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BARCELONA

Human Dimension as the Key Success Factor in Experience Management. The Emotional Connection as the Best Loyalty Strategy

Nuria Louzao Belmonte

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PhD in Business | Nuria Louzao Belmonte

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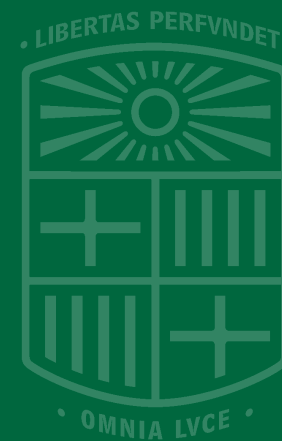


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PhD in Business

Thesis title:

Human Dimension as the Key Success
Factor in Experience Management.
The Emotional Connection as the
Best Loyalty Strategy

PhD candidate:

Nuria Louzao Belmonte

Advisor:

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Date:

May 2024



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Aprendí...

*que no importa lo que pase o que tan malo pueda parecer el día de hoy,
la vida continua y mañana será mejor.
Que puede decirse mucho sobre una persona
a partir de la manera en que maneja tres situaciones simples:
un día lluvioso, la pérdida de su equipaje, y el enredo de las luces de Navidad.
Que, sin importar la relación que tengas con tus padres,
los extrañarás enormemente cuando ya no estén con vida.
Que algo de qué vivir, no es lo mismo que vivir.
Que, a veces, la vida te da segundas oportunidades.
Que cuando decido algo con el corazón abierto,
casi siempre tomo la decisión correcta.
Que todos los días hay que acercarse y tocar a alguien;
todos amamos un abrazo cálido o simplemente,
una palmada amistosa en la espalda.
Que, a estas alturas de mi vida, todavía tengo mucho por aprender..
Aprendí que la gente olvidará lo que dijiste, olvidará lo que hiciste,
pero nunca olvidará cómo les hiciste sentir.
Dicen que cuando la memoria falla, los sentimientos perduran.
Aprendí que la gente olvidará lo que dijiste, olvidará lo que hiciste,
pero nunca olvidará cómo les hiciste sentir.
Dicen que cuando la memoria falla, los sentimientos perduran.
El tiempo pasa, la gente cambia, las palabras se pierden, el suceso se olvida,
pero las emociones que sentiste en ese instante de tu vida perduran en tu cerebro.
Sé consciente de cómo haces sentir a los demás”.*

Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

Aknowledgements

“Human dimension as the key success factor in experience management. The emotional connection as the best loyalty strategy.” I thought as a title, it was too long, but now I think I should add in the Hospitality sector. Because those are my keywords; this research talks about PEOPLE (internal clients or employees and external clients or customers) and about ENGAGEMENT through EMOTIONAL CONNECTION in the HOSPITALITY sector; although it is applicable in any activity related with the service sector.

It could be confirmed that I started this thesis back in the 90s when I started studying at CETT, (Centre d'Estudis Tècnics Turístics). Since then, the passion and admiration for the hotel sector, its professionals, and professors, have motivated me to follow a long path that has guided me to my actual place as Professor, Hospitality Master's Degree Coordinator and Researcher at the *Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB*; the same university where I took the first steps in the tourism sector.

Prior to the start of this thesis, I would like to take some time to acknowledge all of those who have made this project possible.

Firstly, to not just my advisor but my mentor and role model *PhD Montserrat Crespi-Vallbona*, who has inspired me by example assisting me through all personal, professional, and academic circumstances all these years. Leading and giving me all the support needed, as well as helping me developing the different contributions with the aim of enriching the results of this research.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge the *Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of Barcelona*, where I have had the privilege of developing my Doctoral Program during these years, especially to the Business PhD Program led by *Mercè Bernardo and Coordinated by Jordi Roca, Judit Farré and Irene Abad*.

Thirdly, I would like to acknowledge the *Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB*, the university where I studied Tourism thirty years ago and that has now given me all the resources and support to carry out this academic and personal challenge.

Fourthly, I would like to acknowledge *all the tourists, customers, patients, colleagues, professors, and students*, that have taken part in this thesis, by contributing with their constant reviews, advice, suggestions, comments, and support with the intention of joining me on this path, by enriching “our results”.

I would also like to acknowledge *all the professionals of the luxury hotel sector who have generously participated* in the methodology of this research either through their responses in the surveys, their active participation in the focus group, in-depth interviews, or by sharing their answers and contributions with their personal thoughts and ideas based on their personal experiences. Without them, it would not have been possible, for that, I am extremely grateful for all their support.

And lastly, I would like to especially acknowledge to *MY FAMILY*, specially to *my parents, my husband, my son, and my lovely pet!* who have stuck with me throughout the day-to-day life of this thesis, giving me, as always, all their support and unconditional love.

Abstract

Purpose

This study contributes to the understanding of the interconnectedness between employee well-being, emotional connection, fair work practices, and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. It highlights the importance of creating a positive work environment that promotes employee engagement and emotional connection as a strategy for enhancing customer satisfaction and achieving sustainable growth. It aims to examine the interplay between employee well-being, emotional connection, and fair work practices in shaping customer satisfaction and industry sustainability within Barcelona's luxury hospitality sector.

Methodology

This research employed a multi-chapter approach to investigate employee well-being, customer experiences, and fair work practices in Barcelona's luxury hotel industry.

Chapter 2 began with a systematic literature review. 138 articles were analyzed and categorized by topic. Atlas.ti network analysis tool was used to categorize and visualize the relationships between authors and keywords mentioned in the literature review. Furthermore, in order to extract managerial implications, a focus group was organized to contrast the results analyzed in the literature review with the expert opinion of the luxury hotel sector. Subsequent chapters explored specific aspects in more detail.

Chapter 3 used a mixed methods approach to understand employee engagement and motivation. This included quantitative data collection through validated online surveys (400 usable responses) and qualitative data analysis of employee reviews on platforms such as Indeed and Glassdoor (378 comments).

Chapter 4 examined guest experiences through a dual approach of online review analysis (TripAdvisor & Ctrip, focusing on customer-staff interactions and guest emotions) and semi-structured interviews with frequent luxury hotel guests.

Finally, **Chapter 5** used a qualitative design to explore employees' perceptions of fair labor practices. This included surveys of entry-level employees and in-depth interviews with industry experts to explore their understanding of fair labor and the potential impact of a specific certification program (HJLR) on employees, the company and even customers.

Findings

The findings reveal a strong correlation between employee engagement, emotional connection with customers, and customer satisfaction. Fair work practices, as exemplified by the Fair Labor Responsible Hotels Certification, were identified as a key factor in fostering employee well-being and emotional connection.

Keywords: Emotional Connection, Fair Work Practices, Employee Engagement, Customer Satisfaction, Hospitality Industry, Barcelona

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Motivation

Based on a beautiful phrase of the writer Maya Angelou (1928-2014), an American civil rights activist, “people will forget what you say and what you do, but they will never forget how you make them feel”, this is the key to staying in their memory so that they never forget you.

Motivations for this research have been many. Firstly, and from my personal point of view is my professional experience in the service sector. After almost 30 years dedicated to the hospitality industry, first and for 3 years, working as a tourist informant in the different tourist offices of the Tourist Board of Barcelona; giving information and services to tourists arriving to our city.

After that and during 15 years since the opening of the first Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Europe, I was working as a Guest Relations Manager, which is a professional profile very similar to a Public Relations in hotels, and it's the person who is the direct contact with guests; coordinating and managing personalized experiences, loyalty systems, and dealing with complaints of individuals, VIP's and repeat guests.

After that, and for 3 years, I had developed and managed a project consisting into designing and implementing a private and international patients' area in a private hospital in the medical sector. Where we had created a new integral area where all procedures (administrative, services and medical procedures) where customers/patients oriented, designed from the patient's perspective.

And finally, for the last 15 years collaborating as a professor in private universities of Tourism & Hospitality of BCN. During the first 3 years as part time professor and during the last 12 years as a full-time professor at the university of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB, affiliated to the University of Barcelona, the same university where I studied Tourism & Hospitality Management 30 years ago.

During all those years of experience, I realized there is a common element which is people/customers/guest's orientation; always focusing the efforts on the human resources to impact in customer satisfaction. No matter if we are talking about tourists, hotel guests, patients, or students. The objective is always the same, to create unique, personal, and memorable experiences and this is accomplished by the emotional connection established between customers and staff members of the different organizations.

The key point of this research is then to analyze how to transform each interaction that a customer could have with any member of the staff in an organization into an integral experience where the main goal is not just fulfilling their needs but anticipating them. As well as how to transform customer satisfaction into customer engagement. And this could only be done through the emotional labor developed by actively engaged employees with their organizations, aligned with the same objectives, values, and philosophy, and with a high level of emotional intelligence.

From an academic point of view, the interest for that topic started after looking through articles and studies conducted throughout the years, when realized the lack of studies towards emotional intelligence and its effects related with the internal client in the hospitality field, as most of them were focused on the external client or customer and in other sectors. It is known how important the engagement with the clients and their level of satisfaction in the service sector is. Therefore, it was considered of main interest to know how the internal client and their emotional labor, as a result of their engagement towards the hotel company they are working for, can impact on the global satisfaction of the external client. This was considered a new approach as all studies are centered on customer centricity, nor employee centricity.

And finally, it is a study of importance for academics and professionals due to its contribution to selection processes based on innate service talents as the emotional intelligence. Therefore, the results provide both academic and managerial implications.

Human Dimension in Luxury Hospitality

The following chapter provides a theoretical introduction to the chapters that follow. In today's digital age, where companies face increasingly fierce competition, especially in hospitality with new business models, customer experience has become a key differentiator and success factor. Customers are no longer satisfied with simply buying a product or service; they are looking for memorable and meaningful experiences that make them feel connected to the brand.

In this context, experience management has emerged as an essential strategic discipline for companies. It focuses on understanding and optimizing the customer journey at all points of contact with the organization, from arrival to departure to post-departure. Its goal is to create positive and consistent experiences that generate satisfy and loyal customers.

The human dimension plays a crucial role in the success of experience management. Emotions are a fundamental factor in customer decision making, and

therefore, companies should focus on creating experiences that evoke positive emotions in their customers.

Emotional connection is the best loyalty strategy. Customers who feel emotionally connected to a brand are more likely to make repeat purchases, recommend the brand to others, and defend it in difficult times.

It is considered of main interest in the service sector to know how the internal clients or workers and their emotional labor can have an impact on the external client or customer's emotions.

The actual context of Tourism and Hospitality

Tourism has become a global mass phenomenon, and the hospitality industry is an important part of it. It is a service industry whose main objective is to create wealth for shareholders through service and guest satisfaction (Duro & Rodríguez, 2015).

The tourism industry is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world, with 1,300 million international tourist arrivals worldwide and \$3.3 billion or 3% of global GDP (UNWTO, 2023). According to the Mastercard Global Destination Cities Index, Barcelona was the 17th most visited city in the world, with 9.09 million international visitors. In fact, Barcelona has experienced a significant increase in tourism since the 1992 Olympic Games.

The year in question saw a revolutionary change in the tourism and hospitality sector. New means of transport arrived, and international hotel chains such as Marriott (W Hotel, 2001; Arts Hotel, 1994, among others), Fairmont (Juan Carlos I Hotel, 1992), Derby Hotel Collections (Hotel Claris, 1992) and other independent hotels (Mercer, 1993) increasingly recognized the potential of Barcelona as a tourist destination. In 1990, the city received 1,732,902 tourists and around 3,800,000 overnight stays. This figure increased exponentially until 2023, with 15.6 million arrivals and 18,649,866 overnight stays (Ajuntament de Barcelona, Bcn.cat, 2023). Furthermore, a study of the number of hotels in the city shows that in 1990 Barcelona had 118 hotels, which increased to 426 hotels in 2000, just eight years after the Olympic Games (Barcelona Turisme, 2019). Barcelona is currently home to a thriving hospitality sector, with 787 hotels and 47 five-star and five-star grand luxury hotels (Idescat, 2023).

From employee engagement to customer satisfaction

The hospitality industry thrives on exceeding guest expectations and fostering loyalty. Customer satisfaction, defined as the perception of quality after receiving a service (Zeithaml et al., 2002), hinges on interactions with employees. Luxury

hotels, facing intense competition, require a dedicated workforce to deliver exceptional experiences and build emotional connections with guests.

This research explores the critical link between employee engagement and guest satisfaction in luxury hotels. Building a positive organizational climate that empowers and motivates employees fosters a sense of value and commitment to company culture. Studies by Gracia et al. (2013) highlight the impact of such a climate on employee engagement, ultimately translating into exceptional customer service.

Frontline employees in luxury hotels play a pivotal role. Their interactions directly impact guest perception of service quality (Gounaris, 2008). Engaged employees, who go beyond satisfaction, become brand ambassadors, fostering emotional connections with guests. Research by Kumar & Oliver (1997) confirms the positive relationship between customer engagement and loyalty, a key driver of profitability.

By analyzing factors that impact frontline staff, this research aims to develop strategies that boost employee engagement. Luxury hotels can leverage this to cultivate a guest experience that fosters loyalty and drives business success.

The luxury hospitality industry is characterized by its high-end services and discerning clientele. To meet the expectations of these demanding guests, hotels must provide exceptional service that is delivered with passion and enthusiasm. This requires a highly engaged workforce that is committed to going above and beyond for guests.

Employee Engagement Theory

Employee engagement theory provides a framework for understanding and improving employee motivation, commitment, and productivity. According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement is "the harnessing of organizational members' selves -- their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energies -- as a service of their personal fulfillment, and contribution to organizational success."

Based on Kahn, several factors contribute to employee engagement in the workplace. These include:

Meaningful work: Employees want to feel that their work is important and makes a difference.

Opportunities for growth and development: Employees want to be challenged and have the opportunity to learn new skills.

Recognition and appreciation: Employees want to feel valued and appreciated for their contributions.

Empowerment and autonomy: Employees want to have a say in how they do their work and feel that they have control over their work environment.

Supportive work environment: Employees want to feel like they are part of a team and that their colleagues and managers support them.

From Customer Centricity to Employee Centricity: The Human Factor in Hospitality Guest Experience

The hospitality industry has long championed customer-centric service, a philosophy placing the guest's needs at the heart of its strategy (McEachern & Warnaby, 2005). However, a paradigm shift is emerging. Recent scholarship emphasizes the critical role of employees in delivering exceptional service quality (Karatepe, 2006; Dawson, et al., 2011).

This renewed focus acknowledges the "human factor" as a central component of the guest experience. The guest experience, as defined by Lovelock (1997), encompasses the sum of interactions and activities a customer encounters throughout their journey with a brand. Deloitte's 2022 study underscores the importance of actively managing this experience. By understanding guest interactions through employee feedback, businesses can tailor products, services, and experiences to evolving customer needs. This, in turn, drives satisfaction, loyalty, and ultimately, key business metrics.

The shift towards employee centricity aligns with the rise of experiential marketing (Holbrook, 1999). Today's consumers seek experiences, not just products or services (Lemke, Clark & Wilson, 2011). Experiential marketing, as defined by Krishna (2012), aims to engage consumers across all five senses – sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch. This approach seeks to evoke emotional responses rather than purely rational decision-making, fostering a deeper connection with the brand.

In the hospitality industry, guest emotions can be significantly influenced by staff interactions (Barsky & Nash, 2002). Indeed, some scholars argue that service providers are "part of the product itself" (Barsky & Nash, 2002). Studies like Langhorn's (2004) explore the link between personality types and service-oriented behavior, highlighting the importance of employee selection and training in creating an exceptional guest experience.

This article delves further into this evolving perspective. By placing employees at the center of the service ecosystem, the hospitality industry can unlock a new era of guest experience excellence.

Employee Engagement, the key to customer satisfaction in Luxury Hospitality

The service industry, particularly the luxury hospitality sector, is increasingly recognizing the critical role of employees in delivering exceptional guest experiences. This research delves into the connection between employee engagement and customer satisfaction in luxury hotels.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a significant role in service quality and customer satisfaction (Kernbach & Schutte, 2005). Employees with high EI possess the ability to understand and manage emotions effectively, leading to positive interactions with guests.

Building on Salovey & Mayer's (1990) work on EI, Khan (1990) introduced the concept of employee engagement, which describes an employee's dedication, commitment, and intrinsic motivation towards their work. Engaged employees experience positive emotions associated with their work, find it meaningful, and are hopeful about their future within the organization (Mohd, 2014). This emotional connection translates into higher performance and a willingness to learn and grow (Rodriguez-Muñoz & Baker, 2013).

Creating an organizational environment that fosters positive emotions like involvement and pride is essential for fostering employee engagement (Robinson, 2006). This not only benefits employees but also leads to improved organizational performance and reduced turnover (Saks, 2006; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009).

Engagement is a two-way street. Engaged employees feel connected to their work and the company, which in turn, leads to a higher level of customer engagement (Verhoef et al., 2010; Hollebeck, 2011). Employees who feel empowered and autonomous are better equipped to create memorable experiences for guests. Deloitte's (2017) research highlights the importance of fostering purpose and autonomy among employees to achieve customer experience excellence.

Luxury hotel guests have high expectations and demand exceptional service. Lashley's (2008) research emphasizes the correlation between employee experience and customer experience in the service sector. Luxury hotels, as argued by Gurel (2013), are part of the "experience economy" (Gilmore & Pine, 2014) where employee interactions play a pivotal role in shaping the guest experience.

This study aims to identify the impact of employee engagement and motivation on customer satisfaction in luxury hotels. By analyzing these factors and their influence on customer experience, the research seeks to contribute valuable insights to the field of luxury hospitality experience management. It delves into a

relatively unexplored area, focusing on the specific relationship between employee actions and guest satisfaction within the luxury hotel industry.

Employee attraction and retention are critical challenges in the hospitality sector. This research proposes a "fair work" approach for hotel employees, recognizing that ensuring fair employment conditions significantly contributes to employee engagement and ultimately, customer satisfaction.

Building upon previous research on the link between customer experience and employees (Lashley, 2008; Chi & Gursoy, 2009), this study offers a novel perspective by focusing on the luxury hospitality context. This originality justifies the study's contribution to the field.

Objectives

This study investigates the relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction in Barcelona's 5-star and 5-star Grand Luxury (5*GL) hotels. The aim of this research is to determine if a connection exists between the engagement of both internal clients (employees) and external clients (guests). Specifically, it is explored whether high employee engagement translates into high customer engagement, reflected in guest satisfaction. Taking this objective as the basis of the study, different specific objectives were created in order to explain this relationship.

1-To analyze the development of Employee Engagement and Emotional Connection research in Hospitality from 2010 to 2020.

2-To identify the levels of Employee Engagement and Motivation in Luxury Hospitality

3-To analyze the impact of hotel employees on Customer Satisfaction in Luxury Hospitality

4-To provide a proper definition of "Fair Work" and to identify the degree of knowledge among hotel employees about the indicators of Fair Labor Responsible Hotels Certification.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured as follows: Starts with Chapter 1 where the context and general idea of the thesis and its structure are explained. Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 each one written as independent chapters, each one addresses general and specific objectives (see Table 1). These chapters are followed by Chapter 6 the conclusions of the thesis, which includes a discussion of the academic and managerial contributions of the research, as well as limitations and future lines of research.

Table 1. Thesis Chapters, Objectives and Contributions

CHAPTER 1- Introduction

CHAPTER 2-Systematized literature review on emotional connection in luxury hospitality

General Objective -To establish a clear image of the most relevant findings on the topic, as well as creating a relevant review on the main conclusions extracted from the subject and its different approach.

Specific Objective - To provide a clear image of the relationship between the topics on the different articles used for the literature review.

Specific Objective - To understand the level of awareness and implementation of organizational support and culture to foster engagement in luxury hospitality organizations.

CONTRIBUTION 1- this chapter is accepted to be published as a book chapter in “Managerial Perceptions and models of organizational effectiveness”.

Louzao, N., Verge, C., Shibaeva, S., & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2024) “Employees’ emotional connection to their organization. Is it an achievable challenge?” In Valeri, Marco, (Eds) “Managerial Perceptions and models of organizational effectiveness”. Springer (Scopus indexed). IN PRESS.

CONTRIBUTION 2- These three entries related to the research key words have already been published at the “Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing” of Professor Dimitrios Buhalis.

Louzao, N. & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2022) “Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction”, 60-62, in Buhalis, D. (Eds): Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN: 978 1 80037 747 9

<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377486.service.quality.customer>

Louzao, N. y Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2022) “Inclusive experience”, 657-659, in Buhalis, D. (Eds): Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN: 978 1 80037 747 9

<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377486.inclusive.experience>

Louzao, N. y Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2022) “Employee Engagement” 73-75, in Buhalis, D. (Eds): Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN: 978 1 80037 747 9

<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377486.employee.engagement>

Google Scholar citations: 6

CHAPTER 3 - Employee Engagement in Luxury Hospitality: Barcelona Case Study

General Objective - To identify the level of employee engagement and employee motivation in the context of luxury hotels in the city of Barcelona.

Specific Objective- To identify those establish relationships between results from questionnaires and content analysis on employee opinion platforms.

CHAPTER 4 - Customer Engagement in Luxury Hospitality: Barcelona Case Study.

General Objective-To identify the impact of hotel staff on customer satisfaction in the context of luxury hotels in the city of Barcelona.

Specific Objective- To analyze the impact of hotel staff on customer satisfaction.

Specific Objective -To identify which departments are the most subject to foster customer emotional connection through their satisfaction.

Specific- To identify the factors that may create an emotional connection with customers.

CONTRIBUTION 3- Part of the analysis in this chapter 3 and 4 is being reviewed for publication in Journal of Marketing Analytics (Impact factor: 3,0; CiteScore: 0,8)

CHAPTER 5- Barcelona hotel employees and their conception of fair work

General Objective- To study the possible factors that influence customer satisfaction, i.e., hotel departments and employees, as well as to understand the potential factors that may create an emotional connection with customers.

Specific Objective-To provide the experts perception related to the decent and fair working condition conceptions.

-CONTRIBUTION 4: This article has already been published in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal.

Crespi-Vallbona, M., Noguer-Juncà, E.; Louzao, N., Corominas, Ll. (2023), “Barcelona hotel employees and their conception of fair work. An exploratory study”, Equality, diversity and inclusion: an Internacional Journal. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-08-2022-0232>.

Google Scholar citations: 2

CHAPTER 6: Conclusions and research outputs. Academic contributions and managerial implications. Research limitations and future lines of research.

Methodology

This research investigates the link between employee engagement and customer satisfaction in luxury hotels. In order to achieve the specific objectives of this thesis, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was employed.

Chapter 1 summarizes the context and general idea of the thesis and its structure.

Chapter 2 details a systematic literature review conducted using Web of Science. The review focused on articles published in the last decade and used keywords like burnout, emotional connection, and customer satisfaction. After filtering, 138 relevant articles were identified and categorized by theme (e.g., luxury hotels, employee engagement). Key concepts from each article were then synthesized. Finally, network analysis tools (Atlas.ti) were used to visualize the connections between themes and keywords.

Chapter 3 describes the research methods used to explore employee engagement and motivation in luxury hotels of Barcelona. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection.

Quantitative Data:

- Two validated online surveys measured employee engagement and motivation.
- Surveys were based on established models like UWES (Utrecht Work Engagement Survey) by Schaufeli and Salanova and Employee Motivation by Berardi (2015)
- 12,000 surveys were distributed, yielding 400 usable responses.
- Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and regression analysis using PSPP software.

Qualitative Data:

- Content analysis was conducted on online employee review platforms Indeed and Glassdoor.
- 378 comments were reviewed to gain insights into employee experiences.
- Qualitative data aimed to complement and provide depth to the quantitative survey findings.

Chapter 4 explores guest experiences in Barcelona's luxury hotels from a customers perspective using a two-pronged approach:

- Online Review Analysis: content analysis of customer reviews on TripAdvisor and Ctrip from 2010 to 2020 was conducted with a special focus on two key aspects:

- Customers-Staff Interactions: Examining the level of connection and interaction between guests and hotel staff.

- Customers Emotions: This analyzed the emotional response of guests to the service they received.

- Frequent customers semi-structured interviews: Semi-structured virtual interviews were conducted with five frequent luxury hotel guests in Barcelona. By combining online review analysis with in-depth guest interviews, the researchers gained a richer understanding of guest perspectives on luxury hotel experiences in Barcelona.

These interviews explored various topics including:

- Guest satisfaction with their hotel experiences
- Factors influencing the overall experience
- Customer loyalty towards luxury hotels
- The impact of online reviews on guest decision-making

Chapter 5 explores employee perceptions of fair work practices within a hotel certification program for socially responsible labor relations (HJLR). The research employs a qualitative design with two data collection methods:

- Surveys: A random sample of 248 entry-level hotel employees completed a questionnaire. This survey assessed their understanding of fair work practices, familiarity with the HJLR certification, and how they perceive the certification's impact on the hotel business.

- In-Depth Interviews: Interviews with hospitality industry experts were conducted, specifically human resource department heads and managers. These participants were chosen purposefully due to their expertise in human resource management, which is crucial to the study. The interviews mirrored the survey themes, delving into the concept of fair work, the HJLR certification, and its potential effects on employees, the business itself, and even clients.

By combining these two methods, the study gains a comprehensive picture of employee perceptions and expert insights regarding fair work practices within the context of the HJLR program.

Finally, **chapter 6** finally includes the overall conclusions, research outputs, academic contributions and managerial implications, as well as limitations and future research directions.

Table 2. Research Methodology Summary

| Chapter | Research Focus | Method | Data Collection | Analysis | Purpose |
|-----------|---|-------------------|--|--|--|
| Chapter 1 | Introduction | | | The Context and general idea of the thesis and its structure | |
| Chapter 2 | Literature Review | Systematic Review | Web of Science | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keyword Search (burnout, emotional connection, customer satisfaction) - Inclusion Criteria (articles published in last decade) - Thematic Analysis & Network Analysis (Atlas.ti) | Identify existing research on employee engagement and customer satisfaction. |
| Chapter 3 | Employee Engagement & Motivation (Luxury Hotels, Barcelona) | Mixed Methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantitative: Online Surveys (UWES, Berardi 2015) - Qualitative: Content Analysis of Online Reviews (Indeed, Glassdoor) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantitative: Descriptive Statistics, Regression Analysis (PSPP) - Qualitative: Coding & Thematic Analysis | Investigate employee engagement & motivation and their relationship with employee experiences. |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|---|---------------|---|---|--|
| Chapter 4 | Guest Experiences (Luxury Hotels, Barcelona) | Mixed Methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantitative: Online Review Analysis (TripAdvisor, Ctrip, 2010-2020) - Qualitative: Semi-structured Interviews (Frequent Guests) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantitative: Coding & Thematic Analysis (Focus: Guest-Staff Interaction, Guest Emotions) - Qualitative: Interview Thematic Analysis | Understand guest experiences, focusing on guest-staff interaction, guest emotions, and factors influencing satisfaction. |
| Chapter 5 | Fair Work Perceptions (Hotel Certification Program) | Qualitative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveys (Entry-Level Hotel Employees) - In-Depth Interviews (Hospitality HR Experts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey: Questionnaire Analysis - Interviews: Thematic Analysis | Explore employee perceptions of fair work practices within the context of a hotel certification program. |
| Chapter 6 | Conclusions | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Overall conclusions, research outputs, academic contributions and managerial implications, as well as limitations and future research directions | |

Chapter 2. Literature review on emotional connection in luxury hospitality (2010-2020)

-This chapter was presented at the 6th International Scientific Conference organized by the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Opatija, Croatia (30th of June 2021).

