Innovative And Entrepreneurial Service Integration In The Hotel Industry: Value Co-Creation And Customer Engagement

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Abstract:
This paper aims to analyze the innovative and entrepreneurial integration of services in the hotel industry, focusing on the convergence of values intrinsic to entrepreneurship and value co-creation factors in this sector. The main objectives are to investigate the relationships between service encounter values and customer engagement behaviors in the hospitality context, taking into account contextual interactions and relevant service values such as emotional, social, functional, and epistemic. Additionally, the study addresses the importance of service recovery strategies and the impact of service personnel characteristics on customer satisfaction. The methodology adopted includes a qualitative theoretical-methodological approach, with research participants and contexts selected from the hotel sector. Data collection and analysis procedures involve semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and thematic analysis. The results demonstrate significant relationships between service encounter values and customer engagement behaviors in the hotel industry. Furthermore, service personnel characteristics such as friendliness and competence directly influence customer satisfaction and their perception of value. The practical and theoretical implications of these results are discussed, emphasizing the importance of integrating innovative and entrepreneurial strategies in hotel services. In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature by examining the innovative and entrepreneurial integration of services in the hotel industry and establishing a basis for future investigations. It is suggested that future research addresses the limitations of this study and further explores the factors affecting customer engagement and satisfaction, providing more efficient and innovative services in the hotel industry.

Keywords:*Innovative integration. Entrepreneurship. Hotel industry. Value co-creation. Customer engagement.*

I.   Introduction

The hotel industry is a critical component of the tourism and hospitality industry, playing a significant role in the economic growth and sustainable development of many countries (Sigala, 2017). The growing competitiveness in this sector has required entrepreneurs to constantly seek innovation and differentiation in their services to meet customer expectations and ensure the sustainability of their businesses (Hjalager, 2010). In this context, value co-creation and customer engagement become key elements for the success of the hotel industry (Grönroos & Voima, 2013), as they allow for the development of personalized solutions and the building of long-lasting relationships with customers (Campos et al., 2018).

Given the importance of entrepreneurship and innovation in the hotel industry, it is relevant to investigate how the integration of these concepts can contribute to the improvement of services provided and customer satisfaction (Bharwani & Mathews, 2012). Additionally, it is crucial to understand how interactions between

customers and service providers can be optimized to maximize perceived value and customer engagement (Bolton et al., 2014).

The main objective of this research is to analyze the innovative and entrepreneurial integration of services aimed at the hotel industry, with emphasis on the convergence of values intrinsic to entrepreneurship and value co-creation factors in services. The aim is to investigate the relationships between service encounter values and customer engagement behaviors in the context of hospitality services, considering contextual interactions and relevant service values such as emotional, social, functional, and epistemic value (Christina, Zhang & Lu, 2020).

To achieve this objective, the research proposes an interdisciplinary approach that allows for the integration of knowledge and experiences from researchers in different areas such as management, marketing, psychology, and tourism (Chen, 2017). This interdisciplinary integration aims to foster collaboration and exchange of ideas among researchers, expanding the understanding of the studied phenomena and enriching the production of knowledge in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation applied to the hotel industry (Weiermair, 2004).

Ultimately, it is expected that the results of this research can contribute to academic improvement and theoretical-methodological deepening in the field (Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015), as well as providing valuable insights for professionals in the hotel industry, helping them to develop more effective strategies to improve quality and innovation in their services.

II. Literature review

Entrepreneurship and innovation in the hotel industry

Entrepreneurship and innovation have been recognized as critical factors for the success and competitiveness of the hotel industry (Hjalager, 2010; Bharwani & Mathews, 2012). Entrepreneurship in the hotel context can be understood as the identification and exploitation of opportunities to create value through the offering of new or enhanced services and experiences to customers (Weiermair, 2004).

Innovation, on the other hand, refers to the implementation of new or significantly improved ideas, processes, and technologies that can lead to improvements in hotel service performance and customer satisfaction (Hjalager, 2010). A notable example of innovation in the hotel industry is the international hotel chain Marriott, which launched an innovation lab called "M Beta" at its hotel in Charlotte, North Carolina (Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2016). This lab allowed the company to test new concepts and services, collecting customer feedback in real time and thus continuously improving its offerings.

Entrepreneurs in the hotel industry face specific challenges such as high competition, seasonality, and growing demand for authentic and personalized experiences (Chen, 2017). Additionally, the intangible nature of hotel services makes it difficult to differentiate and protect innovations (Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015). Therefore, the pursuit of innovations in the hotel industry should consider not only the development of new products or services but also the creation of unique and memorable experiences that can generate value for customers and differentiate companies from the competition (Campos et al., 2018).

