upon arrival to the hotel/ resort, villa, including choice of beverages, special requirements for the room, flowers, temperature of the room, cooling wine, curtains up/down, if needed, delivery of specific pillows, bedspreads, bio cosmetics for the bathroom, specialized personal cosmetics, newspaper/magazine and much more.

Offers pre-arrival hotel forms for guests to fill out, ensuring that the butler is informed about any special requests such as allergies, diet, need for caregiver or medical staff, babysitter, tennis coach, golf, etc.

Arranges airport transfers for the guests, but again tailored to their preferences, for car type, brand, number of people, driver who speaks their language etc.

Upon arrival

Upon the arrival of the guests, the butler makes a personal welcome and provides private check-in if it is available.

Escorts guests to their room, arranges for their luggage and introduces them to their accommodation.

Offer them drinks, find out if they have any additional requirements for their stay, offer additional services such as booking a restaurant for dinner, bar, theater, cinema or similar.

During the entire stay

During their entire stay, he is always at their disposal, helps with their personal and business commitments, organizes special dinners, organizes the arrangement of the table and the room, takes care of the temperature in the room, its cleaning, accompanies them during additional activities - a yacht trip, visiting cultural attractions, organizing business meetings, etc.

According Butlers-and-Household-Managers-Booklet of International institute of modern butlers, a butler must know and practice good manners and etiquette, must master the etiquette associated with his responsibilities, be able to resolve and manage awkward circumstances with poise while preserving the dignity of other and the occasion. These modern butlers are performing out-of-the-box services such as snapping the perfect social media pics, delivering pencils to the kids and roasting the perfect s'mores with them. Many luxury hotels around the world provide this service to their guests, and it can be fully personalized with a personal butler or semi-personalized with a team of butlers who are in charge of the customers. Often the term butler is confused with

concierge. The difference between the two is that concierge service focuses on providing information and making arrangements for guests' requests and activities, while butler service offers tailored help, recommendations, takes responsibility of specific guest requirements, and attends to their comfort and well-being during whole stay. The role of the concierge is to provide one-off services, while the butler creates the overall guest experience and personally attends to them.

3. Personalised services in hospitality industry

Personalization of hotel services is part of the overall CRM concept of the individual sites. Over the years, scientific thought has come up with a number of definitions of what personalization is. The related term customization is also often used. According Also, Peppers and Rodgers (1999) accept that the key issue is the capacity to produce service from which the customer feels like real value is added. Godin (1999) defines "personal" like message directly related to the individual. Hanson (2000) argue that customer wants products or services that satisfy their needs in the best possible way and it is specialized form of product differentiation, in which a solution is tailored for a specific individual. Roberts (2003) propose that this is the process of preparing and individualized communication for a specific person based on stated or implied preferences. The author of the present study fully accepts Roberts' theory because the author opinion is that personalization is a dynamic process, not a one-off action that develops with the customer and follows his rhythm and changes with him and his wishes. Personalization in hospitality is a process of tailoring content, messages, offers, and services to suit a guest's lifestyle, preferences, and requirements. It aims to enhance customer experience and create a long-lasting, meaningful relationship between the client and the brand. Author accepts that personalization is tailoring hotel services and experiences to cater to each guest's needs and preferences. It requires experience, understanding and anticipating guest's expectations. It helps to increase customer's experience at hotel by providing care and attention to each detail. The results that can be achieved in long term are stable business development, enhanced loyalty, unique client's reviews, rise of word of mouth and standing out from direct market competitors. Personalized experiences make guests feel valued and understood, leading to higher levels of satisfaction. Travelers are more likely to choose a hotel that offers tailored experiences over one that provides a basic, one-size-fits-all approach. The most common ways to achieve this personalization is through communication, tailored services, loyalty programs, trainings, guest profiles management, feedback and customer improvement. For research purposes author divides the main ones into 3 groups - technologies, human resources, services.

Group 1: Technologies

Using the capabilities of storage guest data, such as reservation systems, loyalty programs, and customer relationship management (CRM) platforms. Using the web site and chatbot, AI and other popular technological methods. Guest profiles help staff create a comprehensive guest history with preferences like city/sea view, soft or firm pillow, balcony or french window/ lower/upper floor etc. Online guest review and customer feedback can help hotel management to improve some services upon their experience next time. Tailored welcome messages on screens or emails are a simple way to get guests excited about their stay and make them feel valued, the hotel staff can use messaging to communicate with guests about promotions, discounts, and special offers. Mobile check-in allows guests to complete the check-in process on their phones without having to queue and save their time.

Group 2: Human resources

Personalizing guest experience is a ultimate way to delight guests, encourage their positive reviews and bring them back again to hotel. Hotel staff is responsible for the memorable stay and for this reason the relationship employee-guest has high importance. Usually using the guest's name instead of the neutral "Dear Guest" gives a personal element. A special occasion hotel visit - a birthday or anniversary can be an opportunity to offer something special, upgrade the guest's stay or provide special amenities to enhance the celebration. The hotel staff is closest to the guests, they can easily understand their requirements and preferences, and informal and non-verbal communication help a lot to personalize the service. In this context, teaching hotel staff how to be attentive to guests' needs is high priority task. Well prepared and trained staff will be more responsive and self-confident to deliver exceptional service.

Group 3: Hotel services

Personalized or tailored services can include spa treatments, room service, activities, events, dining options, live cooking and other things that cater to each guest's unique needs and preferences. Here we can note personalized welcome gifts like handwritten notes, flowers, local treats, or small souvenirs. Some hotels personalize the service through room scents and allow guests to choose their favorite room scent, such as vanilla, rose, lilac, papaya etc.