-This chapter was also presented on the III Research Seminar Session organized by Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB (1st of July 2021).

-Partial versions of this chapter were published as 3 book chapters in Buhalis, D. (Eds): Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing.

Louzao, N. & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2022) "Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction", 60-62, in Buhalis, D. (Eds): Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN: 978 1 80037 747 9
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377486.service.quality.customer>

Louzao, N. & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2022) "Inclusive experience", 657-659, in Buhalis, D. (Eds): Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN: 978 1 80037 747 9
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Louzao, N. & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2022) "Employee Engagement" 73-75, in Buhalis, D. (Eds): Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN: 978 1 80037 747 9
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Louzao, N., Verge, C., Shibaeva, S. & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2024). "Employees emotional connection to their organization. Is it an achievable challenge?". In Valeri, M, (Eds) "Managerial Perceptions and models of organizational effectiveness". Springer (Scopus Indexed). IN PRESS.

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the development of employee and customer emotional connection research in hospitality during the period 2010 to 2020.

Methodology

To establish a clear image of the most relevant findings on the topic, as well as creating a relevant review on the main conclusions extracted from the subject and its different approaches, article research was performed within the Web of Science database. Eventually, 348 articles were selected and created a complete review of the literature and theoretical framework, considering that only hospitality related articles were chosen.

Findings

The main concepts and ideas mentioned by each author were put in common, and the different authors' points of views and more relevant theories were summarized in different authors' tables. The objective of such tables was to provide a clear perspective on the illustrated progress on the different theories mentioned in the text.

Contributions

This study examines the development of employee and customer emotional connection research in hospitality from the last ten years. Also has de aim to identify research opportunities for future emotional connection research related to the hospitality industry.

Keywords: Burnout - Employee Engagement - Emotional Connection - Luxury Hotels - Employee Motivation - Customer Satisfaction and engagement

Introduction

Tourism, which has become a mass phenomenon (Bacik et al., 2020), is defined by the UNWTO as a social, cultural, and economic activity characterized by the movement of people for personal or business purposes, outside of their usual environment. The hospitality industry has often changed and developed needs and requirements that define the sector and now includes a wide range of establishments, from guest houses to luxury hotels.

Moreover, the luxury hotel industry has become increasingly competitive in this context, always searching for the right strategies to be introduced by the top management of hotels to respond to new demands and build a competitive advantage. Thus, the hospitality sector has a primary interest in recognizing how employees and their emotional relation with the business can influence customer satisfaction.

Luxury hotels are an important part of the tourism industry characterized by exceptional customer service and high levels of customer satisfaction as a result of a positive guest experience. The relation of employee and customer is a rather subtle topic that contains different ideas and has many ways of interpretation. By review of articles, it has been understood that the quality of the service offered necessarily affects customer satisfaction and their loyalty to the establishment.

This line of study has been issued from the necessity to examine the development of employee and customer emotional connection research in the luxury hotel sector from 2010 to 2020 due to the absence of existing systematic literature review about emotional connection, as well as the importance of such concept in the hospitality industry in modern times.

The proposal is therefore to establish a clear image of the most relevant findings on the topic, as well as creating a relevant review on the main conclusions extracted from the subject and its different approaches. This approach therefore has implications in both fields, both at an academic and professional level. The results of the literature review were taken as a basis to organize a focus group of experts with the intention of extracting managerial implications.

Literature Review

Luxury Hotels

The service sector has a main interest in knowing how employees and their emotional connection with the company can have an impact on the guests' satisfaction. Thus, the main objective of this research is analyzing the relationship

between the emotional connection of employees and guests in the luxury hospitality sector.

It should be noted that there is no homogeneous classification of tourist accommodation establishments at an international level. Hotels are not categorized in the same way in all countries. Defining luxury hotels based on the first annex of the Decree 75/2020, luxury hotels in Catalonia are those of 5* and 5*GL. These hotels are characterized by delivering the best service possible to their guests, through exceptional room decoration (amenities, etc), restoration 24/7 including restaurant, bar and room service, a minimum surface for the rooms and common areas, as well as providing at least one suite, among other minimum requirements.

Therefore, when it comes to luxury, service quality, satisfaction of customers and positive customer experiences are vital concepts (Dubois, Czellar & Laurent, 2005; Lu et al., 2015; Nasution & Mavondo, 2018). Indeed, a positive experience will cause the customer the wish to return, stay longer or recommend the establishment to others.

The hotel industry has always adapted to the changing needs and demands characterizing the sector that composes now all categories of establishment from guest houses to luxurious accommodations. In this context, the luxury hotel sector has become more and more competitive, always looking for the right strategies to be implemented by hotel top management to adapt to new demands and create competitive advantage.

As Torres & Kline, (2013) explained, a hotel is an overall experience engaging emotions, attitudes, and motivations. Satisfying basic needs is necessary, but not at all sufficient: it is the customer experience that will create a feeling of delight in the minds of guests. This is even more emphasized in luxury properties where guests expect high quality (Dubois et al., 2005).

As a result, hotel operators must focus on the quality of every detail of service with guest encounters and the emotional judgment about customers' stays as the basis for the hotel organization to differentiate itself from competitors (Chang & Horng, 2010). Vo (2018) emphasize this concept with the idea that a strong service-based philosophy is extremely important to achieve successful performances in hotel businesses, especially in luxury hotels, as well as in hotel chains which need to standardize all the customer and organizational processes to be successful across all properties.

Table 3. Luxury Hospitality Author's Table

| Idea | Authors | Methodology | Year | Source of publication | Country/Region |
|--|---|---|------|--|--------------------------|
| Hospitality industry is characterized by high competitiveness | N. Vo | Empirical study, comment analysis | 2018 | 14th Annual International Bata Conference for Ph.D. Students and Young Researchers | Vietnam |
| | R. Bacik, R. Fedorko, B. Gavurova, M. Olearova, M. Rigelsky | Exploratory, sentiment, and polarity analysis | 2020 | Marketing & Management of innovations | Visegrad group countries |
| Luxury hotels are characterized by customer satisfaction, service quality and positive customer experience | Dubois, Czellar & Laurent | Two-stage empirical study | 2005 | Marketing Letters | Western countries |
| | Lu, Berchoux, Marek & Chen | Interviews and qualitative analysis | 2015 | International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research | Taiwan |
| | Nasution & Mavondo | Qualitative survey analysis | 2018 | International Journal of Hospitality Management, | Australia |

Source: Self-elaboration.

Emotional connection - Customer Satisfaction

Bagozzi et al., (1999) define emotions as a mental state of readiness arising from the cognitive appraisal of events or thoughts, having a phenomenological tone, that can be accompanied by a psychic process. On the other hand, a similar concept, emotional attachment is defined as multifaceted, emotionally complex, that evolves through time and requires a personal history between the object and the person (Kleine & Baker, 3004; Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016).

But still, emotional connection has not been defined clearly in the existing literature, where connection with the company simply implies loyalty to establishment and level of satisfaction, measured through surveys and analysis of online reviews. In the meantime, emotional connection through social media platforms was studied by Bekalu, McClould & Viswanath (2019), where through survey research, authors study that the connection is not equal for all individuals, referring to various affection of social media on different people, frequency and amount of social media usage and differences related with age, education, race,

economic situation, what also forms a lot of different ways of research of the concept and possible conclusions.

Customer satisfaction, with relation to quality of the service, loyalty and purchase influence found to be highly correlated (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020). Customer satisfaction and attentiveness have direct significant impacts on repurchase intentions (Yavas et al., 2004). As Li et al., (2020) explain, very satisfied customers are more likely to come back and recommend the hotel, while very disappointed customers will spread bad words denigrating the reputation of the hotel, which leads to the loss of future potential customers (as an important example given in the study - one dissatisfied customer can lead to the loss of about 30 possible customers).

The highlight is a direct relation between service quality, what relates to client's general impression of the relative superiority of an institution and its services (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020), where quality is defined as the demand of the market by comparing expected and perceived performance of services by clients (Danish et al., 2018), and customer satisfaction, which means that a better quality of provided service leads to more satisfied and engaged customers (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020).

On the other hand, there is a direct connection between physical features and service in luxury hotels with customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Here, the failure in providing the basic services to customers leads to bigger dissatisfaction and less possible loyalty (Li et al, 2020). Due to the same research, through empirical study, it was found that the absence of basic services in the hotel, which are cleanliness, location, room, service and value, lead to customer dissatisfaction and the preservation of these essential attribute's quality reduces the dissatisfaction among guests (Li et al., 2020).

Another important side of customer satisfaction, which also has a big importance for the research development, is a connection of employee performance of providing the service with its effect on clients and their further ratings (Li et a.l, 2020; Cain et al., 2017). From here, Bagozzi et al., (1999) define emotions as a mental state of readiness arising from the cognitive appraisal of events or thoughts, having a phenomenological tone, that can be accompanied by a psychic process. On the other hand, a similar concept, emotional attachment is defined as multi-faceted, emotionally complex, that evolves through time and requires a personal history between the object and the person (Kleine & Baker, 2004; Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016).

Since the competitiveness characterizes the sector of hospitality, customer satisfaction was found to be of great importance in hospitality companies in order to achieve better performance and customer retention (Chang et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Sanchez-Gomez & Bresó, 2020). It was found that satisfaction and perception of customers have been studied and explained a lot, as it was resumed before, having the concept clear to companies, who implement it for a long time (Li et al., 2020; Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020; Vences et al., 2020).

Summarizing the concepts about external clients, customer satisfaction is a clue for hospitality companies, embracing the loyalty and purchase influence (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020). Maintaining customer satisfaction and avoiding dissatisfaction leads to success and an increase in clientele, while the opposite will result in a loss of customers and a decrease in loyalty (Li et al., 2020). At the same time, influencing factors, physical characteristics of hotels, basic services, and the quality of service of employees, all this affects the client and leads to his positive or negative experience and further evaluation (Cain et al., 2017).

Table 4. Customer Satisfaction Author's Table

| Idea | Authors | Methodology | Year | Source of publication | Country/ Region |
|---|--|--|------------------|---|--------------------|
| Understanding the customer is key to success in hospitality | Alkhurshan & Rjoub | Variance-based structural equation modeling with PLS (PLS-SEM) | 2020 | Journal of Competitiveness | Jordania |
| Customer satisfaction as the psychological fulfillment | Li ; Liu ; Tan & Hu | 412,784 user-generated reviews on TripAdvisor for 10,149 hotels from five Chinese cities | 2020 | International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management | China |
| Customer satisfaction is linked with service quality, especially in luxury hotels | Chang; Hsu; Cheng & Kuo | Initial review & questionnaires | 2019 | Total Quality Management and Business Excellence | Taiwan |
| Emotional connection of customers | Kleine and Baker, 2004 Hemsley-Brown, J., & Alnawas, I. | Empirical investigation Survey/Questionnaire | 2004 2016 | Academy of Marketing Science Review International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management | US England |

| | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|------|--|----------|
| Satisfying basic factors is not sufficient in luxury hotels | M. Alkhurshan & H. Rjoub | Variance-based structural equation modeling with PLS (PLS-SEM) | 2020 | Journal of competitiveness | Jordania |
| | Li, H., Liu, Y., Tan, C. W., & Hu, F. | Three factor theory customer satisfaction, content analysis of customer reviews on Tripadvisor | 2020 | International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management | China |

Source: Self-elaboration.

Employee Engagement

As described by Louzao & Crespi (2022) employee engagement is an evolving concept within the business, management, organizational, and human resources areas of knowledge. It is a relatively recent approach that has become a widely used term, with real organizational and professional interests, although studies, especially those related to the tourism and hospitality sector are limited.

The review on emotional connection of hotel customers emphasized the concept of hospitality industry as a people-oriented business that needs people to serve people (Kandampully et al., 2015; Cain et al., 2017; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019). Hotel organizations cannot function without formal contractual relationships and guests and staff must be present simultaneously (Taheri et al., 2017; Harkison, 2018; Lucia-Palacios et al., 2020).

Employee engagement was first defined by Kahn (1990) according to a three psychological condition theory determining that people engage in their jobs when they perceive it as meaningful, when they are provided with the right work environment and are provided with the right psychological resources. Engagement was then closely linked to job satisfaction, enthusiasm for work and organizational commitment, defined as the individual's psychological attachment to an organization (Kahn, 1990; Salanova et al., 2005). The concept has been defined in multiple ways and based on different approaches (see Table 5).

However, the main definition used across studies on employee engagement are based on Salanova & Schaufeli (2009) defining engagement as a positive and fulfilling psychological state of mind from the employee, which is characterized by three main dimensions: vigor, dedication, and total absorption on the job-related activity. In other words, an engaged employee is a perceived employee who works harder, always willing to improve, passionate about its work and that tends to

produce better results that drive to business growth (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Karatepe, 2013; Andrews & Turner, 2017; Cain et al., 2017; Zeidan & Itani, 2020).

Engaged employees are able to respond to challenging service encounters, show practice behaviors and be adaptable in every situation. They see changes as challenges and opportunities for learning, personal growth and development (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Cain et al., 2017; Zeidan & Itani, 2020). In that way, engaged employees are crucial for hospitality firms because employees that are centered on their tasks deal with customer requests more effectively and demonstrate higher quality performances (Cain et al., 2017). Moreover, employee engagement has been found to positively link to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Cain et al., 2017; Chang et al., 2019; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019; Lucia-Palacios et al., 2020).

In addition, employee engagement is closely related with employee motivation. Indeed, Bakker & Schaufeli (2008) define engagement as a set of motivating resources, including support and recognition from supervisors, feedback, and opportunities for learning. Motivation is first considered a powerful tool that reinforces behaviors and triggers the tendency to continue (Bartol & Martin, 1998).

Employee motivation is thus vital to the success of organizations (Curtis, Upchurch & Severt, 2009; Chiang & Jang, 2008; Dobre, 2013), as a lack of motivation may cause organizational issues such as turnover, retention and poor performances. On the contrary, highly motivated employees will put more effort on the job and enhance their productivity and the quality of their performance (Chiang & Jang, 2008), as well as being more oriented towards autonomy and are more self-driven (Shahzadi et al., 2014).

Therefore, employee motivation is a necessary and determinant factor of employee engagement, mindset, passion and enthusiasm, openness to ideas and change, as well as the ability to work with peers and customers (Chathoth et al., 2020).

Table 5. Employee Engagement and Motivation Author’s Table

| Idea | Authors | Methodology | Year | Source of publication | Country/Region |
|--|--|---|------|---|---------------------------|
| Engaged employees are more performant and drive to business growth, show more adaptability and see challenges as opportunities | Zeidan & Itani | Systematic literature review | 2020 | Central European Management Journal | Amity University Dubai |
| | Andrews & Turner | Critical Literature review | 2017 | Academy of Marketing Science | UK |
| | Salanova & Schaufeli | Online surveys analyzed through Qualtrics | 2009 | Alianza Editorial | Spain |
| | Cain, Tanford & Shulga | LISREL 8.30 structural equation modeling | 2017 | International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration | US |
| | Karatepe | | 2013 | International Journal of Hospitality Management | Romania |
| Employee engagement has positive links on customer satisfaction | Chang, Hsu, Cheng, Kuo | Initial review and questionnaires | 2019 | Total Quality Management and Business Excellence | Taiwan |
| | Sen & Bhattacharya | Review of three case studies | 2019 | Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes | India |
| | Lucia-Palacios; Pérez-López y Polo-Redondo | Quantitative study based on survey | 2020 | Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services | Spain |
| | Cain, Tanford, Shulga | Online surveys analyzed through Qualtrics | 2017 | International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration | US |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|--|------|---|-------------------|
| Motivated employees are more performant, self-sufficient, committed and have higher a sense of belonging | Chiang & Jiang | Descriptive analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) | 2008 | International Journal of Hospitality Management | US |
| | Shahzadi et al. | Questionnaire analysis through regression analysis | 2014 | European Journal of Business and Management | Pakistan |
| | Dobre | Literature review | 2013 | Review of Applied Socio- Economic Research | Romania |
| Non-motivated employees may cause issues on turnover, retention and poor productivity | Curtis, Upchurch & Severt | ANOVA Procedure | 2009 | International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration | US |
| | Shahzadi et al. | Questionnaire analysis through regression analysis | 2014 | European Journal of Business and Management | Pakistan |
| Empowerment, recognition, positive working environments, and intrinsic motivations enhance employee trust in organization, motivation, engagement and sense of belonging | Chiang & Jiang | Descriptive analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) | 2008 | International Journal of Hospitality Management | US |
| | Dobre | Literature review | 2013 | Review of Applied Socio- Economic Research | Romania |
| | Shahzadi et al. | Questionnaire analysis through regression analysis | 2014 | European Journal of Business and Management | Pakistan |
| | Chathoth, Harrington, Chan, Okumus & Song | Qualitative study through in-depth & focus group interviews | 2020 | International Journal of Hospitality Management | Hong-Kong & Macao |

Source: Self-elaboration.

Employee engagement, motivation and satisfaction with its job is thus considered of high importance in hospitality industries. Indeed, hotels are characterized by the permanent interaction between employees and customers, especially for frontline employees, as well as high emotional demands due to emotionally charged interactions at work through excessive working hours, little time for breaks, great pressures, repetitive mundane daily tasks, etc. (Sanchez-Gomez & Bresó, 2020; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009). All these sources of job stress can lead to effects such as burnout and high turnover intentions (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Martínez et al. 2020; Wang & Wang, 2020).

On one hand, burnout is defined as a persistent and job-related state of ill being that act as a response to emotional or interpersonal stressors (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Salanova and Schaufeli (2009) established a three-dimensional definition of burnout being characterized by emotional exhaustion (chronic emotional and physical fatigue), depersonalization (negative attitude towards work) and reduced personal accomplishment (feeling of less competence and achievement in one's work). The negative organizational outcomes resulting from burnout are employee turnover, absenteeism for sickness and reduced job performances, which leads to a decrease in employee engagement (Karatepe & Uludag, 2007; Wang & Wang, 2020).

Table 6. Emotional demands, burnout, and turnover intentions

| Idea | Authors | Methodology | Year | Source of publication | Country/Region |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|------|---|----------------|
| High emotional demands in the service sector, sources of job-related stress that lead to burnout & turnover intentions | Salanova & Schaufeli | Online surveys analyzed through | 2009 | Alianza Editorial | Spain |
| | Cain, Tanford, Shulga | | 2017 | International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration | US |
| | Q. Wang & C. Wang | Qualtrics Onsite paper questionnaires | 2020 | Frontiers of business research | China |
| | | | 2020 | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|------------------------------|--|--|
| | Sanchez-Gomez & Bresó | Cross sectional design Multilevel model with two levels of analysis | 2020 | Environmental research and public health Journal of work and organizational psychology | Spain Spain |
| Emotional exhaustion affect burnout and turnover intention which negatively affects employee engagement and organizational performances | Q. Wang & C. Wang Kang & Busser Karatepe, Uludag | Onsite paper questionnaires Structural equation modeling Questionnaire | 2020 2018 2007 | Frontiers of business research International Journal of Hospitality Management International journal of hospitality management | China US Northern Cyprus |

Source: Self-elaboration.

In summary, emotional connection of the internal client of luxury hotels is created through employee engagement, organizational climate, and organizational commitment. If engagement is an individual process to be performed, it cannot exist without a proper organizational climate reducing negative emotional demands (such as burnout or turnover intentions) and increasing the sense of belonging among employees (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Lee & Ok, 2015; Johnson et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2020).

Employees are a company's biggest asset, and without their engagement, productivity and performance will decrease. Due to this, hotel organizations should implement employee retention strategies to foster more organizational commitment, demote counterproductive work behaviors, thus leading to higher employee engagement levels (Zeidan & Itani, 2020; Kang & Brusser, 2018).

In other words, the hotel organization must provide the right support and tools to recruit, train and retain employees (Taheri et al., 2017; Wang, 2019; Ogueyungbo et al., 2020; Van Tuin et al., 2020). All these processes have to be designed in alliance with the company's culture and values, but they also need to train

employees on their ability to understand and cope with different emotional behaviors, always with positivity and towards exceptional customer service, creating therefore internal emotional connection towards the company.

Table 7. Organizational climate, working environments and the importance of intrinsic motivations.

| Idea | Authors | Methodology | Year | Source of publication | Country/Region |
|---|---|--|------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Positive working environments through job satisfaction and organizational commitment reduce burnout and increase employees' engagement & sense of belonging with the organization | Salanova & Schaufeli | Hierarchical multiple regression analyses revealed | 2009 | Alianza Editorial | Spain |
| | Lee & Ok | | 2015 | International Journal of Hospitality Management | US |
| | Johnson, Park, Bartlett | Structural equation modeling | 2018 | European Journal of Training & Development | Jamaica |
| | Kang & Busser | | 2018 | | US |
| | Q. Wang & C. Wang | Structural equation modeling | 2019 | International Journal of Hospitality Management | China |
| | I. Ali, M. Ali, Grigore, Molesworth & Jin | Onsite paper questionnaires | | | 2020 |
| | Zeidan & Itani | Partial least square - path modeling (PLS-PM) and PROCESS tool | 2020 | Journal of business research | Amity University Dubai |
| | Gillet, Morin, Jeoffrion, Fouquereau | Systematic literature review | 2020 | Central European Management Journal | France |
| | | Latent profile analysis | | | Group and Organization Management |

| | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|------|--|------------------------|
| Employees are a company's biggest asset: importance of defining strategies to recruit, engage and retain employees to maintain high business performances | Taheri, Coelho, Sousa, Evanschitzky | Cross-sectional study of questionnaires | 2017 | Frontiers in psychology | Iran |
| | Sen & Bhattacharya | Review of three case studies | 2019 | Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes | India |
| | Karatepe | Structural equation modeling | 2013 | International Journal of contemporary hospitality management | Romania |
| | Kang & Busser | Structural equation modeling | 2018 | International Journal of Hospitality Management | US |
| | Lee & Ok | Hierarchical multiple regression analyses revealed | 2015 | International Journal of Hospitality Management | US |
| | C. Wang | Three level hierarchical linear model | 2019 | International Journal of Contemporary | Taiwan |
| | Zeidan & Itani | Systematic literature review | 2020 | Hospitality Management | Amity University Dubai |
| | Yavas, Karatepe, Babakus | Path analysis | 2013 | Central European Management Journal | Northern Cyprus |
| | Karatepe | Path analysis | 2013 | Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal | Nigeria |
| | | | | Journal of economics and management. | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|---|------|---|-----------------|
| Intrinsic motivations (empowerment, trainings programs, recruitment processes, rewards, opportunities, leadership style) enhance employee engagement and performance, as well as positive working environment and social relationships between employee. | Karatepe | Empirical research model | 2013 | Cornell University Quarterly | Cameroon |
| | Lee & Ok | Hierarchical multiple regression analyses | 2015 | International Journal of Hospitality Management | US Taiwan |
| | Chang, Hsu, Cheng, Kuo | Initial reviews & questionnaires | 2019 | Total Quality Management and Business Excellence | |
| | Q. Wang & C. Wang | Onsite paper questionnaires | 2020 | Frontiers of business research | China |
| Intrinsic motivations reduce emotional exhaustion | Karatepe & Uludag | Structural equation modeling | 2007 | International Journal of Hospitality Management | Northern Cyprus |
| | Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe | Questionnaires | 2008 | International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration | Turkey |

Source: Self-elaboration.

Connection between Employee Engagement and Customer Satisfaction

Relation of employee and customer is a rather subtle topic that contains different ideas and has many ways of interpretation. By review of articles, marked below, it has been understood that the quality of the service offered necessarily affects customer satisfaction and their loyalty to the establishment.

Analyzing the existing literature about the topic, first, it has been found that the quality of employee engagement and empowerment positively affects customer satisfaction and loyalty (Wang, 2019). The same idea has been studied by Alkhurshan & Rjoub, (2020), where authors study the impact of the quality of service on customer loyalty, through development of questionnaires, explaining that the quality of service is a key factor to customer satisfaction.

Developing the theme of the importance of customer satisfaction and loyalty, many relevant studies found and resumed below, mentioning, or directly analyzing the

idea as one of the most crucial and core factors for the success of hotels (Wang, 2019; Li et al, 2020; Kandampully et al., 2015; Cain et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2017; Bacik et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2018).

Speaking about companies' perception of its employees, Kandampully et al., (2015) by synthesizing existing customer loyalty literature, talk about the importance of creating emotionally engaged customers, loyal brand ambassadors (both employees and customers), mass personalization, employee engagement, shared consumption and mutual understanding between customers and employees. It again highlights the importance of employee - customer relationship, their engagement and emotional connection.

Referring to the described above analysis of emotional connection of employees, it is crucial to maintain an engaged employee (Zeidan & Itani, 2020), implement the appropriate practices to ensure employee well-being and emotionally connect them to the work and organization (Johnson et al., 2018; Wang, 2019). This, as previously analyzed, directly leads to the employee's state control (as burnout) and their quality of performance at work.

Through the study of literature review in relation to emotional connection of employees and customers in hospitality, the concept of strong competition in luxury hotels was emphasized and connected with engagement of employees and customer satisfaction (Torres & Kline 2013; Vo, 2018; Bacik et al., 2020; Le et al., 2020; Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020). An extent of studies explored that employee engagement is crucial here, having the employee satisfied with his job and committed with the company, leads to a superior perception and satisfaction with service quality from customers (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Cain et al., 2017; Zeidan & Itani 2020).

Torres & Kline (2013) studied that fulfilling expectations of guests will produce a feeling of satisfaction, but necessarily engagement, while not meeting them will generate dissatisfaction, where exceeding expectations and having an extraordinary experience might also lead to emotional delight, what is even a higher emotion than satisfaction.

Moreover, hospitality employees are strongly affected by emotional demands (working hours, pressure, etc) (Cain et al., 2017; Chang et al., 2019; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019; Lucia-Palacios et al., 2020) which further increases the need of company organization in focusing on employee wellbeing. Workers with a positive state of mind will be more engaged with their work and be able to display positive emotions to the client. Therefore, receiving such positive experience, will allow customers to perceive positive emotions, which will result in higher loyalty

and engagement with the hotel (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Wang & Wang, 2020; Martinez et al., 2020).