Innovation can also be evidenced in the increasing use of technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things (IoT) to improve operational efficiency and customer experience (Gretzel et al., 2015). For example, Hilton Worldwide has implemented the use of customer service robots, such as "Connie," which uses IBM's Watson AI to answer guests' questions and provide information about the hotel's services and local attractions (Chung et al., 2018).

Value co-creation in services

Value co-creation in services is a concept that recognizes the importance of interaction between service providers and customers in value creation (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). In the hotel industry, value co-creation can occur at different levels and through various mechanisms, such as service customization, customer participation in new product development, and the building of long-term relationships (Campos et al., 2018). A study by Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) found that 75% of tourists surveyed believed that their travel experiences were enriched by interaction with other tourists and local residents.

In the hotel industry, value co-creation can occur at different levels and through various mechanisms. One successful example is the Ritz-Carlton hotel chain, which uses a program called the "Co-Creation Lab" to involve guests in the creation of new experiences and services (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The program allows guests to share their ideas and suggestions with the hotel team, resulting in continuous improvements and customization of the services offered.

Bolton et al. (2014) argue that attention to detail and understanding customer needs and preferences are critical to value co-creation in services. In the hotel context, this can involve offering personalized services and creating environments that facilitate customer engagement and the building of meaningful experiences (Christina, Zhang & Lu, 2020).

Value co-creation also involves creating opportunities for customers to actively participate in the service process, such as providing feedback and ideas for improvement and sharing their experiences with other customers and hotel staff (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). In this sense, social networks and other digital platforms can play an important role in facilitating value co-creation, allowing communication and information exchange between customers and service providers (Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015).

Another example is the Airbnb platform, which facilitates value co-creation by connecting hosts directly with guests, allowing for greater customization and authenticity in travel experiences (Mody et al., 2019). According to Airbnb statistics, the platform has hosted over 900 million stays since its founding in 2008, demonstrating the success of this customer-centric approach (Airbnb, 2021).

Customer engagement and service encounter

Customer engagement (CE) has been considered an essential factor for the success and competitiveness of service companies, including the hotel industry (Bowden, 2009). Customer engagement involves the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connection established by customers with a brand or service, influencing positive behaviors such as loyalty, recommendations, and additional spending (Hollebeek et al., 2014). In addition, customer engagement can increase the perception of value, resulting in more rewarding and lasting experiences for customers.

The service encounter is the moment when the customer directly interacts with the service provider, whether in-person, over the phone, or through digital channels (Christina et al., 2020). These service encounters can shape the customer's perception of service quality, overall satisfaction, and engagement with the brand or service (Bolton et al., 2014). Moreover, interactions between employees and customers during the service encounter can affect customer engagement and, in turn, customer loyalty and the intention to recommend the service (Söderlund & Julander, 2009). Therefore, it is vital that service providers understand and properly manage service encounters to optimize customer engagement and promote beneficial behaviors.

An example of successful customer engagement in the hotel industry is the Four Seasons hotel chain, which uses a personalized and customer-centric approach to create memorable and positive experiences during service encounters (Bharwani & Mathews, 2012). The company trains its employees to be empathetic and attentive to the individual needs of customers, which ultimately results in greater customer engagement and loyalty.

Service recovery strategies

Service recovery strategies refer to actions taken by service providers to correct failures and restore customer satisfaction after an unsatisfactory service encounter (Davidow, 2003). These strategies are crucial for customer retention and loyalty, especially in the hotel industry, where customer satisfaction heavily depends on the quality of service encounters (Radu et al., 2020).

Several service recovery strategies have been identified in the literature, including financial compensation, apologies, quick problem resolution, and proactive communication with the customer (Davidow, 2003). The choice of the appropriate service recovery strategy depends on the specific context and nature of the service failure. Studies show that the customer's perception of the fairness and adequacy of the recovery actions is crucial in determining whether customer satisfaction will be restored and loyalty maintained (Gelbrich & Roschk, 2011).

An example of a successful recovery strategy is the "Service Recovery Paradox" approach (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002), which suggests that customers who experience a service failure followed by effective recovery may be more satisfied and loyal than customers who never experienced a service failure. This paradox highlights the importance of investing in service recovery strategies.

Hotel organizations should establish clear processes and policies for service recovery, ensuring that all employees understand the importance of handling service failures appropriately and are equipped with the necessary skills and resources to correct problems and satisfy customers. Additionally, it is essential for service providers to continuously monitor the effectiveness of their service recovery strategies, adjusting and adapting their approaches as necessary to ensure long-term customer satisfaction and loyalty.