4. Brand, branding, brand image

Back in the 1960, American Marketing Association defines (1960) brand as "A name, term, design, symbol, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from competitors". Nowadays, the same institution gives a much shorter definition of a brand "A brand is any distinctive feature like a

name, term, design, or symbol that identifies goods or services." The legal term for brand is trade mark. On the other hand, the brand is associated with the corporate identity. According Balmer and Gray (2000) in essence, corporate identity is the reality and uniqueness of an organization which is integrally related to its external and internal image and reputation through corporate communication. The author accepts Aaker's definition of a corporate brand, namely "corporate brand defines the firm that will deliver and stand behind the offering that the customer will buy and use". The term corporate branding should also be mentioned as the process of establishing and managing a corporation or organization's identity. It involves crafting the company's mission, values, and culture, which align with its public image. Corporate branding aims to create a consistent and positive company perception among its stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, and the public. Roy and Banerjee, (2007) defined brand image as a consumer's thoughts and feelings about the brand. Theory defines that customer behavior is affected and determined by brand image too. For the purposes of the study the author adopts the definition of Roy and Banerjee. Personalization has become an integral part of brand strategy in recent years. By tailoring experience and messaging addressed to the unique needs and preferences of individual guests, hotels are able to build important connections and create more distinct and stronger brand image.

5. Research

The current research is conducted in two directions: surveys to consumers and surveys to hoteliers. The main purpose of the research is to show whether both groups are familiar with butler services, what are their attitudes and expectations towards personalized service and, last but not least, whether it affects the image of the brand. The main results and conclusions after the conducted research are systematized as follows.

Butler concept: 48% of users are familiar with the butler concept, but the result of hoteliers' answers is surprising, only half of them confirm that they know what it is. The results of the professionals' answers clearly show that these services are not known in the country, and even if they are known, we do not know whether their knowledge is in-depth or only basic. The interesting fact is that over 37% of professionals would like to get to know this concept in detail. The distribution of the interviewed professionals is almost even in terms of the category of hotel in which they work. Categories are distributed as family hotel, 2*, 3*, 4*, 5*. More than 62% cannot assess whether the presence of a butler has an impact on the image of the brand.

According to the **way of personalized service**, again the responses of the professionals are almost evenly distributed: nearly half of them personalize their services through personal employee-guest interaction, and the other half

through a combination of digitalization and personal interaction. Over 80% of the surveyed hoteliers say that they compliment their guests if they are staying with them and have a personal holiday, and 12% indicated local or international holidays as occasions for complimenting their guests. Unequivocally, all professionals believe that it is important to make every guest feel special. Over 35% of hoteliers leave a bottle of wine in the room as a compliment, and over 25% leave a welcome card. The interesting fact is that over 60% of the surveyed specialists have a database with the history of each guest.

According to **users' perception of personalized service**, more than 92% of customers believe that personalized service affects the brand's image, and more than 72% say they would use a hotel where a specific employee is responsible for their requirements on the spot. Over 64% of guests expect to receive personal attention during their stay at the hotel, and over 70% have received a compliment. Over 90% notice the small details when staying in a hotel. From the point of view of the interviewed customers, personalized service depends on the size and category of the object - 52% and 48% prefer to be served by the same hotel staff. On the other hand, hoteliers do not accept that personalization depends on the category and size of the hotel over 80% of respondents. For more than 40% of customers, personalized service is associated with the personal attitude of the staff, over 20% answered that personal service is associated with special offers and promotions, and a lower percentage of consumers accept compliments as a tool of personalization.

According to the **reasons for choosing one or another hotel**, the points of view of hoteliers and guests is similar. When choosing a hotel online, users choose the hotel's rating and comments from other users as the main criteria. In third place is belonging to a local or international chain. When choosing a hotel, regardless of how it will be booked, the rating on the Internet is the leading factor, immediately followed by the recommendations of friends and the location. The customers would recommend a hotel in the first place because of the personal attitude of the employees - over 60%, followed by the services offered on site. From the hotelier's point of view, guests return to them mostly because of the employees, who have an individual approach to each guest - more than 70% of the respondents, followed by the good ratio price-quality and in third place is the location.

Customer preferences and brand. According to the results of the survey, a large part of hoteliers analyze the preferences of their guests before or during their stay - 50%, and more than 50% of the surveyed travelers want to be asked in advance or to be specifically asked during their accommodation-over 20%. More than 40% of consumers would choose a hotel because of the brand image, slightly less than 40% cannot judge, while nearly 80% of specialists accept that the brand image has a significant influence on the choice of guests.

6. Conclusion

In the conditions of a dynamic and highly competitive environment, the hotel industry is paying attention to the individual treatment and personalized service of the guests. The terminology of experience design, travel design, etc. is increasingly entering the overall tourism sector. In this context, the human factor is an indispensable part of quality guest service and the provision of a complete experience. Personal interaction, attention, interpersonal relationships take precedence and shift the focus from the previous favorite - location. We can conclude that the concept of butler services is still unknown in the country, specialists do not have enough information about the essence of the concept. In this regard, the study of good practices in butler service in competing destinations can help its development in Bulgaria.

Personal service can be used as a tool to enhance brand image, regardless of whether it is a chain or an independent establishment. Unlimited information, access to different platforms, recommendations of acquaintances influence the customer's choice. Good positioning in the minds of guests and personalized services help to improve the brand image.

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Dr. Svetla Tagareva
CONFITO Events&Travel, Bulgaria
E-mail: svetla.tagareva@confi.to