Accordingly, it was highlighted that in order to foster employee engagement, it is important to create a positive organizational climate, by providing all the necessary tools, training programs and leadership styles to maintain a high level of employee wellbeing (Taheri et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2018; Wang, 2019; Ogueyungbo et al., 2020; Van Tuin et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2020; Zeidan & Itani, 2020; Zheng et al., 2019).

However, the relation between employees and customers and the creation of emotional connection between them is a very specific land to study, which has been even less studied and explained. Indeed, very few articles were found to investigate this topic, even though the concept is crucial and significant for the hospitality industry. Regarding emotional connection, the concept has not sufficient relevant investigation to establish a clear definition and implementation practices. In fact, some studies investigated the keywords of emotional intelligence, emotional labor, and customer experience (satisfaction, loyalty, etc) and the ways to measure it.

Nonetheless, the topic of the emotional connection in hotel experience management, from both internal and external parts, has no relevant theoretical background, what makes the conducted research important and valuable. The terms emotional connection of employee and customer involve much that binds and echoes, just as one cannot exist without the other, giving the great importance and field of implementation to research of emotional employment in hospitality, and customer loyalty.

Table 8. Relation between employee engagement and customer satisfaction.

| Idea | Authors | Methodology | Year | Source of publication | Country/Region |
|--|--------------------|---|------|--|----------------|
| Employee engagement and empowerment positively affects customer satisfaction and loyalty | Wang | quantitative research | 2019 | International journal of contemporary hospitality management | China |
| | Alkhurshan & Rjoub | Variance-based structural equation modeling | 2020 | Journal of competitiveness | Jordania |
| | Li et al | Three factor theory customer satisfaction, | 2020 | International Journal of Contemporary | China |

| | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|---|------|---|--------------------------|
| | Kandampully et al | content analysis of customer reviews on Tripadvisor | 2015 | Hospitality Management | U.S.A |
| | Cain et al | Literature review | 2018 | Journal of contemporary of hospitality management | U.S.A |
| | Wu et al | Online surveys analyzed through Qualtrics | 2017 | | China |
| | Bacik et al | Surveys | 2020 | International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration | Visegrad Group Countries |
| | Johnson et al | Exploratory, sentiment, and polarity analysis | 2018 | International journal of organizational analysis | Jamaica |
| | | Structural equation modeling | | Marketing and Management of Innovations | |
| | | | | European Journal of Training and Development | |
| Company's responsibility of creating engaged employees | Kandampully, Zhang, Bilgihan | Synthesis of extensive literature review | 2015 | International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management | US |
| | Zeidan and Itani | Systematic literature review | 2020 | Central European Management Journal | University Dubai |
| | Johnson et al. | | 2018 | European Journal of Training and Development | Jamaica |
| | C. Wang | Structural equation modeling | 2019 | | China |
| | Rahman et al. | Quantitative research | 2020 | International journal of contemporary hospitality management | Bangladesh |
| | | Empirical study | | Cogent Business and Management | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|---|------|---|--------------------------|
| Concept of strong competition in luxury hotels was emphasized and connected with engagement of employees and customer satisfaction | Alkhurshan & Rjoub | Variance-based structural equation modeling with PLS (PLS-SEM) | 2020 | Journal of Competitiveness | Jordania |
| | Bacik et al | Exploratory, sentiment, and polarity analysis | 2020 | Marketing and Management of Innovations | Visegrad Group Countries |
| | Le, Nguyen, Le | | 2020 | | Vietnam |
| | Torres & Kline | Exploratory factor analysis, reliability test, correlation and regression | 2013 | The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business | US |
| | N. Vo | Content analysis | 2018 | International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management | Vietnam |
| Perception of quality | Zeidan & Itani | Systematic literature review | 2020 | Central European Management Journal | Amity University Dubai |
| | Salanova & Schaufeli | | 2009 | Alianza Editorial | Spain |
| | Cain, Tanford & Shulga | Online surveys analyzed through Qualtrics | 2017 | International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration | US |
| Hospitality employees and emotionality | Chang, Hsu, Cheng, Kuo | Initial review and questionnaires | 2019 | Total Quality Management and Business Excellence | Taiwan |
| | Sen & Bhattacharya | Review of three case studies | 2019 | Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes | India |
| | Lucia-Palacios; Pérez-López y Polo-Redondo | Quantitative study based on survey | 2020 | Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services | Spain |
| | | | 2017 | | US |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|--|------|---|-------------|
| | Cain, Tanford, Shulga | Online surveys analyzed through Qualtrics | | International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration | |
| Positive experience and positive emotions leads to higher loyalty and engagement | Salanova & Schaufeli | Multilevel model with two levels of analysis | 2009 | Alianza Editorial | Spain |
| | Martinez, Salanova, Cruz-Ortiz | Onsite paper questionnaires | 2020 | Journal of work and organizational psychology | Spain |
| | Q. Wang & C. Wang | | 2020 | Frontiers of business research | China |
| Importance of creation of positive organizational climate | Johnson, Park, Bartlett | Structural equation modeling | 2018 | European Journal of Training & Development | Spain |
| | I. Ali, M. Ali, Grigore, Molesworth & Jin | Partial least square - path modeling (PLS-PM) and PROCESS tool | 2020 | Journal if business research | US |
| | Zeidan & Itani | Systematic literature review | 2020 | | Jamaica |
| | Taheri, Coelho, Sousa, Evanschitzky | Cross-sectional study of questionnaires | 2017 | Central European Management Journal | Iran |
| | Van Tuin, Schaufeli, van Rhenen | Partial least squares structural equation modeling | 2020 | Cross-sectional study of questionnaires | Netherlands |
| | Zheng, Graham, Epitropaki, Snape | Confirmatory Factor Analysis of survey | 2020 | Journal of Leadership Studies | UK |
| | C. Wang | Three level hierarchical linear model | 2019 | Personnel Review | Taiwan |
| | Ogueyungbo, Chinonye, Igbinoba, Salau, | | 2020 | International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management | Nigeria |

| | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|--|
| | Falola, Olokundun | Structural equation model | | Cogent Business & Management | |
|--|----------------------|------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|--|

Source: Self-elaboration.

Methodology

To establish a clear image of the most relevant findings on the topic, as well as creating a relevant review on the main conclusions extracted from the subject and its different approaches, article research was performed within the Web of Science database.

A systematized bibliographic review was considered of main importance as it is commonly used in social sciences, to reduce the possibility of bias and to ensure the identification of the body of knowledge on the subject. As defined by Booth et al., (2016), the word systematized is a critical element for the description of a literature review, thus the study's literature review was structured as follows:

A selection of keywords that were fundamental for the development of this project was performed. Considering the study topic, the keywords chosen were burnout, luxury hotels, employee engagement, emotional connection, employee motivation, and customer satisfaction. Based on these keywords, a search was made of all the scientific articles that had been published during the last ten years (2010-2020) through Web of Science for each main keyword.

Eventually, 348 articles were selected and created a complete review of the literature and theoretical framework, considering that only hospitality related articles were chosen. A total of 138 articles were finally selected related to the different keywords (Customer satisfaction 22; Burnout 21; Employee engagement 66; employee motivation 11; emotional connection 14 and luxury hotels 4).

After the elaboration of such keyword summary tables, to elaborate the theoretical background, the main concepts and ideas mentioned by each author were put in common, and the different authors' points of views and more relevant theories were summarized in different authors' tables. These tables were included within

the literature review and provided information on the mentioned theory/concept/idea, corresponding authors, year, country, and source of publication. The objective of such tables was to provide a clear perspective on the illustrated progress on the different theories mentioned in the text. The designed tables were:

Table 1. Luxury Hotels.

Table 2. Customer satisfaction.

Table 3. Employee Engagement and Motivation.

Table 4. Emotional demands, burnout, and turnover intentions.

Table 5. Organizational climate, working environments and intrinsic motivations

Table 6. Relation between employee engagement and customer satisfaction.

A tag cloud was previously developed in order to find out what were the topics and most mentioned keywords. Finally, to provide a clear image of the relationship between the topics on the different articles used for the literature review, a radial network was produced through Atlas.ti tool in order to provide an image of the relationship between the main keywords and the literature review used articles. The radial network allowed to provide a clear vision on the relationship in between each article as well as the most used keywords thanks to the number of relations that they had.

Secondly and in order to provide managerial implications, essential for the hospitality sector, it was considered of main importance to analyze the relationship between employee engagement levels based on the literature reviewed, related to the expert's opinion representing the hospitality industry point of view.

The experts participating in the focus group were carefully selected with the intention of obtaining the maximum representativeness of the luxury hospitality industry sector. Their profiles were considered ideal, not just because of their trajectory, but from different perspectives as a result of years of experience, as they represent different management models, hierarchy levels, hotel areas and departments, of a large variety of luxury hotels located in Barcelona.

Table 9. Methodological design chart.

| METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN CHART | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--|----------------|---|
| | TYPE OF RESEARCH TOOL | TYPE OF RESEARCH METHOD | SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES | RESOURCES | RESUME |
| Literature review | Systematic literature review | Qualitative method | To search, manage and reference theoretical studies | Web of Science | A systematic literature review was carried out through Web Of Science. A total of 348 articles were analyzed, of which 306 were finally selected, |
| | Network View | Qualitative method | To provide a clear image on the relation between articles, keywords and authors | Atlas.ti | A Network view was created in order to provide a clear image of the relationship between the topics on the different articles used for the literature review. |
| Experts point of view | Focus Group | Qualitative method | To provide a clear relation between authors and theoretical studies and theories and hospitality experts | | With the intention of analyzing the opinion of experts in the luxury hospitality sector of Barcelona and comparing it with the opinion of academics, a focus group was organized. |

Source: Self-elaboration.

Results

Literature Review

The number of articles was based on the search for each keyword used in Journals related with Social Sciences since January 2010 until December 2020. After the research, Web of Science provided a detailed graphic for each type of search (years, authors, sources, and countries). The results obtained were:

Employee Engagement in Hospitality: Employee engagement was shown to be facing an exponential increase in its relevance in academic research. In front of a constantly changing world and hand in hand with the recent difficult situations it has become fundamental for businesses to consider the emotional situation of the employees, from which engagement is the key. When mentioning the countries that most contributed to this recent scientific research, it is necessary to highlight USA and China as the main producers of content considering most of the keywords, as well as Karatepe O.M. as the main producer on employee engagement with more than 15 articles related.

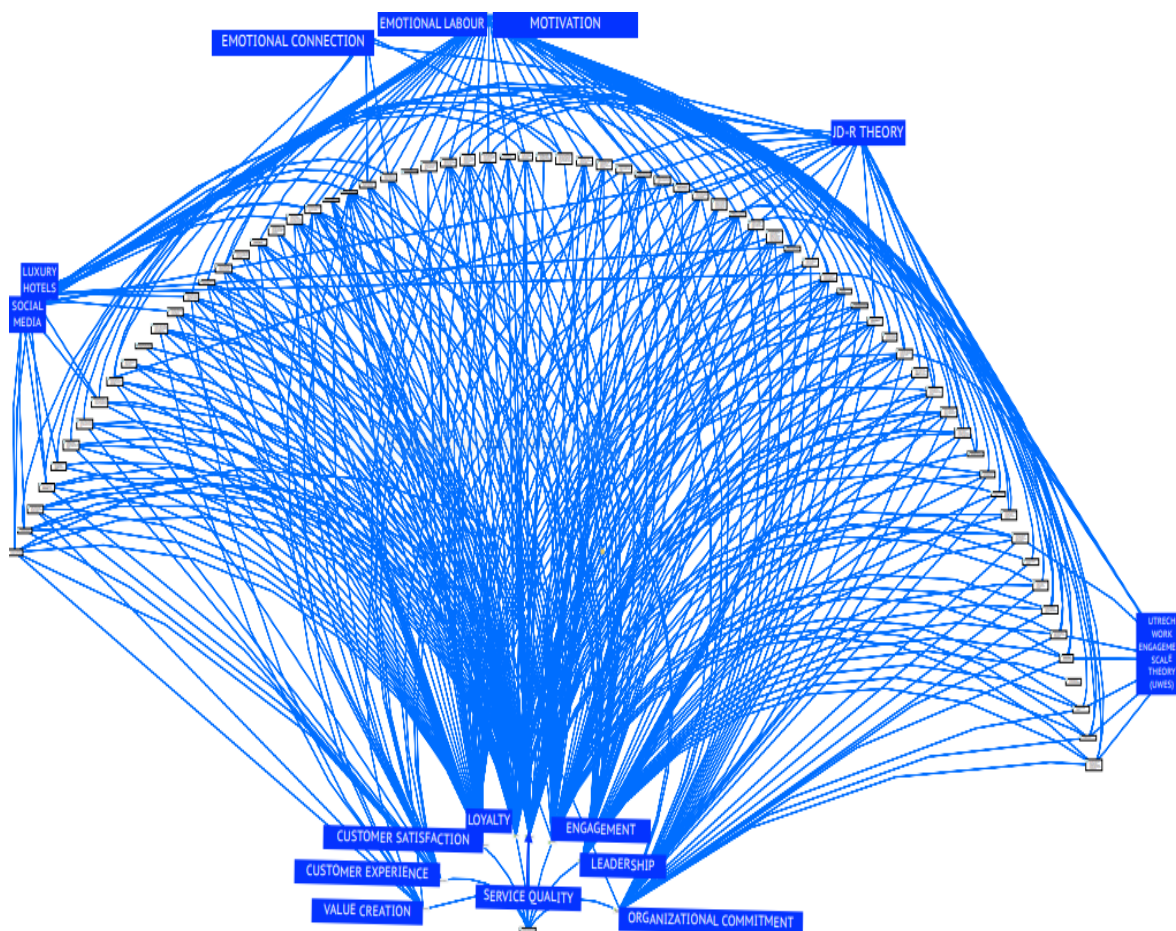
Emotional Connection in Hospitality: In terms of emotional connection, the results were less significant given the fact that emotional connection has been established in several different topics and activity sectors. Thus, in order to focus on hospitality, only 21 articles were finally selected from which the production was also found to be increasing exponentially. However, it was found that the production was performed only in the last 15 years, especially in 2008 and 2014. Regarding the countries with a higher production about the topic, the USA is the country that has published the most about emotional connection in hospitality followed by Taiwan. As happens with other topics, University of Florida and Ohio state university are the institutions in the USA which have published scientific articles about emotional connection the most. There is not a relevant author that has published more than others in this case.

Burnout in Hospitality: In relation to burnout in the hospitality sector, a total of 93 scientific articles has been published over the years but the considerable increase in number of publications was only observed in the last two years (2019-2020). A deduction can be made that there is an increase of concern about staff's burnout, and companies in the hospitality sector realized that it is a key point to consider in the development of daily work. Considering countries of publication, the USA was the country which published the most - much like most articles related with the hospitality sector -, followed by Taiwan, Turkey, and China. The more relevant author that has been highlighted is Karatepe OM.

Engagement in Luxury Hotels: Engagement in luxury hotels didn't show much evidence in terms of social sciences articles published, - 36 in total. This could be explained through the fact that it is not believed that engagement in luxury hotels would be different than among other hotels of lower categories. However, articles were published in the past ten years with an emphasis put on 2019, with 13 articles exploring engagement in luxury hotels. China was the country with higher production, followed by USA and India, the most relevant authors and institutions being Chovancoca M., UL Islam J., and the Hong Kong Polytech University.

Customer Engagement in Hospitality: Customer engagement allows companies to know if their products, services, and marketing strategies are developing a positive effect on the customer. Building customer engagement considering the needs and preferences of each customer, even before they know it themselves, is the key to business success. That is why research have been done on the subject through different studies in all types of companies. As for hospitality companies, a total of 239 social science articles were published in the last ten years, showing a huge increase in the last five years. USA and China are the biggest producers, in which

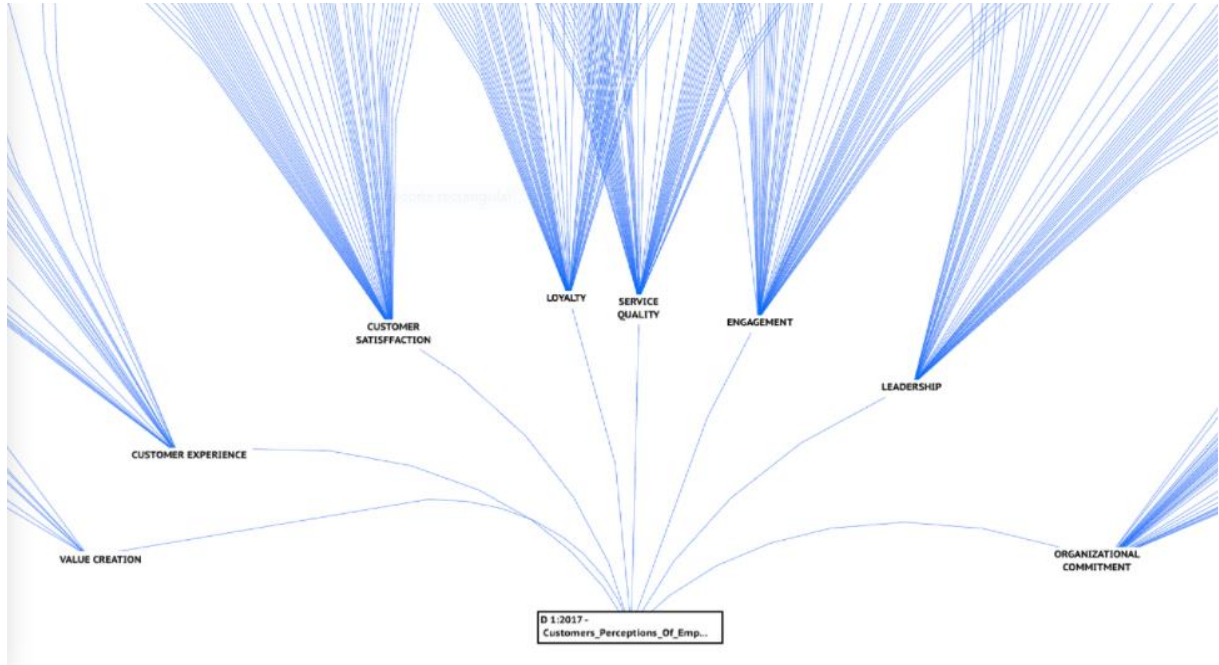
Figure 2. Global Radial Network View



Source: Self-elaboration (2020)

The radial network also contributed to the research by showing how many articles mentioned each concept. As can be observed in Figure 2, the concepts mentioned by most articles are **Value creation, Customer Experience, Customer satisfaction, Loyalty, Service Quality, Engagement, Leadership, Organizational Commitment, Emotional Labor, Motivation and Emotional Connection**. These findings confirm therefore what was emphasized in the theoretical background: engaging customers passes through customer satisfaction thanks to service quality which will be done by creating value through high quality customer experiences.

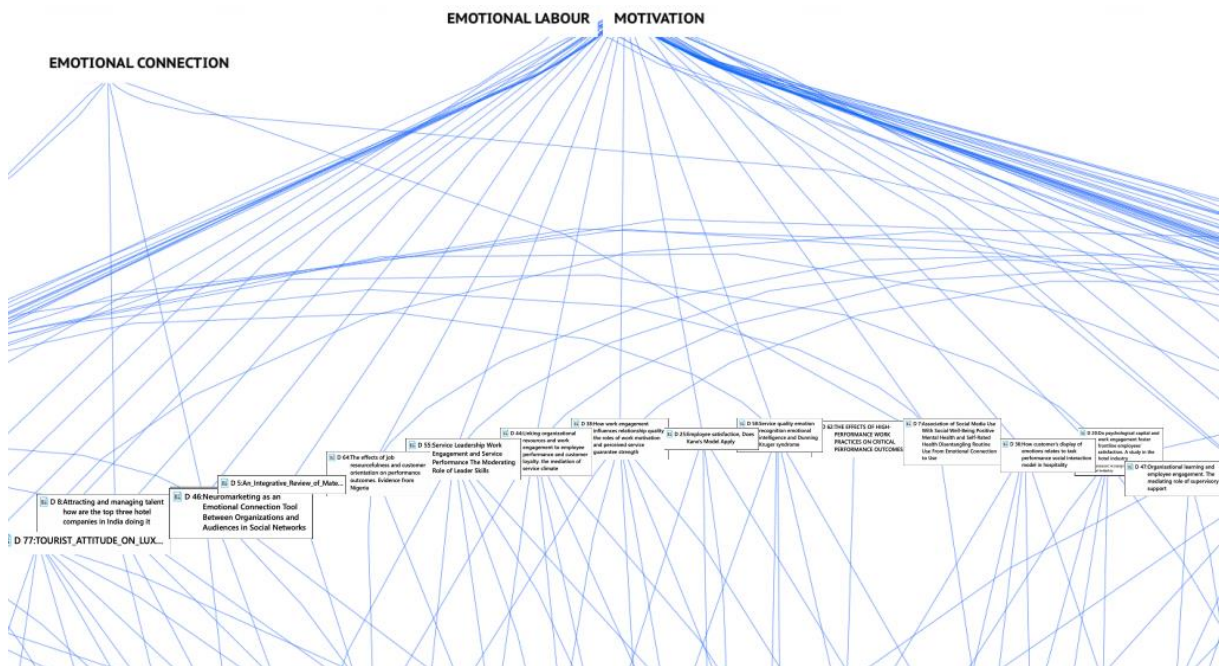
Figure 3. Partial Radial Network View.



Source: Self-elaboration (2020)

However, to engage customers, there is also a main need to engage employees to create a high organizational commitment through motivation and the right display of emotions in front of guests (emotional labor). A great commitment to the company through a good organizational culture providing intrinsic motivations (empowerment, training, leadership style, positive working environments) will connect employees emotionally to the establishment, which will in return emotionally connect customers to the hotel. In this way, both clients (internal and external) will sustain a form of loyalty to the corresponding establishment.

Figure 4. Partial Network View



Source: Self-elaboration (2020)

These findings confirm what was emphasized in the theoretical background: engaging customers passes through customer satisfaction thanks to service quality which will be done by creating value through high quality customer experiences. However, in order to engage customers, there is also a main need to engage employees in order to create a high organizational commitment through motivation and the right display of emotions in front of guests (emotional labor).

A great commitment to the company through a good organizational culture providing intrinsic motivations (empowerment, training, leadership style, positive working environments) will connect employees emotionally to the establishment, which will in return emotionally connect customers to the organization. In this way, both clients, internal and external, will sustain a form of loyalty to the corresponding establishment.

Focus Group

With the intention of analyzing the opinion of experts in the luxury hospitality sector of Barcelona and comparing it with the opinion of academics, a focus group was organized the 21st January 2021. In order to develop the focus group as

efficiently as possible, a list of discussion topics was elaborated: expert's definition of employee engagement and customer satisfaction; their opinions on the practices that enhance engagement, for both external and internal client; specific actions to be implemented; the vital moments of true during the internal customer journey in which the level of emotional connection or engagement is higher and the influence of the selection processes on customer and employee engagement.

The development of an experts focus group session represented a number of 15 luxury hotels and encompassed different position profiles with only their professional experience. Each of the six participants profiles is detailed below:

-Expert 1- E1- International & National Luxury Hotel Chain Rooms Director and General Manager representative- E1 is a General Manager with more than 20 years of experience in the luxury hospitality sector in Barcelona. The participation of this profile was considered crucial given the fact that this position represents the overall comprehensive vision of the hotel. The expert has worked in many different positions such as Night Manager, Front Office Manager, Rooms Division Area Director and most recently General Manager of one of the analyzed hotels. This expert profile added the strategic vision of someone who started from line employee positions, operation management and strategy who provided an overall experience in the whole hotel.

-Expert 2- E2- International and National luxury Hotel Chain F&B Director and Independent luxury Hotel General Manager representative - E2 is an experienced Food and Beverage Executive who worked for almost 20 years in the F&B Area. During the last 10 years has held the position of General Manager of a national independent small luxury hotel located in Barcelona, thus providing to the focus group an operative and strategic vision of the contrast between three very different establishment management models and different operating areas, in this case, related to the Food and Beverage Area.

-Expert 3- E3 -National and International, Operations and Rooms Division Director - E3 has extensive experience in different departments of the Front of the House and as Operations Manager in a large number of establishments. The expert worked as a Rooms Division Director as well as General manager in different national hotels, developing his career in different cities all over the world, always related to the luxury sector. Currently E3 was established as an Operations Director in one of the establishments analyzed. His profile added a strategic and operating vision of the Operations Area, which is considered a pillar in a hotel's good functioning and provides the first and last impression of the guest experience. Therefore, such a profile is fundamental in order to be aware of the internal client's situation and its impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

-Expert 4- E4 - Corporate Luxury Hotel Human Resources Director - E4 is an experienced Human Resources Director with more than 20 years of experience in different related positions in the luxury hospitality industry. He has worked in different positions in Human Resources, as Training Manager, Assistant Area Director, and during the last decade, he became the Human Resources Area Director, Talent and Culture Director and Corporate Human Resources Director in several luxury hotels located in Barcelona. His profile was considered to be the linking point between the company and its employees, providing strategic vision from a hotel and a corporate point of view, as an extra mile in terms of employees' situation and implemented measures fostering engagement and motivation within the luxury hotel establishments.

-Expert 5- E5 - International Luxury Hotel Guest Relations and Guest Experience Manager- With more than 20 years of experience in the luxury hospitality sector, E5 was the representative of the connection between internal and external customers in relation with customer experience management. Having experience in different departments of the Front of The House E5 represented a profile with an operative vision that has experienced, from firsthand, the departments, directly related with the customer, and could therefore be a great source of information on the practices that would foster customer engagement, satisfaction and customer loyalty. It was considered essential to provide the vision of the hotel department that has the most direct contact with the client, managing the loyalty system to guarantee the personalization of the guest experience and dealing with complaints as a Manager on Duty. A Guest Experience Manager is the core of the hotel establishment, as it is considered the hotel image for customers and therefore can influence their satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, a guest experience profile would provide the present study with the different perspective of the service in luxury hotels, as well as understanding of the relationships between departments in a hotel establishment.

-Expert 6 - E6 - International and National luxury Hotel Chain Corporate Sales and Marketing Director - With extensive experience in the luxury hospitality industry, E6 started working in different departments of the F&B area, but during the last two decades he has also developed his profile as Director of Sales, Director of Marketing and Communication and currently as a Corporate Sales and Marketing Director of a national hotel company. His position is key in achieving the key success factors and the best organization's brand image. His profile was added to the project for providing an operative and strategic vision on the Sales and Marketing Areas.