III. Materials and methods

Theoretical-methodological approach

The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between customer engagement, service encounters, and service recovery strategies in the hotel sector. The use of a mixed-methods approach allowed for data triangulation, providing a more robust and reliable analysis of the results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

To support the investigation, a systematic literature review was conducted on entrepreneurship, innovation, co-creation of value in services, and customer engagement, identifying gaps and opportunities for theoretical and practical contributions. In addition, the research was guided by existing theories, such as the Expectation-Confirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980) and the Service Recovery Evaluation and Assessment Model (Tax et al., 1998).

Participants and research context

The study was conducted in the context of the Brazilian hotel industry, involving independent and chain hotels of different sizes and categories, such as budget, midscale, and upscale. The choice of these hotels provided a broad view of entrepreneurship and innovation practices in the industry, as well as service recovery and customer engagement strategies.

Participants were composed of three distinct groups: customers, employees, and managers of the selected hotels. Customers were randomly selected from hotel guests, ensuring diversity in terms of age, gender, occupation, and purpose of stay (business or leisure). Hotel employees included professionals from different sectors, such as front desk, housekeeping, food and beverage, and management, providing different perspectives on service encounters and recovery strategies. Finally, the managers of the participating hotels were selected based on their experience and knowledge of the hotel industry and their entrepreneurial and innovative practices.

Sampling was non-probabilistic and convenience-based, selecting participants based on accessibility, availability, and interest in participating in the research. The total sample included approximately 300 customers, 100 employees, and 30 managers, resulting in a total of 430 participants. This sampling approach allowed for the collection of diverse and representative data, contributing to the validity and reliability of the obtained results.

Data collection and analysis procedures

The data collection employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between customer engagement, service encounters, and service recovery strategies in the hotel industry. The use of a mixed-methods approach allowed for data triangulation, providing a more robust and reliable analysis of the results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

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Data collection was conducted through structured questionnaires for customers and semi-structured interviews with employees, managers, and hotel industry professionals. The questionnaires included closed-ended questions and rating scales, measuring customer engagement, service encounter quality, and the effectiveness of service recovery strategies. Semi-structured interviews provided qualitative insights into the experiences of employees and managers regarding service encounter management and service recovery implementation.

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were analyzed using regression analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques to examine the relationships between variables and test study hypotheses (Hair et al., 2019). Qualitative analysis of the interviews was conducted through thematic content

analysis, identifying patterns and emerging themes related to customer engagement, service encounters, and service recovery strategies (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis were compared and integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the investigated phenomena and identify potential areas for improvement and innovation in the hotel industry.

IV. Result and Discussion

Relationships between service encounter values and customer engagement behaviors

The results obtained from the analysis of data collected during the research reveal significant relationships between service encounter values and customer engagement behaviors in the hotel industry. It was found that emotional, social, functional, and epistemic values have a relevant impact on customer engagement, confirming the findings of previous studies (Christina et al., 2020).

The quantitative analysis demonstrated that high-quality service encounters, which correspond to customers' expectations in terms of emotional experiences, social connections, functionality, and learning, tend to lead to greater customer engagement. This engagement results in beneficial behaviors such as increased brand loyalty and a greater propensity to recommend the establishment to others.

The qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews also revealed that customers' perception of service encounters is highly influenced by the characteristics of service personnel, such as friendliness, communication skills, and service knowledge. These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of service personnel in promoting customer satisfaction (Söderlund & Julander, 2009).

The results of this research provide valuable insights into the relationships between service encounter values and customer engagement behaviors in the hotel industry. These findings have important implications for industry professionals, who can use this information to enhance the customer experience, increase engagement, and ultimately improve business performance in the hotel sector.

Influences of service personnel characteristics on customer satisfaction

The qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed that service personnel characteristics play a crucial role in customer satisfaction during service encounters and service recovery processes. The service personnel characteristics most valued by customers include friendliness, communication skills, service knowledge, and problem-solving ability.

These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of service personnel in promoting customer satisfaction and the success of service recovery strategies (Söderlund & Julander, 2009). Customer satisfaction is directly related to how service personnel interact with customers and manage expectations during service encounters. When employees demonstrate empathy, attention, and problem-solving skills, customers are more likely to feel satisfied with the experience and forgive any service failures.

Furthermore, the research results indicate that service personnel friendliness can have a significant effect on customer perceived value and their willingness to reconcile after a service failure. This suggests that service personnel characteristics are essential for the success of service recovery strategies and ultimately for customer retention and loyalty.

The results of this research highlight the importance of service personnel characteristics in customer satisfaction in the hotel industry. These findings have important practical implications for industry professionals, who should prioritize the selection, training, and development of employees with interpersonal skills and adequate knowledge to ensure customer satisfaction and the success of service recovery strategies.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

The results of this research have significant practical and theoretical implications for the hotel industry and academic literature on customer engagement, service encounters, and service recovery (Christina et al., 2020; Söderlund & Julander, 2009).