Focus Group Content

Definition of engagement and satisfaction

Starting with the definition of the concepts of engagement, the emotional factor is crucial, according to the experts based on the employee point of view. It is a feeling of identification and belonging with the organization and the people who are part of it: “Engagement is when you are going to work, you are willing to contribute with your added value to a project. It is not just going to work” - E1. This goes along with the definition of satisfaction provided by Torres & Kline, (2013), Le et al., (2020) and Li et al., (2020) as the subjective evaluation after the use of service, and engagement as a raiser of sense of belonging and commitment (Chiang & Jiang, 2008; Dobre, 2013).

E6 expressed that satisfaction is “not only related with the hotel classification or luxury”, but it is also a will from the organization to “exceed the needs of both the customer, and the employee” - E4. By applying the emotional aspect, employees will create a memory, a mental picture that will perdure in time. E3 compares engagement with a marriage, a real engagement between two persons that are willing to commit to each other, involving love and feelings for life. E6 emphasizes that “What generates engagement are emotions. What remains in the memory is not the material value, but emotions which are the ones that will remain through the time”. Reformulating his words, the material value is increasingly less perceived by internal clients, and it is the feeling that they will perceive when working, or staying, in this establishment that will engage them. Relating with the theoretical background, the importance of the whole process of satisfaction and engagement as an overall experience that includes emotions provided by Macey & Schneider (2008) on the employee side.

Organizational culture as the main influencer of engagement

During the discussion, an aspect that was constantly brought to light, was the absolute necessity of designing a strong organizational culture. The company philosophy and the transmission of vision, mission and values to its employees is crucial in fomenting engagement: “Having a clear vision, mission, values and a well-developed culture is the spinal column” - E6. E4 insisted on the intrinsic factor and that if the culture is clear and followed with emotion, it will enliven engagement. E1 continued explaining that sometimes company’s say they don’t have a culture or philosophy: “The culture is always there, it exists. Another thing is how and how much time you decided to dedicate in structuring it”. E1

emphasized that an organization's strategic level will be higher or lower depending on the effort put in structuring the culture.

Confirming the authors theories (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Lee & Ok, 2015; Johnson et al. 2018; Kang & Busser, 2018; Zeidan & Itani, 2020; Gillet et al., 2020), engaging employees through providing an organizational culture and climate and a positive working environment will raise employee performances. Moreover, designing the culture and guidelines to follow to reach the desired organizational climate will enhance sense of belonging, commitment, engagement and therefore performances (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Wang & Wang, 2019). Therefore, designing the company's culture should be the main objective of organizations, but it is at the same time the most difficult strategy to implement. Indeed, it is a high expense for a company to implement such strategies in a short term, but it is something that will foster long lasting relationships with the employee. E2 confirmed the difficulty of designing a philosophy fomenting engagement from an independent hotel point of view: "It is much easier having a reinforced and consolidated brand than generating engagement with only one hotel, (...), the engagement starts with me and my team who created it".

Eventually, concerning the level of awareness of hospitality companies about designing the culture and philosophy, E3 and E1 have two opposite points of view: for E3, companies are more and more recognizing the importance of structured culture and values. There is an appearing need to "Hire somebody for life" - E3. However, in E1's opinion, "Vision and mission are falling too much, and the short term is increasingly prioritized".

These two different experts' opinions revealed a gap in our study in understanding whether Spanish, and especially hospitality companies from Barcelona are aware of the need of supporting employees and customers through a well-designed organizational culture.

Specific actions to be implemented to foster engagement.

Once again, in terms of specific actions to foster engagement, the importance of an organizational culture was highlighted. E3 shared his experience starting from scratch when started working with him for a hotel opening. He and his team had to design the philosophy, values, the culture, and for him, designing the culture is "thinking how you will engage the internal client". E4 followed by conceptualizing it with his idea of a reward that reinforce positive attachment to the hotel: there is a need of attracting the employee, and to do that, hotels need to constantly readapt their strategies to provide the right "reward" to their employees, therefore always fulfilling their needs and expectations.

Engagement in the “Welcome” process

Even though the whole process of the employee journey is crucial in order to maintain levels of satisfaction and engagement, E5 remarks there is no doubt that the “welcome” moment for internal customers and arrival process for external customers are crucial to impact employee or customer engagement. As E1 mentioned, welcoming the employee on his first day is the beginning for creating engagement. However, although E6 emphasizes the welcoming and the orientation moment, it compares engagement with love: “Love needs to be permanently reinforced and an effort from the individual has to be made to maintain it. It is the same for engagement”. According to E4 “Engagement can sometimes be a lifetime relationship, (...), then in the end, when the employee receives more value than what was expected, they will increase their level of engagement and will be more durable”.

As pointed out by E5, it is the same situation with external clients, “arrival process” and “farewell process” are key procedures to impact in customer engagement through the emotional connection established between customers and employees. “Everything is developed through the employees' emotional work, especially those working in direct contact with customers”. “This feeling of emotional connection must be true since it is very difficult to show the illusion of seeing someone again or wanting to see them again in the future if that is not the reality”. “Everything is developed through the emotional work of the employees, which is terribly exhausting in relation to the complaints and claims management process. Hence the importance of selecting the best candidates with talents related to emotional work”.

Employee selection process as an influencer of engagement

Eventually, when discussing the influence of the selection process in fostering engagement, two different points of view were emphasized. First, a strong company's culture as a base for prioritizing engagement must be followed, and for that selection processes is crucial to create the right team. These processes are even more meaningful for managements' positions because “In the end the ones that ensure that the philosophy is implemented are, first the General Manager, Area Directors and the management team that transmits it to all hotel areas” - E4.

Moreover, according to E1, some difficulties could appear when “the manager is not aligned with the company's philosophy”. In that exceptional case, the main objective of the organization is making sure that area directors and managers know

how to select candidates and how to enliven engagement in order for the company's culture to be followed. This relates with the study of Kang & Brusser (2018) indicating that recruitment is even more important for managerial positions since they can influence both the quality of service provided by frontline employees and their engagement. An essential tool that E4 highlighted are the evaluation processes that will emphasize the personal skills and competences that are necessary for the organization.

Thus, different filters have to be implemented in the selection process in order to select the right person and right profile, meaning various tests and evaluations, as well as including different organization profiles with different points of view in the selection process. By applying these filters, directors will recruit for engagement directly by selecting on personal skills and competences, as also explored by Karatepe et al., (2006), Lee & Ok (2015), Sen & Bhattacharya (2019), Wang & Wang (2019), and Karatepe (2014).

However, even if a general agreement can be made on the necessity of filters and a strong base in the selection process, E2 provided a different point of view on the emotional factor that affects the selection of candidates. A base of selection questions regarding candidates' education level and what they do in life is essential but asking personal questions to employees is the way of knowing them better. These personal questions will also reveal skills and personal competences or talents that would not have been brought to light with regular questions on the education background.

By detailing the example of selection based on his experience, E2 pointed out that "our main goal is to be a base for learning (...), we selected people without any experience, who could be taught correctly to create the engagement by the right training". He focused on selecting for personal talents that in the end, he obtained a highly engaged team that is retained and doesn't want to leave the company. Sen & Bhattacharya (2019) observed the same pattern in their India hotels' case study, and especially on the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower hotel which also focused on selecting by personal skills. In addition, the expert emphasized that his team was particularly engaged and happy because of the liberty his management gives to them: they have liberty in their decisions, actions, opinions and even in their schedule, by fixing objectives and results instead of shifts and hours. This completely relates with the empowerment concept reviewed across the theoretical background.

Concluding on selection processes, of course, tools, such as evaluations, will allow to select the right candidate and the right personal skills related to emotional work for creating engagement. However, the emotional factor of engagement also has to

be considered during selection, because the engagement of employees will come from the emotional connection they establish with the organization, and in this particular case, with the luxury establishment. The below final quote completely supported the emotional idea of engagement in the recruitment emphasized by Sen & Bhattacharya (2019) in their Indian hotels case study: “If a person makes you fall in love, you have to give them opportunities, like on a first date” - E2.

Conclusion

Based on the literature review, the connection between concepts of customer satisfaction and employee engagement was studied through elaborated articles, giving the opportunity to know deeper the initial gist, creation, and relation between the selected keywords. After the research and systematic literature review, it was clear that the connection exists and represents a large and important part of hospitality.

Therefore, it was highlighted by the authors in the theoretical background that supporting employees, satisfying their needs, and providing the right working environment, will reinforce engagement and motivation, and on the contrary, when not provided, employees feel dissatisfied, therefore less engaged. Engagement (for both customers and employees) goes along with the importance of an emotional factor. Thus, internal, and external engagement comprises emotions.

Moreover, designing the culture will provide each employee with the guidelines to follow to be aligned with the organization’s philosophy and therefore enhance performance, customer service and customer engagement. Moreover, there is a need of constantly adapting strategies to the changing needs of both clients and thus attracting and retaining them.

Based on the results of the focus group with experts, all of them emphasized the importance of developing the company’s culture and philosophy as the main strategy to foster engagement. Designing the culture will provide each employee with the guidelines to follow, in order to be aligned with the organization’s philosophy, and therefore enhance performance.

They agreed that the key moment to create engagement was found to be the “welcome moment” or “arrival process”, because it is the first image and impression to be provided to employees. However, a consistency in the efforts to enhance engagement has to be performed in order to maintain such levels of commitment. Given this, selection processes were highlighted as the most important tool to select a candidate by focusing on personal talents (with different evaluations and filters), recruiting for engagement, and to apply the company’s values and culture in the right manner.

They considered the personal attention of employees is the most influential factor for customer satisfaction. In addition, personalized service and experience have become particularly important, also being a trend in the development of the hotel industry in recent years. The staff personal profiles and the attentive service provided are the keys to success to foster customer satisfaction and to establish emotional connection that will lead to loyalty.

Finally, if a relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction exists, the main gap of this study was found on the fact that there is no existent tool that would scientifically measure the specific relation between both variables. A need for defining such measures that would analyze the variables on the same scale is therefore emerging, with the goal of establishing and explaining the factors that characterize this relationship.

A line for future investigations is therefore observed: after seeing the findings from an academic point of view, it would be of interest to analyze it from the perspective of the internal and external client (employee and customer) by analyzing the levels of employee engagement in luxury hotels as well as the level of customer satisfaction and compare both results in order to be able to establish a relation between both variables. This could be done by surveying both experts of the sector and guests of luxury establishments.

Chapter 3. Employee Engagement in luxury hospitality. Barcelona case study.

-This chapter was presented at the II Latin American Congress on Hospitality Research, co-organized by the University of Applied Sciences (Peru), the Universidad Externado (Colombia), and the Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT (Universitat de Barcelona) (12th of November 2021).

-The results of this chapter were presented on a master class session on “Talent Retention in Hospitality” organized by the University of Applied Sciences (Peru) (15th December 2021).

-A version of this chapter was presented at the UB Ph.D. in Business workshop (February 2022)

-The results of this chapter were also presented on a master class session on “New challenges in Hospitality: Talent Retention” organized by the Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (3rd of May 2022).

-This chapter was also presented on the IV Research Seminar Session organized by Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB (12th of July 2022).

-Part of the analysis in this chapter and chapter 3 is being reviewed for publication in Journal of Marketing Analytics (Impact factor: 3.0, CiteScore: 0.8), May 24

Abstract

Purpose

The main objective of this study is to analyze the level of employee engagement and employee motivation in the field of luxury hospitality in the city of Barcelona. The relationship between employees and customers and the creation of emotional connection between them is a very specific field to study, which has been poorly studied and explained. In fact, very few articles were found to investigate this topic, even though the concept is crucial and significant for the hotel industry. As for emotional connection, the term does not have enough relevant research to establish a clear definition and implementation practices.

Methodology

This study was developed through a mixed research method, initially based on a bibliographic review, supported by primary data from various methodologies such as the use of two validated anonymous questionnaires, content analysis through the two most frequently used employee opinion platforms (Glassdoor & Indeed).

Findings

The results revealed that emotional connection or engagement is one of the most valuable aspects for both, employees, and experts in the sector. Based on these findings, several useful implications for academic and professional fields regarding employee engagement are positively related to customer satisfaction.

Conclusions

When an organizational culture and philosophy is well designed, the more engaged are the employees and the better service can be provided to the guests, which implies an increase in customer loyalty, satisfaction, and commitment.

Keywords: Emotional connection - employee engagement - employee motivation - burnout - luxury hotels

Introduction

Becoming a global phenomenon tourism was described by the UNWTO, as a social, economic, and cultural activity. It is defined by the people's movement beyond their normal environment for different reasons. The hospitality sector has a primary interest in recognizing how employees and their emotional relation with their organizations can influence the satisfaction of customers. Luxury hotels, which are distinguished by excellent quality customer service levels of guest satisfaction as a result of a pleasant customer experience, are an essential part of the tourism industry.

This study has been issued from the necessity to define the importance of employee engagement and employee motivation in the luxury hotel sector, relating our study with the city of Barcelona, recognized as a tourist city (Palomeque, 2015), one of the destinations that concentrates the largest number of luxury hotel establishments, and where the presence of luxury hotel establishments has grown exponentially during the last decades, which now has 765 hotels, including 41 luxury properties (Idescat, 2019). In this setting, the luxury hotel industry has become increasingly competitive, with senior management constantly searching for the correct tactics to implement in order to respond to new needs and gain a competitive advantage. Thus, the main objective of this study is to define and determine the impact of employees' engagement and their emotional connection with their organization in the field of luxury hospitality in the city of Barcelona.

To carry out this research, quantitative and qualitative methods were used, including the use of two validated questionnaires related with engagement and motivation, as well as content analysis of employee reviews in the opinion platforms Glassdoor and Indeed.

Eventually, the literature provided insights about a crucial need of understanding customers and satisfying them in the luxury hotel industry, where the competition is fierce, and customers have a higher perception of service quality in order to be satisfied. Thus, fomenting emotional connection of employees is necessary in order to engage them in their job and therefore providing a higher service quality which will further induce emotional connection of customers through their satisfaction with the experience and their loyalty. Analyzing and understanding the emotional connection of employees and its impacts on the emotional connection of customers is crucial in luxury hospitality worldwide.

Literature review

Tourism is defined by the UNWTO as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon characterized by the movement of people for personal or business purposes, outside of their usual environment. Therefore, the tourism industry is one of the most rapidly growing industries globally representing 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals globally (UNWTO, 2019) and 10,3% of the global GDP.

"Employee Engagement is an emerging and evolving concept within the business, management, organizational, and human resource development areas of knowledge that has become a widely used and popular term with organizational and professional interest, particularly those related to the hospitality sector," according to Louzao & Crespi (2022). Employee engagement literature analyzed highlights the premise that the hotel sector is a people-oriented profession that requires employees to serve people (Kandampully et al., 2015; Cain et al., 2018; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019). Hotels cannot function without formal relationships, which necessitates the presence of multiple staff members at the same time (Taheri et al., 2017; Harkison, 2018; Lucia-Palacios et al., 2020).

Employee Engagement was initially defined by Khan (1990). People are engaged in their occupations when they believe them to be meaningful, when they have the suitable work environment, and when they have access to psychological resources, according to a three psychological condition theory. Job satisfaction, excitement for work, and organizational dedication are all linked to employee engagement. It was defined as a person's psychological attachment to a company (Kahn, 1990; Salanova et al., 2005).

The concept of employee engagement has been defined in multiple ways and based on different approaches, however, Salanova and Schaufeli's (2009) concepts are mostly utilized in studies on employee engagement in the tourism industry. They define employee engagement as a good and rewarding psychological state of mind characterized by three primary dimensions: vigor, dedication, and total absorption of the job-related activity. An engaged employee is defined as someone that works harder, is always willing to improve, is passionate about their work, and produces better outcomes that help the company thrive (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Karatepe, 2013; Andrews & Turner, 2017; Cain et al., 2018; Borst et al., 2020; Zeidan & Itani, 2020).

Consequently, engaged employees are able to respond to challenging service encounters, show practice behaviors and be adaptable in every situation. They see changes as challenges and opportunities for learning, personal growth, and development (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Cain et al., 2018; Zeidan & Itani, 2020). In addition, employees that are engaged in their work roles tend to transfer their engagement to others (Chang et al., 2019), which is considerable in an industry where employees work in teams. It is even more important considering that it is not only transmittable to workers, but also positively related with the emotions that are displayed by staff during customer interactions, which will further increase the perception of service quality (Chang et al., 2019), their satisfaction and emotional connection. Moreover, employee engagement has been found to positively be related to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Cain et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2019; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019; Lucia-Palacios et al., 2020).

Employee engagement is closely related to employee motivation. Indeed, Bakker & Schaufeli (2008) define engagement as a set of motivating resources, including support and recognition from supervisors, feedback, and opportunities for learning. Motivation is seen as a potent instrument for reinforcing behaviors and inducing the desire to continue (Bartol & Martin, 1998). It is an internal drive to satisfy an unsatisfied need and to achieve a certain goal that begins through a physiological or psychological need that stimulates performance set by an objective (Dobre, 2013). In other words, motivation means the willingness of an individual to make an effort and take action towards organizational goals. It is a force that enables an individual to act in the direction of a particular objective (Ramlal, 2004; Shahzadi et al., 2014).

Employee motivation is thus vital to the success of organizations (Curtis et al., 2009; Chiang & Jang, 2008; Dobre, 2013), as a lack of motivation may cause organizational issues such as turnover, retention and poor performances. On the contrary, highly motivated employees will put more effort on the job and enhance their productivity and the quality of their performance (Chiang & Jang, 2008), as well as being more oriented towards autonomy and are more self-driven (Shahzadi et al., 2014). Employee motivation is therefore a vital and determinant aspect of employee engagement, thinking, passion and enthusiasm, as well as receptivity to new ideas and change (Chathoth et al., 2020).

Employee engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction are thus extremely important in the hospitality industry. Indeed, hotels are known for their constant engagement among employees, as well as strong emotional demands resulting from emotionally charged encounters at work, such as long working hours, limited

time for breaks, high pressures, repetitious monotonous everyday activities, and so on (Sanchez-Gomez & Bresó, 2020; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009). All of these types of workplace stress might result in burnout and high turnover intentions (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Martínez et al. 2020; Wang & Wang, 2020).

Burnout is a long-term, work-related illness that develops as a reaction to emotional or interpersonal pressures (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion (chronic emotional and physical fatigue), depersonalization (negative attitude toward work), and lower personal accomplishment (feeling of less competence and achievement in one's work) are all characteristics of burnout, according to Salanova and Schaufeli (2009). Employee turnover, absenteeism due to illness, and poor job performance are all negative organizational outcomes of burnout, which leads to a decline in employee engagement and an increase in turnover intention (Karatepe & Uludag, 2007; Wang & Wang, 2019).

Considering the review on employee engagement, motivation and burnout in hospitality companies, the emotional connection of the internal client can be closely associated with the concept of emotional engagement. Emotional engagement derives from an employee's willingness to involve personal resources such as pride, belief, and knowledge following a positive cognitive appraisal (Shuck et al., 2014). Emotionally engaged employees will feel connected and a part of the organization (Macey & Schneider, 2008) and will therefore display practices in alliance with the organizational demands and be more customer oriented. They will also be less subject to experience negative behaviors such as burnout or turnover intentions (Wang & Wang, 2019). In other words, an emotionally connected employee will be satisfied and engaged in his work, achieving high job performances, being committed to the organization philosophy and culture, as well as being customer oriented towards an exceptional service through the right display of own emotions (Wu et al., 2017; Taheri et al., 2017; Chang et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2020), their management and the ones of others for both team players and customers.

However, even if an individual's willingness to commit to the company is needed, there is a need for fostering a positive organizational climate defined as the employees' perception of the ambiance at work based on the emotions displayed by the organization. Developing work engagement, emotional connection and displaying emotions in hospitality need to be sustained by hotel directors by focusing on practices that will create positive working environments in order to reduce such negative emotional demands and emotionally engage the teams (Zhao et al., 2020).

Consequently, the need for fostering job satisfaction and organizational commitment appears in order to reduce burnout, increase performances through retention and have a stronger sense of belonging and identification among employees with the organization (Wang & Wang, 2020). Job satisfaction is induced through a positive organizational climate, and organizational commitment will be fostered through perceived organizational support, including moral support, recognition of employees and the provision of right tools to complete their work.

Summarizing, employee engagement, organizational climate, and organizational commitment all contribute to the emotional connection of luxury hotels' internal clients. If employee engagement is an individual process, it cannot exist without a positive organizational atmosphere that reduces negative emotional demands such as burnout and turnover intents while also improving employee sense of belonging (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Lee & Ok, 2015; Johnson et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2020). Employees are a company's most valuable asset, and productivity and performance will suffer if they are not engaged.

As a result, hotel companies should use employee retention methods to foster a better degree of organizational commitment while also demoting counterproductive work practices, resulting in higher levels of employee engagement (Zeidan & Itani, 2020; Kang & Brusser, 2018). To put it another way, the hotel must give the necessary support and resources to recruit, train, and retain staff (Taheri et al., 2017; Wang, 2019; Ogueyungbo et al., 2020; Van Tuin et al., 2020). All of these processes must be aligned with the company's culture and values (Boria et al., 2013), but they must also train employees on how to recognize and deal with various emotional responses.

Employee engagement still needs to be refined in most organizations. The quality of service provided by employees directly depends on their satisfaction and enthusiasm in their work. The employee factor plays a crucial role in customer loyalty, profitability, productivity, and employee turnover. As for emotionality in hotel companies, important influences such as burnout, empowerment, recognition, training, and ways of engagement must be understood and established, creating the right consciousness and connection between the company, employee, and customer (Cain et al., 2018).

According to the Mastercard Global Destination Cities Index of 2019, Barcelona was the 17th most visited city in the world with 9,09 MM international visitors. Indeed, Barcelona has experienced an exponential growth in tourism after the Olympic Games of 1992. This year was revolutionary for the tourism and

hospitality sectors with the development of new means of transportation as well as the appearance of international luxury hotel chains as The Ritz Carlton Hotel Company, Marriott International (Arts Hotel 1994, W Hotel 2001), Accor Group (Fairmont Rey Juan Carlos I Hotel, 1992), Derbi Hotels (Hotel Claris, 1992); and other independent hotels (Mercer, 1993) increasingly more and more interested in the potential of Barcelona as a tourist city. Based on the data provided by the Ajuntament de Barcelona, this number of establishments was almost multiplied by 5 by 2019 with 8.520.417 arrivals and 21.363.292 overnight stays.

Moreover, if we look at the number of hotels in the city, Barcelona had 118 hotels in 1990, a result that increased to 426 hotels in the year 2000, only eight years after the Olympic Games (Estadístiques de turisme. Barcelona: ciutat i entorn, 2016, Barcelona Turisme, 2019). Nowadays, based on the information of Idescat, 2019, Barcelona is characterized by a fierce competition across the hospitality sector, accounting for 765 hotels, from which 41 are 5* and 5* Grand Luxury Hotels. In this context, the luxury hotel sector has become more and more competitive, always looking for the right strategies to be implemented by top hotel management to adapt to new demands and create a competitive advantage.

The establishments of 5* and 5* Grand Luxury are designated luxury hotels, according to the Generalitat de Catalunya's Decree 75/2020. These hotels are distinguished by providing great customer service, including exceptional room decoration, 24-hour restoration, restaurant, bar, and room service, and a minimum room and common area surface, among other minimum standards. As a result, when it comes to luxury, service quality, customer happiness, and great customer experiences are all important aspects (Dubois et al., 2005; Lu et al., 2015; Nasution & Mavondo, 2018). A positive experience will entice the consumer to return, stay longer, or refer the business to others.

Methodology

With the aim of responding to the established objective of defining and determining the impact of employees' engagement and their emotional connection with their organization in the field of luxury hospitality in the city of Barcelona, a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology has been carried out, through different methodological research tools.

Employee Engagement and Motivation Questionnaires

In order to measure employee engagement and employee motivation, two validated online questionnaires were distributed. Both sets of questions were included and distributed, adding a series of demographic enquiries, in order to define the main characteristics that had an impact on the selected indicator results - namely engagement and motivation. The employee engagement questionnaire has been designed based on the UWES (Utrecht Work Engagement Survey) questionnaire from Schaufeli, et al., (2002) and the employee motivation questionnaire provided by Berardi (2015) based on previous studies of Salanova and Schaufeli.

On one hand, Schaufeli, et al., (2002) are pillars in providing empirical studies on tourism and hospitality. After an in-depth review on the subject, it was found that only a few employee engagement measurement models were created across the research field, and if so, no general agreement was provided on their use as a validated research tool. Consequently, the use of the UWE questionnaire was justified.

On the other hand, the questionnaire on motivation provided by Berardi (2015) was based on the academic review of the previous studies of Salanova and Schaufeli provided extra mile conclusions on the importance of the overall motivation of employees and teams in enhancing engagement. Thus, using it as a base for our research, it will provide a 360° overview on the employees' situation towards engagement and motivation in the luxury hotels of Barcelona.

Overall, around 12.000 self-administered questionnaires were distributed, from which 474 were returned. After removal of incomplete questionnaires, a total of 400 responses were considered useful and validated. In order to analyze the results of the conducted survey, the selection of 8 hotels based on relevance in terms of responses was done. In fact, the selected hotels turned out to be the most recognized ones in the city of Barcelona.

As the research topic was considered confidential both in the perception of participation, as well as about the topic itself, sending the survey online and anonymously to employees was considered the best way to guarantee the confidentiality of the participants. They also were required to share the survey with their contacts, developing the snowball methodology. Based on the data and the sample size, a descriptive statistical analysis was carried out. PSPP, the program used to analyze data and the regression analysis, was implemented as the most

suitable statistical method, in this case by using validated questionnaires and a simple percentual and graphical analysis for the demographic data.

Indeed & Glassdoor Content Analysis

Glassdoor is a popular employee platform, for sharing salary and job evaluation information from each organization, including hotels, to its members. With more than 33 million reviews and is built on business transparency. Confidential information is shared on this platform so that employees can help others in getting to know the company, as well as qualitative information related with salaries and organizational conditions. Indeed, is an employee opinion platform which offers the same services as Glassdoor adding the possibility to value workplace parameters.

The analysis of these two employee opinion platforms through a total review of 378 out of 850 comments has been considered crucial for obtaining a wider a more detailed and specific and more transparent perspective of the hotels analyzed, as well as being able to establish relationships between results from questionnaires and the content analysis on employee opinion platforms.

Results

Employee Engagement & Motivation Questionnaires and opinion platforms content analysis

Of the 12.000 participants to whom the questionnaire was sent, 474 were returned and of these, 400 were considered as the useful population, representing 84.39% of the total number of responses obtained.

After analyzing the demographic characteristics of the sample, the results revealed that 41,5% of the respondents were male, which therefore translates to most female respondents representing 56,9% of our sample. Only 1,6% preferred not to mention their gender. Considering age, participants were between 23 and 29 years old (26,1%), between 30 and 35 years old (21,4%) and between 36 and 42 years old (20,9%). Regarding the other age categories, the 43 to 50 categories revealed 14,6% of the respondents, 51-65 category was 9,9% and 19 to 22 category was 7%. Taking education level into consideration, undergraduate degree was the diploma owned by most respondents with 51,7% of the responses. It was followed by Master's degree (30,5%), Bachelor (10,7%) and High School degree (7%). The Doctorate education level revealed no results among the selected sample.

As previously explained in the methodology section, the most relevant results concerned eight specific luxury hotels. Indeed, the hotel with the highest number of respondents was H3, accounting for 118 employees representing 31,1% of the sample. It was followed by H7 (12,9%), H1 (12,4%), H6 (7,7%), H8 and H5 with both 6,9%, and finally H4 (6,1%). The other 33 analyzed hotels revealed such low results that were not considered due to their low significance in terms of conclusion to extract. Moreover, the length of service of the respondents was in majority between 2 and 5 years of experience (26,6%), or more than 5 years (32,1%). It was followed by between 1 and 2 years (15,3), 6 months and 1 year (11,5%), and less than 6 months (12,5%) of relation. In terms of command level, results revealed that 58% of the respondents were line employees, 29,6% were departmental managers; 9,1% area directors and 2,5% occupied general management positions.

Eventually, concerning hotel departments, the most relevant results revealed from the survey concerned Front of the House departments with a majority of respondents in Reception (40,3%), F&B (25%) and Concierge (18%). They were closely followed by Reservations (11%), Housekeeping (10,3%), Sales (12%) and Public Relations (11%). Management, MICE and Marketing went shortly after with respectively 8%, 6% and 4,8%. The departments that showed the lowest respondents were Human Resources (3,3%), Quality (3,3%), Finance (2,8%) and Maintenance (2%). For each hotel, the levels of engagement were considered as follows: <5% is very low, between 5% and 24% is considered low, 25% to 74% is considered medium, 75% to 95% is considered high, and > 95% is considered a very high level of engagement. With respect to motivation, the levels were considered as follows: 5% to 30% is low, 31% to 55% is medium, 56% to 80% is medium-high and more than 80% is high level of motivation.

The detailed questionnaires and opinion platform's results related to the specific levels of employee engagement of the 8 hotels studied are as follows:

H1 Hotel is the first hotel of a European hotel group to be opened in Barcelona in November 2017. Located in the city center, this new 5* GL hotel features 91 rooms from which 30 are suites. The findings of the survey accounted for 52 respondents that have worked at this establishment. In the H1 Hotel case, the results from the questionnaire revealed a high level of engagement among employees and a medium-high level of motivation. Through Glassdoor & Indeed analysis, conclusions cannot be extracted due to the low number of reviews. These results provide insights on the fact that fostering positive working environments will increase employee engagement.

H2 Hotel was also opened in 1992 as a result of the Olympic Games. It is nowadays managed by a European International Hotel Company. Accounting for 432 rooms, this establishment, located in the financial area of Barcelona is one of the most emblematic hotels of the city. The results of the questionnaires provided 28 respondents that were employed in this establishment. High levels of engagement and medium-high level of motivation from the employees of the H2 Hotel are positively associated with the human factor in an organization and the organizational support even though negative aspects in relation with the work volume, the number of extra hours, pressure, schedule, and lack of motivation were highlighted in both platforms which differed in 1,5 points from one platform to another (Glassdoor & Indeed)

H3 Hotel is one of the pillars in terms of luxury property in Barcelona. Opened in 1994 as a result of the Olympic Games of 1992, this establishment is managed by an and was the first hotel to be opened in Europe. It is one of the biggest 5*GL hotels of the city accounting for 483 rooms and is also the hotel that provided this study with the highest number of respondents with 121 employees. Results from the H3 Hotel translated into a high engagement among employees, but where absorption dimension was lower, and the level of motivation was only medium-high. In fact, Indeed & Glassdoor content analysis mentioned the lack of communication, opportunities, and the rigidity of management in the company. These aspects are of high importance in order to foster engagement which could explain the lower results in absorption and the medium motivation. However, what increases vigor and dedication dimensions of engagement would be the teamwork, the strong corporate values, and the intensive training programs.

H4 Hotel 5*GL is a national independent hotel that was opened in Barcelona in 2012. Its 71 rooms and common areas offer spectacular views of the Barcelona landscape. The survey revealed a total of 23 responses. Positive working environment and human factors proved also to be of main importance in the H4 Hotel in order to provide high levels of engagement and medium-high levels of motivation. The lack of intrinsic motivations such as good salary conditions, nonexistent possibility of promotion or permanent contract and communication between departments could be factors that affected the absorption which showed lower levels than dedication and absorption of workers.

H5 Hotel is one of the most traditional and luxurious hotels in Barcelona. Part of a national hotel group, it was opened in 1918 in the city, near two of the most renowned Gaudi houses, Casa Mila and Casa Batlló. This 5*GL hotel accounts for 271 rooms and provided the present study with 28 respondents. Regarding H5

Hotel, the levels of engagement and motivation were high as well. Reviewing comments on Glassdoor & Indeed both platforms coincide, the importance of positive working environments was emphasized through the lack of a more consistent culture and values established by the Human Resources department that is, it can be extrapolated that one of the most important factors for employees is based on a good relationship with their colleagues and superiors.

H6 Hotel is one of the most luxurious and sophisticated hotels in Barcelona. Located in the very center of the city, in one of the most emblematic streets of the city, it was settled in 2009 by an international company. Accounting for 120 rooms and provided the present study with 29 respondents. Engagement and motivation levels are one of the lowest in comparison to other analyzed hotels, which can be explained by the employees' reviews on Indeed & Glassdoor mentioning the rigid supervision and the perception of managers instead of leaders. However, the training provided, and the strong corporate values are highlighted as positive aspects. This shows that H6 as part of an international chain has the necessity in providing such culture and values in order to standardize its levels of service across all properties. Reviewing the management model in directive position would be a factor to implement in order to enhance these levels of engagement from the employee.

H7 Hotel, one of the most traditional hotels in the city, after a thorough renovation became part of a Spanish hotel group recently associated with a very prestigious international hotel company. The results of the survey provided 49 respondents. Again, with H7 Hotel, most relevant aspects (both positive and negative) of the organization referred to the organizational climate provided by the company. The most relevant positive aspects refer to the team, environment and communication between colleagues, managers and directors leading in terms of absorption to show one of the three best scores along with the H3 and H4 examples even though in terms of motivation it was revealed, one of the lowest in comparison with the other eight hotels probably related to the high level of turnover and the lack of organization between departments.

H8 Hotel opened in 2001, as a result of the increasing interest for international hotel chains to implement properties in Barcelona after the Olympic Games of 1992. Indeed, is part of the biggest and most prestigious hotel company worldwide. It has become nowadays one of the most iconic skyscrapers of the city, located just on the sea front and accounting for no less than 473 rooms. The results of the survey highlighted 26 respondents. The levels of engagement and motivation revealed to be respectively high and medium-high. Once again, observing the

reviews on Indeed & Glassdoor, the main issues concerned employees' needs and emotional demands (working hours, shift changes, low salaries, etc.). The engagement is still high, however, such big hotel companies (H8, H3, H6, etc.) with these large room numbers could be compared to “factories” that are training young employees of the hospitality sector, but not investing in retaining them. In that case, the emotional connection of employees with the organization has a wide range for improvement.

Conclusions

The main objective of this study is to examine the level of employee engagement and employee motivation and their emotional connection with their organization in the field of luxury hospitality in the city of Barcelona. In relation with employee engagement and motivation levels, the results of the study showed high levels of employee engagement and medium-high levels of motivation in the eight 5* and 5* GL hotels analyzed in-depth in Barcelona. In general, levels of absorption in the job were always a bit lower than dedication and vigor levels. This could be explained since absorption is a bit more difficult to be felt by employees. In other words, employees can be happy and engaged in their job without being completely absorbed. However, it also could be due to the Covid-19 and temporary employment regulation situation in Spain, in concrete in Barcelona. Therefore, the levels of engagement could have been influenced by the negative situation currently experienced at a global level.

Focusing on Indeed & Glassdoor analysis, and in relation with employees' perceptions and opinions of the organization, conclusions can be extracted on the importance of the human factor to be considered for employees. Moreover, the results of both platforms revealed that both positive and negative reviews were mentioning the organizational support and climate, the intrinsic motivations (being provided with training, feedback, being recognized, empowerment, etc.) and the fulfillment of their basic needs (salaries, working hours, emotional demands, etc.). This goes along with the concepts highlighted by the authors in the theoretical background: supporting employees, satisfying their needs and providing the right working environment, and resources will reinforce engagement and motivation, and on the contrary, when not provided, employees feel dissatisfied, therefore disengaged.

The personal attention of employees is the most influential factor for customer satisfaction. In addition, personalized service and experience have become particularly important, also being a trend in the development of the hotel industry

in recent years. The staff personal profiles and the attentive service provided are the keys to success to foster customer satisfaction and to establish emotional connection that will lead to loyalty.

Chapter 4. Customer Satisfaction in luxury hospitality. Barcelona case study.

-This chapter was presented at the Smart Tourism Congress organized by CETT-Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy, University of Barcelona (10th of November 2022).

-The new version of this chapter was presented at the III CLIHR Congreso Latinoamericano de Investigación en Hotelería y Restauración co-organized by the University of Applied Sciences (Peru), the Universidad Externado (Colombia), the University Anáhuac Cancun and the Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-Universitat de Barcelona (9th of November 2023)

Abstract

Purpose

The main objective of this research is to determine the impact of employees on customer satisfaction in the luxury hospitality field in the city of Barcelona. Despite being an important topic, little is known about the emotional connection between employees and customers and its importance in the luxury hospitality industry.

Methodology

These relationships were investigated using a mixed research strategy based on content analysis, specifically sentiment analysis, which is a technique for analyzing data related to opinions, attitudes and emotions (Bacik et al., 2020), with primary data extracted from TripAdvisor and Ctrip user reviews as well as five semi-structured interviews to frequent travelers' luxury hotel customers.

Findings

The contribution of this article is to highlight that personnel and emotional connection are one of the most valuable aspects for customers and employees. Several useful implications concerning employee and customer engagement are positively related with customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: Customer Engagement – Customer Satisfaction -Emotional Connection – Luxury Hospitality

Introduction

Tourism, as a mass phenomenon, bears the trait of leaving a familiar area in response to various triggers (Bacik et al., 2020). It is deemed a social, cultural, and economic phenomena by the World Tourism Organization of the United Nations. As an integral element of the tourist sector, luxury hotels are distinguished by their superior customer service and comfortable accommodations.

The luxury hospitality as part of the tourism sector, is well known for its excellent levels of quality products and services. The concept “luxury” comes from “luxus”, which means “sumptuousness, luxuriousness, opulence” and nowadays, does not exist a unique definition. It can be explained as “high quality, expensive and non-essential products and services that appear to be rare, exclusive, prestigious, authentic and offer high levels of symbolic and emotional / hedonic values through customer experiences”. (Tynan et al., 2010).

According to Louzao & Crespi-Vallbona (2022), Employee Engagement is an emerging and evolving concept within the business, management, organizational, and human resource development areas of knowledge that has become a widely used and popular term with organizational and professional interest, particularly those related to the hospitality sector. Thus, recognizing the influence of workers' emotional connection to the organization to which they belong on customer satisfaction should be considered as a top priority for the hospitality sector.

The cornerstone of success in the hospitality industry is the customer (Goeldner, et al., 2020; Bacik et al., 2020; Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020). The customer's satisfaction, the stay experience, and the emotional connection they gain are the motivations for staying in a hotel, and the quality of service gained during the customer's stay translates into their satisfaction. Managing tourism and hospitality service quality becomes a complicated goal because of the heterogeneity of customers. As quality is based on personal experiences, it is valued differently and subjectively by each customer. Thus, tourism and hospitality organizations need to adopt quality strategies, where personal perceived value becomes the driver of competitive advantage (Louzao & Crespi, 2022).

This study was conducted to investigate the impact of personnel and emotional connection of hotel staff on customer satisfaction in the context of luxury hotels in city of Barcelona. Competition in the hotel industry has always been fierce, and in Barcelona, where luxury hotels are growing exponentially, the competition is particularly intense. In this context, hotel executives need to actively seek the right strategies to meet new demands to gain a competitive advantage thus, the role of employee engagement is the key success factor for customer loyalty strategy.

The hypothesis considered to carry out this investigation are:

H1-For luxury hotel customers staff plays an important role when relating to the emotional connection developed during their stays

H2-Staff related content highlights aspects in relation to those situations that have had the most emotional impact during their stays

H3-Those departments in direct contact with guests, those defined as Front of the House departments, are the ones who develop a higher impact on customer emotional connection.

H4-Customers highlight content related with emotions on their online platform reviews.

H5- The most influential factors on Emotional Connection are related to the employee personal attention.

Literature Review

According to Bacik et al. (2020), tourism has been described as a mass phenomenon characterized by the movement of people outside of their usual environment based on personal or professional motivations. It is considered as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon by the UNWTO. Luxury hotels are an important part of the tourism lodging industry, characterized by excellent customer service and high levels of customer satisfaction as a result of a positive guest experience.

The hotel experience consists of the three experiences of engagement, emotion, attitude, and motivation _ (Torres & Kline, 2013). Dubois et al. (2005) say that in luxury hotels, it is not at all adequate to meet fundamental necessities, it is the customer experience that provides joy in the mind of the customer, this is because high quality is anticipated by the consumer. Therefore, the quality of service in every aspect is a primary issue for hoteliers, and hotels differentiate themselves from their competitors based on the interaction with guests and the emotional evaluation of the customer's stay (Chang & Horng, 2010). This notion is highlighted by Vo (2018), Louzao & Crespi (2022), who asserts that a strong service concept is acknowledged as a significant aspect in the effective performance of the hotel industry, especially in luxury hotels. This approach is crucial in the very competitive Barcelona luxury lodging industry.

As a tourist destination, Barcelona features 41 luxury hotels out of 765 total hotels (Idescat,2019). Therefore, in the luxury hotel business in Barcelona, competition

is growing more severe, and market-specific tactics are constantly required in order to react to changing market needs and maintain a competitive edge. According to Dubois et al., (2005) the most important principles for the luxury market are service quality, customer happiness, and a good customer experience. In fact, a great experience is essential for increasing consumers' duration of stay and encouraging them to return or suggest the business to others. Based on Aeberhard, et al, (2020), the current understanding of luxury, it is exposed that new luxury hotels differ from “old school” luxury ones in different aspects such as the space of each property and the value of time spent in each one; the personalized and individualized service; the exclusiveness offered and the safety, security, and health aspects remarkable for actual customers.

According to Alkhursha and Rjoub (2020), there is a strong correlation between customer satisfaction and service quality, client loyalty, and purchasing influence. Customer satisfaction and attention are seen as significant determinants of intention to remember to create memories (Yavas et al., 2004). According to Li et al., 2020, very pleased customers are more likely to return and promote the hotel, but highly dissatisfied customers are more likely to disparage the hotel, affecting its reputation and leading it to lose potential customers.

Understanding the consumer is therefore the key to success in the hospitality industry (Goeldner et al., 2000; Bacik et al., 2020; Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020). As stated by Louzao & Crespi (2022) it is essential to understand those elements that determine the perception of quality for each client. As quality is related with personal experiences, it is valued differently and subjectively by each client, thus managing tourism and hospitality service quality becomes a complicated goal because of the heterogeneity of customers.

Customer engagement or motivation entails concepts such as customer satisfaction, experiences, and interactions with others. Satisfaction is predicted by the service quality: customer satisfaction comes from a subjective perception of quality after the use of such service by comparing a priori expectations and posteriori perceived performance of the service. In other words, it is the subjective evaluation of the customer after the use of a service (Torres & Kline, 2013; Le et al., 2020; Liet al., 2020).

Considered crucial is the direct link between service quality and customer satisfaction whereas service quality is affected by consumers' perceptions of the relative excellence of the business and its offerings (Alkurshan & Rjoub, 2020). Danish et al., (2018) argued that the comparison of customers' expectations and perceived performance of services defines quality as a type of market demand, while the so-called customer satisfaction, i.e. the higher the level of customer

satisfaction and engagement, the higher the quality of the service being provided (Alkurshan & Rjoub, 2020).

In this sense, we consider the development of the following hypothesis:

H1-For luxury hotel customers staff plays an important role when relating to the emotional connection developed during their stays.

Another important aspect of customer satisfaction, which is also of great significance for the development of the study, is the link between the performance of employees in providing services and its impact on customers and their further evaluations (Li et al, 2020; Cain et al., 2018; Louzao & Crespi, 2022). Through content analysis of customer reviews on TripAdvisor (Liu et al., 2017), sentiment analysis of similar online reviews on TripAdvisor (Bacik et al., 2020), content analysis of customer letters (Torres & Kline, 2013) and quantitative research surveys of customers (Le et al., 2020) speaks about review analysis as a possible way to understand what influences customer satisfaction, and to improve the connection between hotels and their guests (Vo, 2018).

Related to this idea, we consider the development of the following hypothesis:

H2-Staff related content highlights aspects in relation to those situations that have had the most emotional impact during their stays.

A notion such as experience will also be examined to highlight its significance and effectiveness in luxury hotels. Rageh et al., (2013) describe customer experience as the consumer's internal and subjective reaction to any direct or indirect corporate encounter. Experience is all about establishing emotions and memories, and by knowing this, better services may be delivered; recognizing the significance of experience is crucial at this time, yet few businesses seem to be doing so. (Rageh et al., 2013). In addition, the idea of experience is often misunderstood, leading to improper application or non-application (Rageh et al., 2013).

From here, defining the customer's emotional connection, Bagozzi et al., (1999) define emotion as a state of mental readiness resulting from the cognitive evaluation of an event or thought, having a phenomenological tone that can accompany a mental process. On the other hand, a similar concept of affective attachment is defined as multifaceted, emotionally complex, evolving through time, requiring a personal history between the object and the person (Kleine & Baker, 2004; Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016).

However, in the existing literature, emotional connection is still not clearly defined and connection with a company simply means loyalty and satisfaction with the company, measured through the analysis of surveys and online reviews. Meanwhile, Bekalu et al., (2019) studied emotional connection through social

media platforms, and through survey research, the authors examined that this connection is not equal for all people, referring to the various effects of social media on different people, the frequency and amount of social network used, and differences related to age, education, race, and economic status, which shaped many different ways of studying the concept and possible conclusions.

The impact of customer satisfaction and emotional connection through social media is a tool for companies to use advertising, create strategies and improve communication between customers and the company (Vences et al., 2020). Therefore, when hotels invest in social media, it is important to connect with their customers in order to have virality, greater visibility and engagement (Vences et al., 2020). Therefore, by analyzing customer reviews on sites such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com or Ctrip, companies and employees can learn more about important issues and their solutions, as well as identify positive aspects of the company and employees for future improvements and strategy proposition. O’Leary (2011) states that customer reviews reflect emotions as happiness, frustration, pleasure or other feelings also known as “emotional connection”.

Therefore, those departments considered as Front of the House, (Reception, Guest Relations, Guest Services and Concierge), are the ones where the most interpersonal and emotional contact is established from the customer perspective. It is understood that the Front of the House departments, should be dynamic, where regular performance should be reviewed, as should the knowledge of each figure in the operational area. It is equally important to recruit the right people with the right characteristics, knowledge, skills and abilities, and to hold regular meetings to build and maintain good communication as well as to offer them the proper conditions that enhance creativity, innovation and positive values to the employees, so they feel comfortable, appreciated and valuable to offer their best in the workplaces (Crespi-Vallbona, 2018).

In this sense, we consider the development of the following hypothesis:

H3-Those departments in direct contact with guests, those defined as Front of the House departments, are the ones who develop a higher impact on customer emotional connection.

H4-Customers highlight content related with emotions on their online platform reviews.

Related to this same idea of Emotional Connection, it is necessary to mention the concept of value creation, (Taheri et al.,2017), conducted a study through data collection and questionnaires and explained value creation as the emotional and relational derived value between customers and employees, where creating a

unique and memorable experience can be easier with the active participation of customers.

For luxury hotels, the combination of these concepts is even more important because, considering the previous research done by analyzing consumer-generated online hotel reviews, and paying extra attention to social media, it is the customers of 4–5-star hotels who are more concerned about this and more likely to be disappointed by their lack of or unsatisfactory basic services (Li et al., 2020; Vo, 2018). As explained by Vo (2018), the service quality of a hotel is crucial in shaping guests' pleasant memories of their stay, where hotels can measure service quality by studying online reviews, rating strategies, and hotel websites toward customer engagement behaviors to further perceive service quality. This obviously leads to greater satisfaction, loyalty levels, and at the end, purchasing power.

According to Chang & Horng, 2010, the reason why customer satisfaction is especially crucial in the hotel business is that it boosts performance and customer return rates, hence enhancing the industry's competitiveness. Maintaining customer satisfaction and preventing customer discontent leads to success and a rise in customer base, whilst the converse leads to failure and a drop in client loyalty (Li et al, 2020). Also, the influencing variables, including the physical qualities of the hotel, the quality of the basic services, and above all, the service quality of the employees, impacts the customer's experience and assessment. (Cain et al., 2018).

As studied by Torres and Kline (2013), satisfaction only occurs when customers are engaged and their expectations are met and vice versa, while exceeding expectations and having extraordinary experiences may also lead to engagement, which is even a higher emotion than satisfaction or loyalty.

In this sense, we consider the development of the following hypothesis:

H5- The most influential factors on Emotional Connection are related to the employee personal attention.

Methodology

In order to achieve the main objective of this study, which is to determine the impact of employees on customer satisfaction in the luxury hotel sector in the city of Barcelona, a mixed qualitative and quantitative research methodology was used. In order to analyze the level of customer satisfaction in luxury hotels in Barcelona, a content analysis was conducted to study the possible factors that influence customer satisfaction, i.e., hotel departments and employees, as well as to

understand the potential factors that may create an emotional connection with customers.

Content analysis is a research method that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. Bernard Berelson defines content analysis as a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the chosen content of communication (Berelson, 1952). Iverson identifies content analysis as a method to help researchers to analyze subjects on topics that have received little previous attention without compromising their power or eloquence (Iverson, 2000). This type of research method was chosen since this kind of approach can find out from a huge amount of information significant data generated by hotel guests' reviews (Lau et al., 2005; Turban et al., 2010).

Related to emotional connection, one type of content analysis is sentiment analysis, which is a technique used to analyze unstructured data related to emotions, as text data (Bacik et al, 2020). Liu (2015) and Fang (2015) describe sentiment analysis as the field of study to analyze customers' opinions, attitudes, and emotions. Sentiment analysis is also applicable to analysis of online reviews, based on the analysis of external guests' emotional connection, through deep examination of reviews on online platforms of 41 five-star or grand luxury hotels in Barcelona, classifying each review as positive, negative, or neutral attitude towards the hotel. The relation between customer satisfaction and provision of service has an important relation, while analyzing online reviews (Li et al., 2020; Cain et al., 2018). At the same time, from literature review, the crucial value of managing customers online review for companies was understood, to maintain engaged customers and improve the connection between hotel and customers (Vences et al., 2020).

The tag cloud, also known as text cloud and word cloud, is one of the most common visualization methods for text data. In other words, it is a visual summary of content (Lee, et al.,2010). It involves determining the number of times the word is repeated so that the word is highlighted in the representation, usually using a larger size or a different color.

Gruen et al., (2007) also define tag cloud as visual presentations of a set of words, rationally chosen and attributing the text by size, weight, or color, to what is used to represent features, such as frequency of the associated concepts. This method was selected due to the better representation of content analysis results.

To analyze all the information gathered in the study, a cloud tag was one of the best options, as is the most efficient and easiest way to organize the information, seeing which are the most important words and concepts. The information was organized following 2 criteria: content related to “departments” (personnel

connection); and content related to “emotions” (emotional connection). With the help of the tag cloud, which is used as a manifestation of external customer emotion, keyword analysis is used as the main predictive tool to establish correlations between tags and ultimately external customer emotion.

In order to have a better understanding of the external perception, it was decided to carry out an online content analysis of the all 5 stars and 5 stars Grand Luxury hotels in Barcelona in selected platforms for the analysis - TripAdvisor and Ctrip. In this way, it has been able to analyze more in depth this concrete perspective. Furthermore, the analysis of reviews was conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese and Russian, due to the high percentage of guests staying in luxury establishments.

TripAdvisor is one of the biggest and most vibrant online travel communities in the world (O'Connor, 2010), so it's useful to view real traveler reviews in different languages and its customer reviews have also been widely used in other hospitality and tourism studies (Xie et al., 2015). It is important to mention that it provides a free tool to all the customers to share their opinions and experiences, besides an online rating system to evaluate the performance of the service used. Liu et al., (2017) explained why using TripAdvisor data, since it is reliable and provides different perspectives from different languages and countries. Additionally, TripAdvisor is the main website to study for reviews analysis in hospitality (Liu et al., 2017). At the same time, Ctrip has been chosen as the Chinese online media landscape, having a great extent from the ones using in other countries, and according to the research of Statista.com (2018), Ctrip ranked first in the market share of leading platforms in China's online lodging industry by gross transaction value in 2018, accounting for 47 percent of the total transaction value in China's online accommodation market.

The selection of languages has been made, firstly, because the biggest part of TripAdvisor reviews is written in English and Spanish. Russian and Chinese have been selected due to databases from such websites as INE and IDESCAT, where tourists with the origin from China and Russia form a big part of luxury tourism arrivals in Barcelona. Specifically, the number of Russian tourists in hotels in 2019 was 195.450 which is 2,1% of the total and as for the Chinese tourists, the total amount was 182.524, which is a 2,1% of the total amount of tourists (Tourism activity report Barcelona, Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2019).

Regarding the identification of valid results, further criteria for review selection have been established. In relevance to get more representative results, all the reviews from 2010 to 2020 were analyzed following 2 criterias, Personnel Connection (PC), Emotional Connection (EC) and basic criteria applied to both.

The basic criteria consist of all the comments having to be from hotels of 5 stars and Grand Luxury in Barcelona written in English, Spanish, Chinese and Russian.

The criteria “Personnel Connection” was determined to understand the level of customer satisfaction with the service provided by the hotel employees (Cain et al., 2018). Related to the theoretical framework, it was found that the quality of employee engagement and empowerment positively affects customer satisfaction and loyalty (Wang, 2019). Moreover, speaking about luxury hotels, Li et al., 2020 and Vo, 2018 explain that it is the customer of 4–5-star hotels who pay more attention to service quality and experience related products and are more likely to be disappointed due to its lack or unsatisfactory basic services (lack of service, staff, cleanliness, location, room, and value).