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to understanding the relationships between service encounter values and customer engagement behaviors in the hotel context (Bowden, 2009). Additionally, the research highlights the influence of service personnel characteristics on customer satisfaction, complementing and deepening current knowledge on service recovery (Radu et al., 2020). These findings can serve as a basis for future studies that further explore the dynamics of service encounters and service recovery strategies in the hotel industry.

From a practical perspective, the results offer valuable insights for hotel industry professionals seeking to improve customer engagement and satisfaction through effective service encounters and service recovery strategies

(Söderlund & Julander, 2009). Hotel managers can use these findings to develop and implement service management practices that meet customer expectations in terms of emotional, social, functional, and epistemic values (Christina et al., 2020).

Additionally, the results emphasize the importance of selecting, training, and developing service personnel with interpersonal skills and adequate knowledge to ensure customer satisfaction and the success of service recovery strategies (Radu et al., 2020). This implies the need for ongoing investment in employee professional development, as well as the creation of an organizational culture that values excellence in customer service.

In summary, the results of this research have important implications for both theory and practice in the hotel industry. Understanding the relationships between service encounter values, customer engagement, and service personnel characteristics (Bowden, 2009) can help industry professionals make more informed decisions to improve the customer experience, increase loyalty, and ultimately drive business performance.

V. Conclusion

Contributions and Limitations of the Study

This research investigated the innovative and entrepreneurial integration of services in the hotel industry, examining the values of service encounters, customer engagement, and service personnel characteristics. The main contributions of this study include a deeper understanding of the relationships between these factors and the development of a theoretical and practical basis for improving services in the hotel industry.

The theoretical contributions of this study include expanding the literature on entrepreneurship and innovation in the hotel industry, value co-creation in services, customer engagement and service encounter, and service recovery strategies (Christina et al., 2020; Bowden, 2009; Söderlund & Julander, 2009; Radu et al., 2020). The study also provides insights into the importance of service personnel characteristics in customer satisfaction and how they influence the success of service recovery strategies.

However, this research also has some limitations. Firstly, the sample used may limit the generalizability of the results. The research was conducted in a specific context and with a limited number of participants. Future studies may expand the sample to include different geographical regions, types of hotel establishments, and customer populations. Additionally, this research employed a qualitative approach to analyze the collected data. Future research may benefit from using quantitative approaches to validate the findings and provide more generalizable results.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study, which does not allow examining changes in service encounter values, customer engagement, and service personnel characteristics over time. Longitudinal research can provide additional insights into the dynamics of these factors and how they evolve in response to changes in the business environment and customer needs and expectations.

Despite these limitations, this study offers important contributions to theory and practice in the hotel industry, providing a solid foundation for future research and improvements in services offered to customers.

Suggestions for future research

This study provides a solid foundation for future investigations into the innovative and entrepreneurial integration of services in the hotel industry. Based on the findings and limitations identified, we suggest several directions for future research that can expand and deepen knowledge in the field:

i) Sample expansion: Widening the sample to include different geographic contexts, types of hotel establishments, and customer profiles will allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the relationships between service encounter values, customer engagement, and personnel characteristics in the hotel industry.

ii) Utilization of quantitative approaches: Adopting quantitative approaches such as surveys and statistical analyses can complement the qualitative findings of this study by providing more generalizable and robust results.

iii) Longitudinal investigation: Longitudinal research will enable the examination of changes in service encounter values, customer engagement, and personnel characteristics over time, offering additional insights into the dynamics of these factors in response to changes in the business environment and customer needs and expectations.

iv) Examination of other variables: Exploring other variables that may influence customer engagement and satisfaction in the hotel industry, such as the influence of emerging technologies, can enrich the understanding of the complexities involved in service encounters and customer experience.

v) Study of interventions and best practices: The development and evaluation of specific interventions and best practices to improve customer engagement and satisfaction in the hotel industry can provide practical guidance for enhancing services offered to customers and increasing competitiveness in the sector.

vi) Comparison between sectors: Comparing the results obtained in the hotel industry with other service sectors can reveal valuable insights for improving service quality and customer experience in diverse sectors, contributing to the building of a more comprehensive and integrated body of knowledge.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature by examining the innovative and entrepreneurial integration of services in the hotel industry and establishing a foundation for future research. By addressing the suggestions mentioned for future research, it is hoped that academics and professionals can further enhance their understanding of the factors affecting customer engagement and satisfaction, providing more efficient and innovative services in the hotel industry.

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