Therefore, it is important to analyze the level of customer satisfaction of employee’s service, by calculating the number of staff mentioning’s in reviews in TripAdvisor and Ctrip, as well as to know if their experience was positive or negative. In TripAdvisor and Ctrip, there is 5 points rating system, where 5 is Excellent, 4 is Very good, 3 is Average, 2 is Poor and 1 is Terrible. In order to have a clear understanding, 5 and 4 were considered positive and 2 and 1 - negative.

Then, criteria “Emotional Connection” have been formed specifically for the deep analysis of reviews by establishing keywords for the selection process. O’Leary (2011) says that customer reviews often reflect such emotions as happiness, frustration, disappointment, pleasure, or other feelings, which can also be called emotional connection. Such areas as sadness, trust and positiveness are one of the main emotional reflections from customers during their stay (Bacik et al, 2020).

From here, the text must mention the position or name of the employee involved in the interaction, as when the guest remembers the person that provided the service, it clearly means that emotional connection was created between the customers and employee. (Wang, 2019; Taheri et al., 2017). The selected keywords were divided in two: department and emotional. The keywords were selected through a previous general analysis of the comments, looking for the most repeated words related to emotional matters. Finally, to create the tag cloud, all the keywords were extracted from the excel document where the Analysis of content was made.

Semi-structured frequent luxury travelers’ interviews

The specific objectives of adopting in-depth research are twofold, firstly to highlight the primary factors that influence customer satisfaction and secondly to understand the possible factors that can create an emotional connection with customers.

The interview is an interpersonal exchange established between the researcher and the research subject with the aim of providing verbal answers to the questions asked. As Kahn & Cannell (1957) explained, the semi-structured interview is a conversation with a purpose and a flexible, informal way of observing the topic from different perspectives (Walls et al., 2011). This method is considered to be more effective than questionnaires because it allows to obtain more complete information about the guest satisfaction and experience. The interviews for this research were conducted virtually via Teams during the first two weeks of July 2022.

The aim of the interview was to know more in depth and in a more personal way the experience of frequent travelers, regular guests of luxury hotels in the city of Barcelona, also their thoughts and opinions regarding different aspects, that will help to know more about this perspective. Regarding the type of interview, considering the number of participants and their geographic location, the virtual interview was considered ideal following an online format through Teams. In addition, the format of the interview was structured as it was considered the best way to compare the results of different interviews.

Furthermore, the interview was divided into four parts. The first part of the interview is an introduction of the topic with the basic questions. It has been conducted to prepare the participant for the next questions and to present the key concepts. Further, the second part of the interview were questions related to satisfaction and experience, as it is one of the most important key points of the study and it is crucial to know the opinion and points of view of luxury hotels customers. The questions covered different aspects such as service satisfaction, the most influential factors in the experience, customer' expectations, etc. The third part is focused on loyalty, or the factors that make customers loyal to a specific brand. Finally, the fourth and final part of the interview was related to ratings in social media, considering online reviews after staying in a hotel and its relevance as a decision-making factor in luxury hotels.

The criteria for selecting the participants was: frequent travelers to Barcelona, staying in luxury hotel establishments. Nationality, gender, or age was not considered as it was not relevant for these interviews. After the selection criteria, results were achieved through 5 semi-structured interviews with Barcelona luxury hotel frequent travel customers. 5 out of 15 guests were virtually interviewed via Teams. Below are the 5 participants' basic profiles:

-Interviewee 1- I1- is an international film producer, that has been regularly visiting Barcelona for business purposes for the past 30 years. He is a member of several five-star international hotel loyalty programs worldwide.

-Interviewee 2- I2- International lawyer who has been visiting Barcelona for more than three decades, visiting many five-star hotels on business purposes. He is also member of several hotel loyalty programs.

-Interviewee 3- I3- International CEO bank executive, who has been living in Switzerland, working in Barcelona for more than 20 years, often attending business meetings and events in five-star hotels, and is a member of many hotel loyalty programs.

-Interviewee 4- I4- Company executive who often stays in hotels selected by his company, also involved in several hotel loyalty programs.

-Interviewee 5- I5- is a Neurosurgeon and his wife, who has only stayed in one five-star hotel in Barcelona during the last two decades, but they both participate in many hotel loyalty programs from other countries all over the world.

Results

Opinion platforms content analysis

The first part of the Content Analysis was based on criteria Personal Connection, which obtained 57,056 reviews of the whole 41 hotels in Barcelona. Of the 57,056 total reviews, 29,149 were related to staff, representing 56,16% of all reviews, while 93,05% of the 29,149 reviews were positive and 4,11% of reviews were negative. However, only 1640 were considered valid due to established criteria Emotional Connection, notably among them, 1631 valid reviews were from TripAdvisor and 9 valid reviews were from Ctrip.

The most used language in the review was English with 1,477 reviews, the ones in Spanish had 143 reviews, 20 reviews in Russian, and 9 reviews in Chinese. This is a foreseeable situation, because according to the “2019 Barcelona tourism activity report”, the top 3 of the tourists staying in Barcelona hotels by country of residence were: Spain with 16,9%, the United States with 11,6%, and the United Kingdom with 8,0%. So, tourists from English-speaking countries were at the top of the list, which was 19,6% more than the rest of the language countries, with the use of Spanish in second place. Moreover, as reported by “Oxford Economics - The Global Economic Contribution of TripAdvisor 2016”, TripAdvisor accounted for nearly 11% of the global online travel market in 2016, with higher penetration in North America (16%) and Europe (15%), it supports the results as most of the reviews were in English.

Reviews in Russian were only 19 valid, referring the content to departments or emotions (personnel or emotional connection), which can be interpreted as content directly related to personnel and emotional connection. Having highlighted the

presence of staff members of the same language and culture at their service during their stay. Apart from the above reviews, the rest of the information including aspects regarding the physical features and facilities perceptions as aspects related to the spaces, environment, decoration, atmosphere, room views, etc. they were not considered, since it was considered as non-valid information for our analysis. Equally, those reviews selected from Ctrip mostly said they liked the service from the hotel, which has Chinese reception or offers gifts and cards during the Chinese New Year and festivals.

In this sense, the analyzed data corroborate our first hypothesis:

H1-For luxury hotel customers staff plays an important role when relating to the emotional connection developed during their stays.

Moreover, the evaluation from 2010 to 2020 of emotional reviews from all 41 hotels of 5 and 5 GL stars in Barcelona, have been calculated. The bar chart clearly displays that the number of external guests mentioning emotional reviews on social media has increased year by year from 2010 to 2019. The growth in the number of tourists to Barcelona and the increase in TripAdvisor/Ctrip users are the two main factors for the evolution mentioned. Furthermore, according to the research of Bright Local, the number of new reviews per quarter of TripAdvisor was growing slowly but positively, from quarter 1 of 2012 to quarter 2 of 2017 (Murphy, 2018). In other words, the emotional review evolution is consistent with TripAdvisor's overall review growth trend.

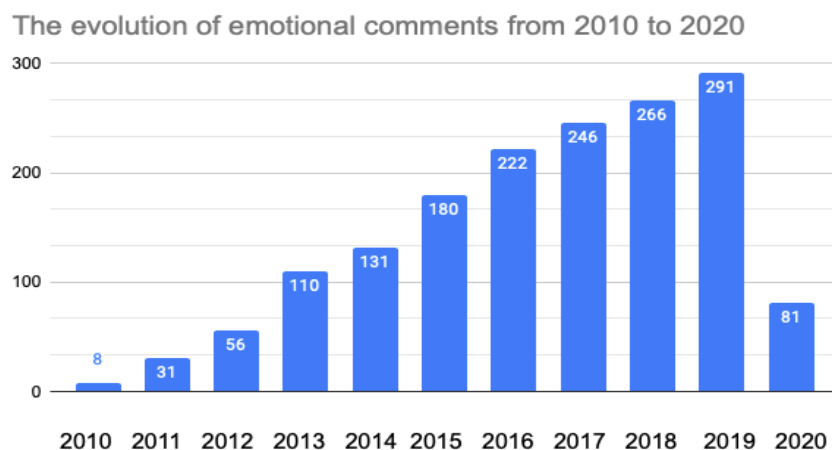


Figure 5. The evolution of emotional comments from 2010 to 2020. Source: Self-elaboration (2020).

Also, it is worth noting that the plunge in the number of relevant reviews in 2020 is due to the closure of hotels and the decrease in guest arrivals, both influenced by the globalization epidemic of Covid-19.

Considering the content analysis of the total number of 5 stars and 5 Grand Luxury hotels in the city of Barcelona, we have selected analyzing 8 hotels as they represent the major variety in relation to their location, size, market segmentation, management model, (including both independent and hotel chains) as part of a national or international organization. Since the luxury hotel industry in the city of Barcelona is composed by a wide variety of establishments of different types.

H1 Hotel – has received a score of 5 out of 5 from TripAdvisor, which can be considered an excellent average rate. There was a total of 341 reviews that meet the required requirements for this study. Of these, 233 reviews mentioned staff, which represents 68,33% of all reviews analyzed. As well 95,71% of the 233 reviews were positive and only 2,58% of reviews were negative. On Ctrip, the H1 Hotel has an average rate of 4.6 out of 5, which is also a good rate. Meanwhile, there were only 13 reviews about the hotel and all of them are invalid, which means that the reviews did not mention the emotional connection with the staff.

| TRIPADVISOR | All-En+ES+Ru | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------------|--------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H1 - | 341 | 5.0 | 233 | 68,33% | 223 | 95,71% | 6 | 2,58% |

Table 10. Results of TripAdvisor-- H1 Hotel Source: Self-elaboration.

| CTRIP | In chinese | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------|------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H1- | 13 | 4.6 | 0 | 0,00% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 11. Results of Ctrip- H1 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration.

H2 Hotel – has an average rate of 4,5 out of 5 on TripAdvisor. A total of 4,735 reviews were written in English/Spanish/Russian, of which 1,175 reviews were about the staff (24,82%), indicating a low level of emotional connection with customers. Of the 1,175 reviews, 1,065 of them were positive (90,64%) and 62 were negative (5,28%). The average rate of the H2 Hotel on Ctrip is 4,6 out of 5. Of the 53 reviews, 7 mentioned employees (13,21%), 3 of them were positive (42,86%) and 4 negatives (57,14%).

| TRIPADVISOR | All-En+ES+Ru | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------------|--------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H2- | 4735 | 4.5 | 1175 | 24,82% | 1065 | 90,64% | 62 | 5,28% |

Table 12. Results of TripAdvisor- H2 Hotel- Source: Self-elaboration.

| CTRIP | In chinese | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------|------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H2- | 53 | 4.6 | 7 | 13,21% | 3 | 42,86% | 4 | 57,14% |

Table 13 Results of Ctripr-H2 Hotel- Source: Self-elaboration.

H3 Hotel –has an average rate of 4,5 on TripAdvisor. There were 1,197 reviews in total, of which 640 reviews mentioned the staff, representing 53,47% of the total number of reviews. Of these reviews, 85% were positive and 4,69% were negative. Regarding the reviews on Ctrip, H3 Hotel has received a good rate of 4,6 out of 5. However, there were only 32 reviews of the hotel on Ctrip, of which only 3 reviews were about the staff with 9,38%, and all three were negative.

| TRIPADVISOR | All-En+ES+Ru | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------------|--------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H3- | 1197 | 4.5 | 640 | 53,47% | 544 | 85,00% | 30 | 4,69% |

Table 14. Results of TripAdvisor-H3 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration

| CTRIP | In chinese | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------|------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H3 | 32 | 4.6 | 3 | 9,38% | 0 | 0,00% | 3 | 100,00% |

Table 15. Results of Ctrip-H3 hotel. Source: Self-elaboration

H4 Hotel – has a rate of 4 out of 5 on TripAdvisor, which is the lowest compared to other hotels. Proceeding from 1,117 valid reviews, 576 reviews were relevant to the staff, which is 51,57% of the total. Of these, 461 reviews were positive (80,03%), and 71 reviews were negative (12,33%). Unfortunately, as of 2020, H4 Hotel does not have any relevant reviews on Ctrip.

| TRIPADVISOR | All-En+ES+Ru | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------------|--------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H4- | 1117 | 4.0 | 576 | 51,57% | 461 | 80,03% | 71 | 12,33% |

Table 16. Results of TripAdvisor--H4 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration.

| CTRIP | In chinese | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage | |
|-------|------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|--|
| H4- | no | | | | | | | | |

Table 17. Results of Ctrip-H4 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration.

H5 Hotel - has an average rate of 4,5 on TripAdvisor. There was a total of 2,479 reviews, of which 1,159 were staff-related, accounting for 46,75% of the total. Of these, there were 1,103 positive reviews with 95,17% and 29 negative reviews with 2,50%. H5 Hotel has a slightly higher rate of 4,7 on Ctrip, but only has 22 reviews,

of which only 4 reviews were related to the staff (18,18%). 3 reviews were positive (75%), and the remaining one was negative (25%).

| TRIPADVISOR | All-En+ES+Ru | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------------|--------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H5- | 2479 | 4,5 | 1159 | 46,75% | 1103 | 95,17% | 29 | 2,50% |

Table 18. Results of TripAdvisor-H5 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration.

| CTRIP | In chinese | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------|------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H5- | 22 | 4.7 | 4 | 18,18% | 3 | 75,00% | 1 | 25,00% |

Table 19. Results of Ctrip-H5 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration.

H6 Hotel - is rated 4,5 on TripAdvisor. It has received a total of 1,496 reviews, of which 778 mentioned the staff, representing 52,01% of the total. Of these, 712 reviews were positive with 91,52%, and 28 reviews were negative with 3,60%. On Ctrip, the hotel has a rate of 4,5 with 2 positive reviews (66,67%) and 1 negative review (33,33%) out of a total of 25 reviews.

| TRIPADVISOR | All-En+ES+Ru | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------------|--------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H6- | 1496 | 4.5 | 778 | 52,01% | 712 | 91,52% | 28 | 3,60% |

Table 20. Results of TripAdvisor-H6 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration.

| CTRIP | In chinese | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------|------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H6- | 25 | 4.5 | 3 | 12,00% | 2 | 66,67% | 1 | 33,33% |

Table 21 Results of Ctripr-H6 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration

H7 Hotel –has an average rate of 4,5 on TripAdvisor and has received 429 reviews. There were 256 reviews talking about staff, which is 59,67% of the total, and out of this 245 were positive reviews, which is 95,7%, and 5 were negative reviews, which is 1,95%. The hotel has a rate of 4,6 on Ctrip and out of a total of 25 reviews, only one was related to the staff (4%) and it was positive.

| TRIPADVISOR | All-En+ES+Ru | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------------|--------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H7- | 429 | 4.5 | 256 | 59,67% | 245 | 95,70% | 5 | 1,95% |

Table 22. Results of TripAdvisor-H7 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration.

| CTRIP | In chinese | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------|------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H7- | 25 | 4.6 | 1 | 4,00% | 1 | 100,00% | 0 | 0,00% |

Table 23. Results of Ctrip-H7Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration.

H8 Hotel –has an average rate of 4,5 and 4,2 on TripAdvisor and Ctrip respectively. The hotel has a total of 5,879 reviews on TripAdvisor and 56 reviews on Ctrip. Interestingly this is the hotel with the most reviews on social media among the eight hotels mentioned above. Nevertheless, most of the hotel's reviews were not related to the staff, with only 1,262 of the 5,879 reviews on TripAdvisor, 21,47% of the total. Of these, there were 1,014 positive reviews (80,35%), as well as 150 negative reviews (11,89%). 56 reviews on Ctrip, only five were about staff, accounting for just 8.93% of the total. Of these, two were positive (40%) and three were negative (60%).

| TRIPADVISOR | All-En+ES+Ru | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------------|--------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H8- | 5879 | 4.5 | 1262 | 21,47% | 1014 | 80,35% | 150 | 11,89% |

Table 24. Results of TripAdvisor-H8 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration

| CTRIP | In chinese | Rate | Staff mentioning comments | Percent from all | Positive | Percentage | Negative | Percentage |
|-------|------------|------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| H8 | 56 | 4.2 | 5 | 8,93% | 2 | 40,00% | 3 | 60,00% |

Table 25. Results of Ctrip-H8 Hotel. Source: Self-elaboration

After analyzing the data from the content analysis, specifically sentiment analysis, our second hypothesis can be corroborated:

H2-Staff related content highlights aspects related to positive experiences during their stays

Tag Cloud

The data input for the tag cloud was collected from 41 luxury five-star hotels in Barcelona in the last ten years from 2010 to 2020 on TripAdvisor and Ctrip, to reveal the keywords that matched the analysis. All keywords have been translated into English for easier categorizing and analysis. All keywords were divided into two sections, "Departmental Keywords" and "Emotional Keywords". Further, the number of repetitions of every keyword under each section was calculated, while

the synonyms of keywords were integrated to avoid duplication of content. The tag cloud visually shows the proportion of each keyword by the number of times they appear in reviews.



Figure 6. Tag Cloud keywords departments.Source: Self elaboration (2021)

In Figure 1, representing the keyword tag cloud involving the words related to hotel departments, departmental keywords were mentioned 1668 times in total. The keywords “Concierge/Concierge desk” shows as the highest result, having been mentioned 450 times with 26,98%. Followed by “Reception” mentioned 413 times with 24,76%, “Front desk”, mentioned 347 times with 20,80%, “Manager” mentioned 160 times with 9,59%, and “Guest Relations” that was mentioned 159 times with 9,53%. In contrast, “Housekeeping” was mentioned the least of these keywords, 139 times, which is 8,33%.

After analyzing the data from the content analysis, specifically sentiment analysis, our third hypothesis can be corroborated:

H3-Those departments in direct contact with guests, those defined as Front of the House departments, are the ones who develop a higher impact on customer emotional connection



Figure 7. Tag Cloud keywords Emotions. Source: Self-elaboration.

In Figure 2, emotional keywords are mentioned 3.347 time in total. The keywords “Welcoming/welcome” shows the highest result, located in the center, being mentioned 493 times with 14,73%. Followed by “Experience”, mentioned 485 times with 14,49%, “Feeling/feel” mentioned 366 times with 10,94%, and “Special” that was mentioned 273 times with 8,16%.

In a combination of both Tag Clouds, for customers who wrote a review on TripAdvisor and Ctrip, the keywords “Concierge/Concierge desk” and “Welcoming/Welcome” were used more frequently than other words, which means that the concierge staff often are in contact with guests prior arrival, helping them to organize their stays and make them feel welcomed, a key factor, that helps customers to create positive emotions and lead to emotional connection.

After analyzing the data from the sentiment analysis, our third hypothesis can be corroborated:

H4-Customers highlight content related with emotions on their online platform reviews.

Semi-structured Interviews

In order to provide a deeper analysis of customer satisfaction, loyalty, and emotional connection, as well as its relationship with the impact of employees on the customer experience, it was decided to develop out semi-structured interviews to frequent customers of luxury hotels in the city of Barcelona.

In relation to the term “emotional connection”, they understand it as the relationship between employees and customers, or in other words, the relationship between organizations and customers. It is all about the affective relationship established between people. That is why for the majority, it is considered as the key to any relationship and can differentiate a company from others. It is the basis of loyalty, not just in the hotel industry. They all agree that emotional connection in luxury hospitality is not different from other sectors and is the key to loyalty programs.

In this sense, the responses from the interviews as well as the sentiment analysis, confirm our first hypothesis:

H1-For luxury hotel customers staff plays an important role when relating to the emotional connection developed during their stays.

Based on the content of the interview related to satisfaction and experience, although I1 believes that the most important factor that affects customer satisfaction besides the hotel location, environment, and facilities is the quality of service provided by the front-line staff, the rest of the interviewed relate it to experience satisfaction.

This would corroborate our third hypothesis:

H3-Those departments in direct contact with guests, those defined as Front of the House departments, are the ones who develop a higher impact on customer emotional connection.

While I1 and I3 both note that service and experience are valued by five-star hotels and have become a key success factor. All participants agree that customer service cannot compensate other basic attributes such as poor sound insulation in rooms, low breakfast variety, and cleanliness conditions, as these are fundamental to luxury establishments. It confirms the study of (Li et al., 2020), where the absence of basic services can decrease satisfaction and is affirmed as an essential attribute of quality.

All interviewees have higher expectations from luxury hotels than other categories in general and would have higher expectations in relation to the service quality provided by employees of luxury hotels. As Vo (2018) explains that luxury customers are more precise in recognizing experience and emotional connection and are more sensitive to receiving unsatisfactory service. What really affects customer expectations are the individuals that work in these hotels. The staff is what attracts the guests and creates expectations.

Loyalty

According to the next part of the interview, related to Loyalty, the customer's perception of loyalty has been found. First, 3 of the 5 interviewers feel that the factor that makes them feel more loyal to a hotel establishment is the human factor. Customers do not want to be treated just as clients, but as human beings who can experience the warmth of social interactions. Therefore, the most important factor for increasing customer loyalty is that the service can exceed expectations, anticipating needs, instead of just fulfilling wishes.

It showed in the interview that employee satisfaction is crucial to customer satisfaction, so it is important to maintain employee engagement and reduce turnover in order to maintain the same level of service excellence. In terms of reviewing the literature, the same idea was expressed that engaged employees with a positive mindset can demonstrate positive experiences and emotions to customers, thus increasing loyalty and engagement with the hotel (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2009; Wang & Wang, 2019; Martinez et al., 2020).

In this sense, the results of the interviewees corroborate our fifth hypothesis:

H5- The most influential factors on Emotional Connection are related to the employee personal attention

Social Media

Finally, in analyzing the questions related to social media, it is important to note that whether to write a review after a stay is a very personal choice, all 5 luxury frequent customers confirm it is more efficient to communicate with employees in person to resolve issues than to leave a review online. Several online review

experiences of the participants, confirm that the reviews were mostly written about the staff's service.

In this sense, as in relation with the interviews results, we cannot confirm our second and fourth hypothesis, H2-Staff related content highlights aspects related to positive experiences during their stays, H4-Customers highlight content related with emotions on their online platform reviews as most of the interviewees does not use to leave comments in social media after their stays. They rather prefer to share their comments directly to the staff or the management during their stays.

However, the element of surprise was highlighted as a reason for leaving a positive review. Checking reviews on social media before traveling was not important to respondents; instead, suggestions from familiar employees were more likely to be accepted.

Based on the importance of hotel managers responding customer reviews, participants noted that they had experience many occasions of not responding to reviews because management wanted to avoid them. Therefore, they believe that social media is a good option for a "leisure guests" to express opinions and personal emotions, but as for "professional guest" it is more effective to communicate directly with staff/managers. This can be partially related to the concept explained by Taheri et al. (2017), where social media is used as one of the possible ways to connect with customers, including a broad area in terms of satisfaction enhancement and better value creation of the experience.

Conclusions

To conclude, it can be stated that regarding customers' satisfaction levels and the impact of staff, that the level of satisfaction of customers of 5* and 5* GL hotels in Barcelona, was found to be high, due to ratings on the online platforms TripAdvisor and Ctrip. It was detected that in social media, staff plays an important role when writing about their experience, and even more important the staff-related reviews were found to be mostly positive. This statement proves that customer satisfaction and further "rating" is highly correlated with employee performance. Moreover, customers' awareness and appreciation of emotional connection and experience have grown over the past 10 years. There is a positive trend when it comes to highlighting situations with higher emotional impact for customers of luxury hotel establishments on social media, thus monitoring and personalized follow up becomes a very successful strategy for maximizing the positive impact on opinion platforms.

In relation to departments fostering satisfaction and emotional connection and based on the tag cloud results of departmental keywords, Concierge and Reception are the most recognized departments in terms of emotional connection with customers. This means the service offered by Concierge and Front Office staff makes clients to have positive emotions such as “feeling welcomed”, which results in them leaving positive reviews on opinion platforms being willing to stay again or develop loyalty to the organization through their employees.

It was also found that concepts such as “feeling”, “welcoming”, “taking care”, “memorable” and “special” had the highest significance in online comments, which can be noted as the most important remarkable emotional aspects for customers leading to their satisfaction that creates a connection with the organization, once again, through their employees. This goes along with the importance of the “Welcoming” moment for engaging both employees and customers. Therefore, it is completely logical to find out that Front of the House departments, as Concierge or Front Office, were the most mentioned by the guests, whereas frontline departments need to have engaged employees, but managers and directors will be the key in transmitting these forms of engagement to their teams.

Based on the content analysis carried out through opinion platforms as Ctrip and TripAdvisor, a clear trend can be observed towards an increase in the use of opinion platforms to communicate and highlight those aspects that have had the most emotional impact on guests; whether they are related to the departments that originated the feeling or emotion (personnel connection) or the emotions developed during the experience (emotional connection).

Although the frequent travelers interviewed are not users of opinion platforms to review comments from previous customers or leave their own comments based on their previous experiences. Due to the type of customer, who above all values protecting their privacy and confidentiality, they rather prefer to share their compliments, comments, suggestions, etc in a more personalized manner always during their stays either to the employee involved, or directly addressed to the General Manager or Division Manager of the hotel.

Moreover, it is clear from the semi-structured interviews that most influential factors of emotional connection are related to the personal attention of employees. Which is considered as the most influential factor for customer satisfaction. In addition, personalized service and experience have become particularly important, as a trend in the development of the hotel industry in recent years. The personal

profile of the staff and the attentive service provided are the key success factors for hotels to foster customer satisfaction and establish an emotional connection.

To conclude, the emotional factor of engagement is also crucial, thus allowing us to define the emotional connection as the satisfaction of the client's expectations (internal and external) and the creation of a will to engage and commit emotionally to the company, that will remain through life even when leaving the hotel, like a memory.

Finally, the emotional connection, as the main concept to study, was defined as one of the most important items for guests in 5* and 5* Grand Luxury hotels. Barcelona's luxury hotel customers equally distinguished these concepts as the most important elements when staying and enjoying memorable experiences.

Chapter 5. Barcelona hotel employees and their conception of fair work. An exploratory study

-This chapter has already been published in Equality, diversity and inclusion: an International Journal.

Crespi-Vallbona, M., Noguer-Juncà, E.; Louzao, N., Corominas, Ll. (2023), “Barcelona hotel employees and their conception of fair work. An exploratory study”, Equality, diversity and inclusion: an internacional Journal. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-08-2022-0232>

- This chapter was also presented at the V Research Seminar Session organized by Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB (28th of November 2023).

Abstract

Purpose

Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8 respectively indicate that decent work and gender equality are challenges that business organizations must face in order to achieve the social wellbeing and sustainable development of communities. Considering those goals, the present article aims to define the concept of fair work and examine the current degree of knowledge among staff in the hotel sector in Barcelona about the indicators of the Fair Labor Responsible Hotels Certification.

Methodology

A mixed methodology is used to analyse the primary data. A survey of 248 employees is complemented by nine semi-structured interviews with experts, general managers and heads of departments of independently owned hotels and national and international chains.

Findings

The results show that this certification is necessary for the economic and social sustainability of the hospitality sector, and to raise awareness that fair work is an urgent need. However, these currently tend to be little more than artificial actions.

Keywords: Fair and decent work, hospitality, human resource management, fair labor responsible hotel certification.

Introduction:

The concept of “decent work” was introduced in 1999 at the 87th Convention of the International Labor Organization (ILO), and considers that jobs must provide monetary and non-monetary remuneration, health and safety, and professional training, among other requirements. Recently, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations (UN) in 2015, and especially Goal 8 “Decent work and economic growth”, which aims to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”, show that slow but continuous progress is being made towards this objective. It is also worth mentioning Goal 5 “Gender equality”, which seeks to end discrimination for gender reasons, an inequality that continues to affect the fundamental rights of women (Noguer-Juncà et al., 2020). Thus, it is clear that organizations must achieve work environments that emphasize equal opportunities, the promotion and training of employees, the reconciliation of professional and personal life and the prevention of occupational risks and hazards, among others (Noguer-Juncà et al., 2020), ensuring fair work for all human capital in organizations. Values shared by employers and their employees shape corporate culture, and have a positive influence on the latter’s satisfaction, engagement and performance (Boria-Reverter et al., 2013). It is a win-win philosophy.

Tourism is an economic and cultural activity that operates in a highly competitive global market. It has a central role as one of the biggest employers, in 2020 representing 6.9% of total employment in the world and 13.5% in Spain (OECD, 2020). Managers of tourism organizations, and especially hotels, seek employees who can perform well while providing a high level of quality of service (Crawford & Hubbard, 2018). A motivated workforce can provide a competitive advantage (Janes & Wisnom, 2011) and is critical to attract and retain talent and keep staff engaged (Reynolds et al., 2021).

Employee engagement was defined as the psychological experiences and conditions that shape the way individuals employ and express themselves physically, emotionally and cognitively during role performance (Kahn, 1990). Meanwhile, tourists are increasingly sensitized and value companies that work in a fair, supportive and sustainable manner (Hernández Flores et al., 2020). Indeed, the employees’ emotional commitment to their organization is a key driver of greater empathy with customers in their daily performance (Louzao & Crespi-Vallbona, 2022).

However, there is still no commonly accepted definition of fair work. This research therefore aims to define the concept and also to analyze the degree of knowledge and perception of the advantages and disadvantages of the implementation of the

certification of Fair Labor Responsible Hotels (HJLR, *Hoteles Justos Laborablemente Responsables*)¹ in the hotel sector in the city of Barcelona. The structure of this paper begins with a review of the state of art related to corporate social responsibility, sustainable business and job insecurity, followed by a general exposition on the quality of work in the hospitality industry.

The empirical analysis then uses primary data collected from an online survey of people who work in the base-level structure of hotel organizations in the city. A semi-structured interview approach was also adopted to explore how these firms conceptualize fair work, and how they are seeking to embed sustainability into the core of their businesses. Finally, the conclusions and managerial implications are presented.

Theory

Corporate social responsibility, sustainable business and job insecurity

Economic sustainability is defined as sustained and inclusive economic growth with employment for all, through the creation of “decent jobs” and equitable access to opportunities, guaranteeing the productivity and competitiveness of organizations. Successful high productivity and high added value companies of the 21st century must lead the way in the creation of quality, decent and productive jobs. In that sense, a sustainable business has been defined as one that creates competitive advantage through superior customer value and contributes to the sustainable development of the company and society (Lüdeke-Freund 2010).

According to De la Cuesta González (2004), management that observes corporate social responsibility (CSR) criteria contributes to the sustainable and balanced development of the planet, by generating wealth without exhausting natural resources and considering future generations. This responsible, ethical, moral and respectful behavior towards society and the environment is a commitment required of current corporations to ensure sustainable development. This involves coherent strategies and actions in different key areas such as quality professional careers, respect and protection of environmental resources and benefits for the community.

In this regard, this research is based on the framework proposed by Zott and Amit (2010), who consider the business model as a network from an activity system perspective, rather than viewing it from a firm-centric one. The value proposition of this network is derived by each stakeholder in the form of the exchange value

¹ Prepared by the UGT and CCOO unions in association with researchers from the Faculty of Tourism at the University of Malaga, but which has yet to be implemented.

involved in creating and delivering a product or service, and offering value in the use of that product or service (Lepak et al. 2007). Suppliers, partners, customers, employees, society, environment, shareholders and investors are all key components of this network-centric perspective; they are all necessary for the sustainable business model (Short et al., 2012).

CSR fundamentally refers to a concept that emerged directly from the shared values of organizations, promoting ethical behavior beyond what are strictly legal requirements, and using this to boost their image and thus reputation (Porter and Kramer, 2002). Socially responsible companies deploy a wide variety of CSR actions in three main areas: social, economic and environmental.

The primary area of the social environment is the workplace, because organizations must consider the well-being and satisfaction of their employees; seeking equal opportunities between women and men; offering flexible labor conditions; positively fostering worker health and safety; promoting training and professional development; providing support programs with benefits and considering consultation processes and the participation of all staff members in the development of the company.

As stated by Werther and Chandler (2011), the incorporation of a holistic CSR perspective supposes that the company manages to achieve the maximum economic performance and social value in the medium and long term. That is, successful business actions are those that are able to link equal opportunities with business and economic performance. Indeed, employees with greater job insecurity are likely to be less emotionally committed to their jobs, which further depletes their mental and physical well-being (Shin et al., 2016; Asfaw and Chang, 2019; Jung et al., 2021).

When companies take CSR seriously, the benefits are huge, as it fosters trust and a sense of belonging among customers (both internal and external). CSR increases the employees' willingness to work, reduces staff turnover and consequently recruitment and socialization costs, and benefits the quality of the product or service and consequently customer satisfaction.

The company's image is generally improved, which helps to gain customer loyalty and access to new markets; and concurrently, the support from the community and local authorities also increases. As stated by Correa (2004), the application of CSR programs boosts financial performance, increases sales, improves the ability to hire and retain the best employees and fosters access to capital, among other benefits.

Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró (2018) relate the concept of job engagement with job satisfaction and status. Job or work satisfaction is claimed to have a positive effect on employees through a set of positive emotions or responses associated with job status that lead people to be more productive and innovative, to perform their jobs well and efficiently, to be more committed and to be more involved in their organization. It should therefore be the main strategic concern of any company, especially those operating in the tourism and hospitality sector, due to the importance of the human factor in its services (Louzao and Crespi-Vallbona, 2022; Kusluvan et al., 2010). Zhao and Ghiselli (2016) identified job characteristics in the hospitality industry (long working hours, irregular schedules and low pay) as the key reasons for job withdrawal behavior among hotel employees.

The concept of hospitality management has been widely analyzed in the academic literature (Cassee, 1983: 14; Hanks, 1989; Kasavana and Brooks, 2009). However, according to Noguer-Juncà and Crespi-Vallbona (2022), direct, face-to-face contact between customers and employees, and also quality of service, are particularly essential values in this sector. Thus, private tourism organizations must evidently create a corporate culture and shared values that generate involvement, efficiency, commitment and satisfaction among employees (Kang et al., 2005). In other words, a business network in which values and strategies are shared and aligned with all participants.

Awareness of work quality

Indicators and social policies with regard to decent work have acquired significant importance in recent years. The standards proposed by the International Labor Organization (ILO) are divided between conventions (which can be binding through ratification by each state member) and recommendations (which cannot be ratified and tend to be technical documents) (Koliev, 2021). In addition, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) promotes the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, where point 2 of article 9 (Rights of the workers and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry) specifically indicates that “Salaried and self-employed workers in the tourism industry and related activities have the right and the duty to acquire appropriate initial and continuous training; they should be given adequate social protection; job insecurity should be limited so far as possible; and a specific status, with particular regard to their social welfare, should be offered to seasonal workers in the sector”(UNWTO, 2001).

Likewise, ISO 26000 on Corporate Social Responsibility mentions that companies must respect human rights by offering certain decent working conditions that favor occupational health and safety and the human and professional development of workers (International Organization Standardization Committee, 2010). The GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) also has its GRI Standards to evaluate the best economic, social and environmental practices of business organizations.

For the moment, the hospitality industry does not have specific GRI standards like those in other sectors linked to the tourism industry, such as restaurants and air transport (GRI, 2021). Furthermore, the Green Papers of the European Commission stress the need to create a European framework to ensure that companies fully assume their social responsibility (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). Other organizations, such as the EBEN European Business Ethics Networks (EBEN, 2021) and Ethisphere (Ethisphere, 2021), also promote ethical business practices at the European level.

At the Spanish level, there is the *Consejo Estatal de Responsabilidad Social de las Empresas* (CERSE), which is the consultant organization of the Ministry of Work and Social Economy for the promotion and implementation of corporate social responsibility policies (García Mestanza et al., 2019). Likewise, Forética, the representative in Spain of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), which currently has more than 200 members, created the System of Ethical and Socially Responsible Management (*Sistema de Gestión Ética y Socialmente Responsable*, SGE, 21), a tool to evaluate the responsible leadership of business organizations (Forética, 2021).

In addition, since 1994 there has been the *Fundación Étnor*, whose objective is to link the business and academic sectors to promote business ethics actions (Fundación Étnor, 2021). Also, *Capitalismo Consciente*, which is part of the global Conscious Capitalism movement, works to promote entrepreneurship and commercial transactions based on humanitarian values and seeking a positive impact among all stakeholders (Conscious Capitalism, 2021). There is also the *Observatorio de la Responsabilidad Social Corporativa*, a non-profit organization founded in 2004 with the purpose of creating a collaborative network between different social entities that work towards the application of good corporate social responsibility practices (*Observatorio de la Responsabilidad Social Corporativa*, 2021). And *FairTur Alianza de Turismo Sostenible*, which was founded in Andalusia in 2015 to promote the participation of different public and private sectors and society, has used the *Fair Tur* label (a certification developed through a system called the *Sistema Integral* (SI) using the standards of the Global Sustainability Standards Board GSSB) to develop a platform called FairTur.com,

a free website where people can book accommodation that respects the SI system (FairTur, 2021).

At the Catalan level, there is also Respon.cat, an organization founded in 2014 that brings together companies that view corporate social responsibility as a strategy to be embraced and which has an ethical code based on the values of responsibility, co-responsibility and trust (Respon, 2021).

Also, the city of Barcelona, in the context of its commitment to tourism sustainability as acquired in 2011 when becoming the first urban destination in the world to obtain the Biosphere certification, has a set of requirements related to labor practices that all tourism companies must fulfill in order to be certified (Biosphere Tourism, 2021).

Meanwhile, in 2016 the *Kellys Association* was created to defend the labor rights of hotel housekeepers (Fernández-Muñoz & Tomé-Caballero, 2020). *Las Kellys Barcelona* plans to create a website for booking hotels that respect the fair work label. It will only include establishments that they feel meet the requirements of not outsourcing or subcontracting essential jobs such as housekeeping, non-wage discrimination based on gender, and compliance with the Collective Wage Agreement and risk prevention laws (Comunicatur, 2021).

There may be different initiatives in place to encourage companies to assume ethical responsibilities with regard to employees and communities, but none of them have legal or supranational value. Hence, the aim of this study is to analyze the degree of knowledge and perception of the advantages and disadvantages of implementing the certification of fair labor responsible hotels (*Hoteles Justos Laboralmente Responsables*, HJLR) in the hospitality industry of the city of Barcelona. The ultimate aim is to produce a definition of the concept of fair work.

Materials and Methods

The tourism labor market

In 2018, one in ten organizations in the non-financial business economy of the European Union (EU) belonged to the tourism industry and employed 12.3 million people (Eurostat, 2021). In the same year, more than three out of four companies in the EU tourism sector were operating in hospitality (14%) or food and beverage services (61%) (Eurostat, 2021).

In 2019 in Spain, tourism-related businesses generated 2.72 million jobs, 12.9% of total employment. Hospitality occupancy increased by 1.5% in that year (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE, 2021). In 2020, as a consequence of the travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 308,000 jobs were lost in Spain. On

31 June 2021, the hospitality services had 90,689 employees on the Spanish furlough scheme (ERTE) (INE, 2021). The tourism sector is evidently important to the world economy, and therefore the Spanish economy too. However, work in the sector has been classified as a low-quality occupation (ILO, 2017) and Spain is no exception.

Fair Labor Responsible Hotel certification

In 2019 and with the aim of achieving fair labor responsible hotels, the Spanish trade unions (Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT)) together with researchers from the Tourism Faculty at the University of Malaga, created a system of indicators on which to base the subsequent design of the HJLR certification.

This proposal is included in the international *Fair Hotels* project that includes eight countries: Canada, USA, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Croatia, and Slovenia. The objective is to offer a tool for hotel organizations to measure their policies and demonstrate that they are socially responsible (García Mestanza et al., 2019) and based on sustainable business models. This indicator system focuses on six dimensions: relationship between organization/employees; work; health and safety at work; training and professional development; diversity and equality of opportunities; and equal retribution.

The first indicator ("Relationship between Organization/Employees") focuses on how organizations consult their employees and their representatives, and how they communicate significant changes at the operational level. The first of its four subsections on the "application of sectorial agreements or similar company agreements" establishes that all hotel establishments must apply the referenced sectorial agreements. In the event that company agreements apply, they must at least satisfy the requirements of the sectorial agreements in their entirety, both socially and economically. In the case of subcontracting-outsourcing, the conditions of the sectorial agreement will apply.

The following subsection refers to "freedom of association", which validates the absence of final resolutions or sentences on violations of freedom of association in the last three years. The third subsection ensures free exercise of the functions of "union representation". And the final subsection deals with "information and consultation with the Legal Representation of Workers."

The second indicator, "Work", considers the organization's approach to hiring, recruiting, and retention of workers and working conditions. It evaluates "permanent and temporary personnel", i.e. the proportion of fixed and discontinuous fixed contracts out of the total number of workers contracted by the

establishment, as well as “full-time and part-time staff”, i.e. the proportion of full-time contracts out of the total number of contracts.

The third indicator, "Health and Safety at Work", measures analysis and control of health and safety risks, training programs, the registration and investigation of health and safety incidents in the workplace, and strict standards to achieve a safe, healthy work environment. There are four units of measurement.

The first is "the prevention manager", i.e. verifying the existence of prevention delegates and/or management-employee committees that help monitor and advise on occupational health and safety programs.

The second refers to "preventive health and safety plans and measures" that must guarantee the prevention of occupational risks, evaluate specific psychosocial risks, and plan health surveillance.

The third unit is “temporary disability due to common contingency”, i.e. the percentage of temporary disability caused by common and occupational diseases in the last three years.

And finally, the fourth is the "occupational accident rate", i.e. the percentage of accidents at work and professional illnesses in the last three years. The fourth indicator, "Training and Professional Development", considers aspects regarding employee training and skills improvement, as well as evaluations of performance and the professional development of the workforce. It also includes the provision of continuous training, continued employability and support following retirement or dismissal. The first measurement value is the existence of a "training and professional development plan" that includes a study of training needs and an evaluation of the training received by the staff. The second is the "average training rate" or percentage of the workforce that has received training.

The fifth indicator measures “Diversity and Equality of Opportunities” and is limited to equal treatment and opportunities between men and women at work. It has three subscripts. The first is "measures to reconcile family and work life or existence of an equality plan" and the second, the "gender pay gap", assesses the ratio of total payroll between women and men. And finally, the “composition of the workforce by gender” breaks down the number of male and female workers in each of the three professional categories included in the State Labor Agreement for the Hospitality Sector (*Acuerdo Laboral de ámbito Estatal para el sector de Hostelería -ALEH-*).

Finally, the sixth indicator refers to "Equal Retribution" and assesses whether workers' payments are distributed equitably in a given period of time and in accordance with merit. The first unit of measurement is the “maximum

remuneration over average” or ratio of the highest salary with respect to the average salary of the workforce. And the second is the "maximum over minimum remuneration" or ratio of the highest salary with respect to the minimum salary of the workforce.

Methodology

The objective of this research is to analyze the concept of fair work as well as the degree of knowledge of the HJLR certification and its advantages and disadvantages among the hotel sector in the city of Barcelona. To do so, a qualitative analysis of collected primary data was carried out. This involved both a survey of employees in the base-level structure of the hotel sector, and in-depth interviews with experts and heads of different departments in the hospitality industry.

The survey was conducted using a Google Form. Data was collected in October, November and December 2021 and was supervised by the authors. 248 correct answers were obtained by simple random sampling. The composition of the respondents was as follows: 63.2% were women and 36.8% were men; 47% had taken a Master’s; 42.6% had a degree and the remainder had VET training. The ages were 18-30 (35.1%), 31-40 (19.9%), 41-50 (26.3%), and over 50 (19.6%).

The questionnaire (Table 25) includes eight questions: an initial one asking the subjects how they would define fair work, three about the HJLR certification and its indicators (knowledge of the certification, rating of the indicators from 1 to 7, lack of indicators) and three on the effects on the business organization of the implementation of this certification (internal organization, repercussions among internal and external clients and communication channels).

Table 10: Questionnaire

| Variable | Category |
|---------------------|--|
| Academic background | Vocational training University degrees Masters |
| Age | 18-30 31-40 |

| | |
|---|--|
| | 41-50 +50 |
| Gender | Male Female No binary |
| How would you define a fair hotel? | |
| Do you know about the indicator system of fair hotels that are responsible for their employees? | Yes No |
| Do you consider these indicators appropriate? Rate their appropriateness as fair hotel indicators from 1 to 7: Organization/Employees Relationship Work Health and Safety at Work Training and Professional Development Diversity and Equality of Opportunities Equal Retribution | 1-7 1-7 1-7 1-7 1-7 1-7 |
| Do you think any indicators are missing? | Yes No |
| If so, what is missing? (if not, do not answer) | |
| Do you think that the implementation of the "Fair Hotel Certification" would involve changes and/or costs to the business organization? | |
| Do you think that the "Fair Hotel Certification" would affect the organizations' clients (internal and external)? | |
| How would you report that your organization offers fair positions? | |

Source: The authors

Judgmental sampling involves active selection of the most productive sample to garner appropriate responses, and is advantageous in conditions when special expertise or key informants are needed (Marshall, 1996). Using this sampling technique, invitations to participate in in-depth interviews were emailed to 26

individuals holding key positions in human resources departments. After follow-ups, a total of 9 interview acceptances were received (36.9% response rate) between October-December 2021. It is a common notion that hierarchical superiority raises levels of responsibility and answerability. Thus, individuals in key human resource management positions (e.g. Managers, Directors and Executives) were deemed relevant for the study. Further details of the participants are shown in Table 2. It may also be observed that most of the participants had a considerable amount of experience both in their current organizations and in general.

The interviews consisted of open questions arising from the literature on the economic sustainability of the hotel sector, human resource business policies and the HJLR certification. Specifically, the interviews are structured into 5 blocks of questions: (a) concept of fair work; (b) assessment of the system of indicators of the certification HJLR; (c) implementation of the certification and changes in the business organization; (d) impact of the certification on internal and external clients; and (e) marketing and promotion of the certification.

Table 11: Interviewee profiles

| Interviewee | Professional area | Gender |
|-------------|--|--------|
| I1 | CEO in a consultancy specialized in the hospitality industry | Female |
| I2 | Hotel deputy director | Female |
| I3 | Corporate Social Responsibility Specialist | Female |
| I4 | Researcher of responsible tourism | Male |
| I5 | Human Resources Director 4* national hotel chain | Male |
| I6 | Founder of Las Kellys housekeeper movement | Female |

| | | |
|----|--|--------|
| I7 | Housekeeper. 5* National hotel chain. | Female |
| I8 | Sub Housekeeper. 4* national hotel chain | Female |
| I9 | Floor supervisor. 4* sup. national hotel chain | Female |

When the participants agreed to collaborate, semi-structured interviews were scheduled. Of the total number of interviews, 6 were virtual and recorded, with the prior consent of the participants and 3 were held in person. The interviews were conducted by the authors themselves and lasted between thirty and fifty minutes. Data analysis was carried out in Catalan, and the quotations presented in this paper have been translated from the original language into English.

The data was coded separately by the two authors and the content was also individually examined. The responses were also cross-examined by co-authors to reduce personal reflections and settle on mutually agreed topics. According to Marks and Yardley (2004), through the use of thematic analysis, the researchers can fully understand the analyzed topic.

Results and discussion

This research is based on a mixed methodology with primary data obtained from a survey and in-depth interviews. The results are therefore structured between the results of the surveys and of the interviews. Both results indicate that the degree of knowledge in the hotel sector of the HJLR certification is mostly low.

Survey results

The respondents consider fair work to be diverse and inclusive, and to guarantee equal opportunities, dignified salaries, flexible timetables, etc. This is evidenced by different answers, such as: “a hotel where clients and workers are respected and have their rights”; “a hotel where all departments are important”; “a business that is based on diversity and respects gender, sexual orientation, ethnic characteristics”, and “a hotel that unites workers and clients and contributes to and cares about society.” In other words, a hotel that ensures its employees’ professional and emotional satisfaction (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró,

2018; Louzao & Crespi-Vallbona, 2022), promotes legal and social justice, and has shared values and ethical capital (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2001; Boria et al., 2013).

The surveys also reveal that the HJLR certification is barely known among people who work in the hotel sector in Barcelona. Only 18.95% of employees working in reception, guest relations, revenue management, human resources, food and beverage department, etc. know about the project. Nevertheless, 64.92% of the respondents attribute the full score of 7 (on a Likert Scale 1-7) to the parameters of health and safety at work and diversity and equality of opportunities, and 64.90% do so for equal retribution. In contrast, employment is the indicator that gets the fewest top scores (39.92%), followed by training and professional development (53.23%) (see Table 3).

Table 12: Adequacy as an indicator of fair work

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Organization/Employees Relationship | 2.82% | 3.23% | 8.47% | 4.44% | 8.87% | 17.34% | 54.84% |
| Work | 2.82% | 3.63% | 8.47% | 6.85% | 11.69% | 27.02% | 39.11% |
| Health and Safety at Work | 1.61% | 2.42% | 5.65% | 5.65% | 5.24% | 14.52% | 64.92% |
| Training and Development | 2.82% | 2.82% | 5.65% | 6.45% | 9.68% | 18.95% | 53.23% |
| Diversity and Equality of Opportunities | 0% | 1.61% | 8.06% | 2.82% | 6.45% | 14.11% | 64.92% |
| Equal Retribution | 2.02% | 3.63% | 6.85% | 4.03% | 8.06% | 12.50% | 62.90% |

Source: the authors

Despite the scarce knowledge of the HJLR certification, the results also illustrate that 35.89% of respondents consider a certain indicator to be missing from its proposal. The lack of requirements related to other stakeholders, such as external customers, suppliers and the third sector, is mentioned in such answers as "not only with the employee but also towards the environment", "everything related to customers and suppliers" and "something about the social benefits for the environment", among others. Hence, it is clear that employees in the hotel industry feel that sustainable business models need to involve all stakeholders, as Short et al. (2012) note. In addition, the lack of indicators related to the employability of disabled people is also mentioned, such as "disability should be considered", and

the emotional benefits of the job, such as “the added value that the employee experience could bring to the company” or “intangible benefits.”

Likewise, more than 90% of the respondents believe that the implementation of the HJLR certification would suppose temporary and economic costs for the organization, mainly during the certifying process, but in the long term it would offer a competitive advantage since the workforce would be more motivated, and consequently, more efficient. This idea is confirmed with answers such as “perhaps it will be the cost of time linked to the verification and confirmation of the indicators... However, although there are economic costs, in the medium/long term they will be a benefit” and “yes, but the company must view the cost as a long-term benefit.” In short, these costs would be quickly amortized.

In addition, most respondents agree that although the implementation of the HJLR would mainly benefit the internal customer, external ones would benefit too. It is evident that if employees are motivated, they provide a better service and are more empathetic, which generates high satisfaction among external customers, as highlighted by the answer: “Very positively. As a guest, to see that the employees are valued and well-considered... It is everything one could wish for, to stay in a hotel where there are values.”

Human capital should be viewed as a strategic concern of hotel organizations since they offer a service given by and for people (Louzao & Crespi-Vallbona, 2022) and the role of its employees is important for a company’s competitiveness (Kusluvan et al., 2010). The respondents also indicate that the certification would represent benefits for corporate image and business reputation, as reflected by the answer “improvement of the brand/company’s reputation.” Hence, these companies should perform as a network (Zott and Amit, 2010) in their quest for a sustainable business model (Lüdeke-Freund 2010; Short et al., 2012).

Also, regarding the instruments to communicate and promote the certification, the respondents believe that use should be made of digital platforms, such as hotel websites and social networks, placing QRs in different places at the hotel, for instance the lobby and the bar; and also through networking, such as meetings between business partners. These proposals appear in responses like: "It could be promoted on social networks (website, Instagram, Facebook ...), as well as at strategic points in the building (such as the reception or restaurant)" and "corporate magazine" and “in the channels to attract and retain talent.”

Interview results

Regarding the first objective, only two out of nine interviewees know about the HJLR certification. This is because it is still a proposal from the unions that is being supported and analyzed by academia, but that has not yet been endorsed by the public institutions. So, there is a long process to go through before this certification will be widely promoted among both employers and employees from the sector, and it will be even longer before it reaches customers, suppliers and society, i.e. where CSR plays a definitive role in terms of a sustainable business. In any case, when the interviewees are presented with the indicators, they are unable to suggest any other items that could define and evaluate the concept of fair work, as explained by I5 when saying “[the HJLR system] addresses all issues.”

Despite their ignorance of the HJLR certification, the interviewees have a clear idea of the concept of fair work. A hotel that offers fair work is one in which all employees have the same job opportunities regardless of their gender, educational level or social status, where they have working conditions that allow them to balance their personal and professional lives, and that offers a decent salary that makes them feel that they are important for the organization. That is, the organization ensures the well-being of the workforce (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró, 2018). For example, I7 says that “a fair hotel is one in which all of its workers are hotel employees. This is basic. The hotel does not outsource employees, neither for cleaning, maintenance, nor food and beverage. Nothing outsourced.” For I1, “a company offers fair jobs when performance is evaluated objectively, using standards and procedures that are written and known by the employees. In addition, the employee and the company must accept and sign certain agreements and codes of ethics and work behavior.” Or as I2 points out, “a fair job is one that allows you to live without renouncing your professional career.”

Likewise, for I6, an organization that offers fair work is one that has “employees in decent working conditions (no work overload, a professional and vocational workforce...). The agreement notes many topics, but they do not close the doors to professional exploitation. Application of the agreement does not mean that the workers won’t be exploited. You must pay enough for people to live. It is wrong for someone like me to earn 1,095.00 euros for half a year and to be on unemployment benefit for the other half of the year. The hotel has a quality certification, quality of what? It is pure marketing, but the reality is different.” In this regard, the respondents demand comparable salaries to all other staff in similar positions or job categories (internal equity), and that are also competitive and attractive in comparison to those paid by other organizations (external competitiveness).

Getting organizations to offer fair jobs means ensuring that they scrupulously comply with the legislation, and at the same time the regulatory framework has to improve working conditions, recruitment, labor relations, gender equality and the inclusion of people with disabilities. However, as I3 points out, “the word ‘fair’ is very dangerous and manipulative. It is not a pleasant word and it will never be fair to everyone either.” I5 adds that “[fair work] is utopic because hotels are very complex structures. We are still in a very precarious sector. The salaries for the basic positions (reception, housekeeping, etc.) are not enough to cover essential needs... And there are still many feminized and masculinized job positions. In our hotel, we are trying to change that by combining the two genders, and the results are excellent because the work is more efficient, especially in the housekeeping and reception departments. We also want to implement this in the human resources and marketing departments.”

There is clearly a desire to work in sustainable companies that offer fair, responsible jobs. And, at the same time, there is concern about the difficulty to achieve this due to organizational changes and costs, because hotel chains, both national and international, already have their standards. As I5 says, “we still haven’t implemented the Equality Plan, although fortunately we do not have large salary differences. But the main positions are held by men. The only woman is the chief financial officer.” I1 is also very clear about “the need for a lot of changes. Big hotels and international companies already have their standards. Small hotels should invest time, and perhaps hire or outsource. It takes time to make sure that the hotel can meet the criteria.”

However, there is agreement that a certification for fair jobs would have a very positive impact not only on internal customers, but also on the organization’s external customers. It would mean a better work environment, a more motivated workforce, and consequently the provision of an excellent service to the external client. The emotional engagement described by Louzao & Crespi-Vallbona (2022) would be reinforced. This is what I1 affirms when commenting that “the worker will be happier and more motivated ... and if the company invests time in the employee, it will be more positive for the client. And the client will receive that positive experience... If you want to create customer experiences, you must first create experiences for the employees. And so the staff turnover could be reduced because it is also a cost in terms of time and resources.” I9 also notes that “the staff would be happier, more dedicated, more willing... now they feel unconnected to the interests of the hotel... like second-class employees.” In short, fair work, as well as the implementation of a system of measures to evaluate its levels in an organization, boosts the accommodation industry through the creation of sustainable business models (Lüdeke-Freund 2010; Short et al., 2012).

It is important for a fair work certification to take into account all employees, both those who are part of the structure itself and external ones. As I2 says, “for sure the client would perceive this positively, but only as long as the organization is forced to implement the certification for the employees of the house and outsourced staff too.” I8 adds: “Yes, a lot of changes. In our housekeeping department, the staff are outsourced. Perhaps this should change ... Nobody can hold this job for a long time.”

Concerning external clients, an interesting issue to evaluate is the communication and promotion strategies to show that the hotel offers fair jobs. I1 proposes that “you could use the employees as testimonies... and use a QR so people can listen to and watch these testimonies... or have a meeting directly with them [with the employees].” I2 also mentions that “this has to be explained very well on the website... giving real data and real testimonies.” I9 shares this opinion when pointing out that “the quality certification should be visible on the hotel's website and in the establishment.” Furthermore, I4 refers to the active attitude of the external client when it comes to the good and bad practices of hotels, stating that “quality certifications are based on the clients making a transfer of trust. The client must leave comments, use the complaint forms...”

Hence, the results confirm that the certification would be well accepted by the hotel sector in the city of Barcelona as a means to end the job insecurity that characterizes the current hospitality industry, despite the potential costs. However, there is some skepticism about the real implementation of the certification, the general consensus being that such indicators are a utopia and will not actually be applied and will end up being no more than a greenwashing or social washing strategy.

Conclusions:

The objective of this research is to propose a definition of the concept of fair work and to analyze the degree of knowledge of the HJLR certification and the perception of the advantages and disadvantages of its application among the hotel sector in the city of Barcelona.

Related to the theoretical contribution, this paper proposes a definition of fair work as that which fosters the personal and professional well-being of the employee. Four dimensions contribute to this: a) fair remuneration (internal equity and external competitiveness); b) provision of a professional career (training and development; equal opportunities); c) decent labor conditions (no work overload; flexible hours; healthy and safe positions); and d) conciliation of professional and private life. As is constantly stated, the offer of fair jobs is synonymous with having

more motivated, efficient employees that are committed to the organization (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró, 2018) and consequently, reducing staff turnover. Employee commitment is especially relevant in the hospitality industry as it is a service given by and for the people. In short, the satisfaction of a hotel's internal customers has positive effects on the satisfaction of its external customers (Louzao & Crespi-Vallbona, 2022). Hence, there is an imperative need to define fair positions that can reduce the job insecurity that characterizes the hotel sector (Zhao and Ghiselli, 2016) and increase the emotional and physical well-being of employees, which will positively affect their involvement within the company (Shin et al., 2016; Asfaw & Chang, 2019; Jung et al., 2021).

With regards to the managerial implications, it has been demonstrated that the HJLR certification is not well known in the sector. Such certifications are also viewed as business strategies used to boost reputation and corporate image, being utopian than a reality. Nevertheless, these indicators are necessary to provide wellbeing to the human capital of an organization, so HR managers should strategically insist on the implementation of such measures to achieve fair jobs in their organizations.

The results also indicate that certifications such as HJLR mean changes in the organization, both in terms of the restructuration of processes and the implementation costs, such as auditing fees, and the temporary costs of employees who are in charge of development or reorganization. However, these costs are usually quickly amortized because the company will operate more efficiently. In other words, it should not be seen as a cost but as an investment since employees play an essential role in a company's success (Kusluvan et al., 2010). Although the advantages of offering fair jobs have been verified, the difficulties and reluctance to implement them are also confirmed. It is nothing new for changes to organizations to be slow and regarded as fearsome.

Fair jobs benefit employees and employers. So, Human Resources managers should focus on fostering shared values between the organization and its employees, showcasing the importance of CSR (Boria et al, 2012). Indeed, the best strategy is to develop networks between employers, employees and customers (Zott and Amit, 2010) to achieve sustainable business models ((Lüdeke-Freund 2010; Short et al., 2012).

There have evidently been numerous initiatives to define and establish processes that guarantee fair jobs, but each proposal is developed independently and they tend to end up being no more than cosmetic, greenwashing operations, making it difficult for them to be actually implemented. It is therefore necessary to unify criteria at the international level, which might be a job for the ILO, but each

government will need to ratify them and be committed to ensuring that fair jobs are really achieved. However, job fairness also depends on the culture, law and labor conditions of each country.

Limitations and future research

This research entails several limitations that need to be addressed by future scholars. First, it focuses on the views of the hospitality industry in the city of Barcelona. Future scholars could broaden the proposed conceptual design by investigating the perception of the hotel sector in other Spanish tourist destinations. Second, this research is focused on the HJLR certification, but there is a wide range of other initiatives that are seeking to develop systems to achieve and verify fair work in the hospitality industry. Thus, future studies will need to link all these initiatives and organize a holistic system that could be applied internationally. Third, the current study analyzes the opinions as a single unit of analysis. Future investigations could examine views by departments and also by hotel category. Fourth, this research examined traditional hotels, but future studies could be addressed at hotels that promote sustainable development, use eco-friendly energy and food, etc.

Chapter 6. Conclusions

General Conclusions

As previously mentioned, the aim of this research is to analyze the relation between employee engagement and customer satisfaction in luxury hotels of Barcelona. The proposal is therefore to analyze if a relationship exists between engagement of external clients (customers of 5* and 5*GL hotels of Barcelona) and internal clients (employees) and be able to establish whether high levels of employee engagement can translate into high levels of customer engagement, understood as customer satisfaction.

Through four chapters, this study assesses different general and specific objectives that seek to help in a better understanding of how organizations can enhance employee engagement in order to achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction.

Table 28 offers a synthesis and comparison between the different proposed specific objectives of this thesis and their corresponding findings.

Table 13. Specific objectives and findings of the thesis

| Specific Objectives | Findings |
|---|--|
| <p>Chapter 2: Literature Review on Emotional Connection in Luxury Hospitality (2010-2020)</p> | |
| <p>1- To analyze the development of Employee Engagement and Customer Emotional Connection research in Hospitality from 2010 to 2020.</p> | <p>Chapter 2 analyzes the development of Employee Engagement and Emotional Connection research in Hospitality from 2010 to 2020. Here are the key findings:</p> |
| <p>2- To provide a clear image of the relationship between the topics on the different articles used for the literature review.</p> | <p>The importance of Employee Engagement for Customer Satisfaction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strong connection exists: Studies show a clear link between employee engagement and customer satisfaction. -Employee satisfaction matters: When employees feel supported and have a positive work environment, they're more engaged and provide better service. -Emotional connection is key: Both employee and customer engagement involve emotional factors. -Company culture drives performance: A strong company culture with clear guidelines fosters employee performance, customer service, and customer engagement. |
| <p>3- To understand the level of awareness and implementation of organizational support and culture to foster engagement in luxury hospitality organizations.</p> | <p>Strategies for Building Employee Engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Adapting to changing needs: Develop strategies that adapt to meet the evolving needs of both employees and customers. -Importance of onboarding: The "welcome moment" is crucial for fostering employee engagement and requires consistent effort to maintain high levels. -Selection for engagement: Hiring practices should focus on personal talents and alignment with company values to build an engaged workforce. <p>Enhancing Customer Satisfaction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Personalized service matters: Employees' personal attention and ability to provide a personalized experience are key factors in customer satisfaction and loyalty. <p>Research Gaps and Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Need for measurement tools: The study highlights the lack of a standardized tool to specifically measure the relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction. |

Specific Objectives

Findings

Chapter 3: Employee Engagement in Luxury Hospitality. Barcelona Case Study

- 4- To measure the levels of employee engagement and employee motivation in 5* and 5*GL hotels of Barcelona.
- 5- To identify those established relationships between results from question: content analysis on employee opinion platforms
- 6- To identify the most important strategies and practices to implement in an or in order to foster employee and customer engagement.
- 7- To understand the level of implementation of organizational support and culture to promote engagement in hospitality companies.

Chapter 3 identifies the levels of Employee Engagement and Motivation in Luxury Hospitality. Here are the main findings:

Employee Engagement & Motivation:

- Employees in Barcelona's luxury hotels reported high levels of engagement and medium-high levels of motivation.
- Absorption in the job was slightly lower than dedication and vigor. This might be due to temporary employment situations or the global situation (e.g., Covid-19).

Employee Perceptions (Indeed & Glassdoor):

- Importance of the human factor: Positive and negative reviews highlighted the importance of organizational support, intrinsic motivations (training, feedback, recognition), and fulfilling basic needs (salary, working hours).
- Alignment with theory: Supporting employees, fulfilling needs, and providing a good work environment reinforces engagement and motivation. Conversely, a lack of these factors leads to dissatisfaction and disengagement.

Customer Satisfaction:

- Personalized attention from staff is the most significant factor influencing guest satisfaction.
 - Personalized service and experiences are crucial for success and a growing trend in the hotel industry.
 - Staff personal profiles and attentive service are key to fostering customer satisfaction and building loyalty through emotional connection.
-

Specific Objectives

Chapter 4: Customer Satisfaction in Luxury Hospitality. Barcelona Case Study

8- To analyze the impact of hotel staff on customer satisfaction.

9- To identify which departments are the most subject to foster customer emotional connection through their satisfaction.

10- To identify the most important factors influencing customer satisfaction.

Findings

Chapter 4 analyzes the impact of employees on Customer Satisfaction in Luxury Hospitality. Here are the main findings:

High Customer Satisfaction: Reviews on TripAdvisor and Ctrip indicate high guest satisfaction in Barcelona's luxury hotels.

Staff Performance Matters: Positive staff-related reviews on social media highlight the crucial role of employees in achieving customer satisfaction.

Emotional Connection is Key:

- Customers increasingly value emotional connection and personalized experiences.
- Words like "feeling welcomed," "taking care," and "memorable" frequently appear in positive reviews, indicating the importance of emotional connection in driving satisfaction.
- Emotional connection is defined as exceeding customer expectations (internal and external) and creating a lasting emotional bond with the hotel.
- Emotional connection is considered the most important factor for guests in Barcelona's luxury hotels.

The Role of Frontline Staff:

- Concierge and Reception staff are most recognized for creating emotional connections with guests.
- Engaged frontline staff (Concierge and Front Office) are key to fostering these connections.

Personalized Service Matters:

- Personalized attention and experiences are the most influential factors for customer satisfaction.
- Luxury travelers prefer to share feedback directly with the hotel rather than using online platforms, suggesting a desire for more personalized communication.

Onboarding and Training: The "welcoming moment" is crucial for both employee and customer engagement, highlighting the importance of proper onboarding and training for staff.

Future Research: This study encourages further research on how to effectively create emotional connections with guests, particularly for luxury travelers.

Chapter 5: Barcelona Hotel Employees and Their Conception of Fair Work. An Exploratory Study

- 11- To define the concept of fair work
- 12- To examine the current degree of knowledge among staff in the hotel sector about the indicators of the Fair Labor Responsible Hotels Certification

Chapter 5 provides a proper definition of “Fair Work” and to identifies the degree of knowledge among hotel employees about the indicators of Fair Labor Responsible Hotels Certifications. Here are the main findings:

Fair Work Definition: The study proposes a definition of fair work centered on employee well-being with four key dimensions:
 -Fair pay (competitive and equitable). Career development opportunities. Decent working conditions (no overload, flexible hours, safety). Work-life balance.

Benefits of Fair Work:
 -Fair work practices are linked to increased employee motivation, commitment, and reduced turnover, ultimately leading to better customer service.

Challenges of Implementing Fair Work:
 -Lack of Awareness: The study finds that the HJLR certification for fair work is not well-known within the hospitality sector.

-Skepticism of Certifications: Some view fair work certifications as marketing tools rather than practical approaches.

-Investment vs. Cost: Implementing fair work practices may involve initial costs (auditing, training) but are seen as investments with long-term benefits (increased efficiency).

-Resistance to Change: The study acknowledges the challenges of implementing change within organizations.

Strategies for Successful Implementation:

-Shared Values: HR managers should focus on building shared values between the organization and employees, emphasizing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

-Collaboration for Sustainability: Sustainable business models require collaboration between employers, employees, and customers.

Standardization and Regulation:

-Need for Unified Standards: The study highlights the need for internationally unified criteria for fair work practices, acknowledging the role of the ILO (International Labor Organization) and national governments.

-Cultural Considerations: Fair work practices also need to consider the specific culture, laws, and labor conditions of each country.

Chapter 2. Summary and conclusions

Chapter 2 explored the well-established connection between employee engagement and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Through a systematized literature review, the research highlighted the critical role employee well-being plays in fostering engagement and motivation. Conversely, dissatisfied employees lead to lower engagement and ultimately, diminished customer satisfaction.

The findings emphasize the importance of a positive company culture. By defining clear guidelines and fostering alignment with the organization's philosophy, employee performance, customer service, and ultimately, customer engagement are all significantly enhanced. Notably, the "welcome moment" or "arrival process" is identified as a key factor in creating employee engagement, as it sets the initial tone for their experience. However, maintaining consistent efforts is crucial to sustain high levels of commitment.

Furthermore, the focus group discussions with luxury hospitality industry experts revealed the importance of personalized service and attention to detail as key drivers of customer satisfaction. Recruiting staff who embody the company's values and providing opportunities for them to showcase their individual talents allows for the creation of personalized experiences that foster emotional connection and loyalty among guests.

While the study confirms the existence of a strong connection between employee engagement and customer satisfaction in luxury hotels, a critical gap remains. No current tool can scientifically measure the specific and quantifiable relationship between these two variables. This lack presents a significant opportunity for future research. Defining metrics that analyze both factors on the same scale would be invaluable in establishing the precise characteristics of this crucial relationship.

Building upon these findings, future investigations could benefit from analyzing the phenomenon from both the employee and customer perspectives. Surveying both industry experts and guests of luxury establishments would offer valuable data on employee engagement levels alongside customer satisfaction metrics. This data-driven approach could finally establish and quantify the precise correlation between employee engagement and customer satisfaction in the luxury hospitality sector.

Chapter 3. Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 3 investigated employee engagement and emotional connection with their organizations in Barcelona's 5-star and 5-star GL luxury hotels from an employee's perspective. The research found high employee engagement and medium-high motivation levels on average. Notably, absorption in the job, which reflects complete focus and immersion, was slightly lower than dedication and vigor. This could be due to the temporary employment situation caused by the pandemic, as it might be challenging to feel fully absorbed under such circumstances.

The study further highlights the crucial role of human factors in employee engagement and motivation. Analyzed reviews on Indeed and Glassdoor emphasized the importance of organizational support, a positive work environment, and fulfillment of basic needs (like salary) for employee satisfaction and dedication. Conversely, a lack of these aspects led to employee dissatisfaction and disengagement. The study concludes that personalized attention to employees is crucial for customer satisfaction. Personalized service and emotional connection with guests are key trends in the hospitality industry, and fostering these qualities translates well to both customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The research emphasizes the importance of personalized attention towards employees for fostering customer satisfaction. Personalized service and emotional connection with guests are identified as key trends in the evolving hospitality industry. By fostering these qualities, hotels can achieve both increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Chapter 4. Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 4 investigated customer satisfaction and emotional connection in Barcelona's 5-star and 5-star GL luxury hotels from a customer's perspective. It revealed high customer satisfaction through online platforms and a strong link between positive staff-related reviews and overall satisfaction, highlighting the importance of employee performance. Customers increasingly value emotional connection during their stay, evident in social media trends, and hotels can leverage personalized follow-up based on online feedback to maximize positive reviews.

The research also identified Concierge and Reception as the departments most recognized for fostering emotional connection. Their services create positive emotions like feeling welcomed, leading to customer loyalty and positive online feedback. Concepts like "feeling," "welcoming," and "memorable" emerged as significant aspects in guest comments, emphasizing the importance of emotional connection through staff interaction.

Furthermore, the study found that frontline departments require highly engaged employees, and managers play a key role in fostering this engagement.

Interestingly, while online platforms like TripAdvisor and Ctrip are gaining popularity for sharing positive experiences, frequent travelers prefer more personalized communication channels.

Personalized attention from employees remains the most influential factor in customer satisfaction, aligning with the growing trend of personalized service and guest experiences in the luxury hotel industry. Staff's personal profiles and attentive service are key to fostering both satisfaction and emotional connection.

Finally, the paper defines emotional connection as exceeding customer expectations and creating a lasting emotional engagement that extends beyond the stay. This emotional connection is identified as a top priority for guests in Barcelona's luxury hotels, leading to memorable experiences and long-term brand loyalty.

Chapter 5. Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 5 proposes a definition of "fair work" in the Barcelona hotel sector, emphasizing employee well-being across four dimensions: fair pay, career development, decent work conditions, and work-life balance. These factors are crucial for fostering motivated, efficient staff and reducing high turnover rates prevalent in the industry. Satisfied employees translate to satisfied customers, highlighting the importance of fair jobs in the service-oriented hospitality sector.

The study reveals a lack of awareness and skepticism surrounding the HJLR certification, often seen as a marketing tool rather than a genuine commitment to employee well-being. However, HR managers are encouraged to strategically implement such measures despite initial restructuring costs and implementation challenges. Fair job practices ultimately benefit both employees and employers, with long-term efficiency gains outweighing initial investments. The authors call for unified international criteria for fair work, acknowledging the need for adaptation based on each country's legal framework and cultural context.

Research Outputs

At the time of its deposit, this dissertation has already led to the following outputs in relation to academic publications and activities.

Regarding participation in research workshops and attendance at international congresses, **Chapter 2** was presented at the 6th International Scientific Conference organized by the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Opatija, Croatia in June 2021. Moreover, this chapter was presented on the III Research Seminar Session organized by Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB in July 2021.

Chapter 3 was presented at the II Latin American Congress on Hospitality Research, co-organized by the University of Applied Sciences (Peru), Universidad

Externado (Colombia), and Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB (Universitat de Barcelona) in Novembre 2021. This chapter was also presented at the UB Ph.D. in Business workshop in February 2022 and on the IV Research Seminar Session organized by Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB in July 2022. The results of chapter 3 were also presented on a master class session on “Talent Retention in Hospitality” organized by the University of Applied Sciences of Perú in December 2021, and on the master class session on “New challenges in Hospitality: Talent Retention” organized by the Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia in May 2022.

Chapter 4 was presented at the Smart Tourism Congress organized by Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB in November 2022. A new version of the chapter was presented at the III CLIHR Congreso Latinoamericano de Investigación en Hotelería y Restauración co-organized by the University of Applied Sciences of Perú, Universidad Externado (Colombia), University Anáhuac Cancun and Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB in November 2023.

Chapter 5 was also presented at the V Research Seminar Session organized by Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB in November 2023.

In terms of Contributions, **the first contribution** was the definition of three entries for the Encyclopedia of Marketing and Tourism, were published as 3 book chapters in Buhalis, D. (Eds) Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, published in august 2022.

It is the largest tourism management and marketing ontology that has even been put together of this interdisciplinary field. Lead by Professor Dimitrios Buhalis, a Strategic Management and Marketing expert with specialization in Information Communication Technology in the Tourism, Travel, Hospitality and Leisure industries. He is the 3rd most cited author for Tourism, 2nd most cited for Hospitality, 10th on Strategy, and 29th in Marketing worldwide.

Louzao, N. & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2022) “Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction”, 60-62, in Buhalis, D. (Eds): Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN: 978 1 80037 747 9
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377486.service.quality.customer>

Louzao, N. & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2022) “Inclusive experience”, 657-659, in Buhalis, D. (Eds): Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN: 978 1 80037 747 9
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377486.inclusive.experience>

Louzao, N. & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2022) “Employee Engagement” 73-75, in Buhalis, D. (Eds): Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN: 978 1 80037 747 9
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377486.employee.engagement>
Google Scholar citations: 6

The second contribution is a new version of chapter 2, accepted for publication as a book chapter in “Managerial Perceptions and models of organizational effectiveness scheduled to be published by Springer (Scopus Indexed).

Louzao, N., Verge, C., Shibaeva, S. & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2024). “Employees emotional connection to their organization. Is it an achievable challenge?”. In Valeri, M, (Eds) “Managerial Perceptions and models of organizational effectiveness”. Springer (Scopus Indexed). IN PRESS.

The third contribution is related with part of the analysis of chapter 3 and 4 that is being reviewed for publication in Journal of Marketing Analytics (Impact factor: 3.0, CiteScore: 0.8,)

The fourth contribution, related with chapter 5, has already been published in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal (SJR 2023 impact factor 0.79, Q1 Cultural and Gender Studies).

Crespi-Vallbona, M., Noguer-Juncà, E.; Louzao, N., Corominas, Ll. (2023), “Barcelona hotel employees and their conception of fair work. An exploratory study”, Equality, diversity and inclusion: an international Journal. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-08-2022-0232>

Google Scholar Citations: 2

Table 14 shows the detailed outputs and contributions derived from this thesis as of the date.

Table 14. Research outputs derived from this thesis.

| Thesis chapters | Authors | Title | Type | Status | Impact Factor | Publication Details |
|------------------|--|--|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---|
| Chapter 2 | Louzao, N., Crespi-Vallbona, M. | Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction | Book Chapter | Published | | Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022 |
| | Louzao, N., Crespi-Vallbona, M. | Inclusive Experience | Book Chapter | Published | | Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022 |
| | | Employee Engagement | Book Chapter | Published | | Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022 |
| | | Employees' emotional connection to their organizations. Is it an achievable challenge? | Book Chapter | Pending to be published | | Managerial Perceptions and models of organizational effectiveness, Springer (Scopus Indexed), 2024 |
| | Louzao, N., Verge, C., Shibaeva, S., Crespi-Vallbona, M. | Literature review on emotional connection in luxury hospitality (2010-2020) | International Congress | Communication | | 6 th International Scientific Conference, University of Rijeka, Opatija, Croatia, 2021 |
| | | Literature review on emotional connection in luxury hospitality (2010-2020) | Research Seminar | Presented | | III Research Seminar Session, Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy CETT-UB, 2021 |

| Chapter 3 | Employee Engagement & Customer Satisfaction in luxury hospitality. Barcelona case study | Journal article | Under Review (IF 3.0) | Journal of Marketing Analytics |
|--|---|------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Louzao, N., Blaya, N., Juan, M., Crespi-Vallbona, M. | Employee Engagement in luxury hospitality. Barcelona case study | International Congress | Communication | II Latin American Congress on Hospitality Research, University of Applied Sciences (Peru), Universidad Externado (Colombia), 2021 |
| | Employee Engagement, Talent Retention in Hospitality | Master Class | Presented | University of Applied Sciences (Peru), 2021 |
| | Employee Engagement in luxury hospitality. Barcelona case study | Workshop | Presented | UB Ph.D. in Business workshop, 2022 |
| Louzao, N., Blaya, N., Juan, M., Crespi-Vallbona, M. | Employee Engagement in luxury hospitality. Barcelona case study | Research Seminar | Presented | IV Research Seminar session, Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy, CETT-UB, 2022 |
| | Employee Engagement. New challenges in Hospitality: Talent Retention- | Master Class | Presented | Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, 2022 |

| | | | | |
|--|--|------------------------|--|---|
| Chapter 4 | Customer Satisfaction in luxury hospitality. Barcelona case study | International Congress | Communication | Smart Tourism Congress, Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy, CETT-UB, 2022 |
| Louzao, N., Zheng, D., Zhang, H., Crespi- Valbona, M. | | | | |
| Chapter 5 | Customer Satisfaction in luxury hospitality. Barcelona case study | International Congress | Communication | II CLIHR Congreso Latinoamericano de Investigación en Hotelería y Restauración, University of Applied Sciences, Perú, Universidad Externado (Colombia), University Anahuac, Cancun, Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy, CETT-UB, 2023 |
| Crespi, M., Noguer, E., Louzao, N., Corominas, Ll. | Barcelona Hotel Employee s and their conceptio n of fair work. An explorator y study | Journal | Published | SJR23 0.79 Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 2023 (Q1) |
| | Research Seminar | Presented | Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy | , 2023 |

Academic Contributions

In terms of research contributions, this study first builds upon existing literature by confirming a strong positive correlation between employee engagement and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry, particularly luxury hotels. It emphasizes the importance of emotional connection for both employees and guests. A positive company culture fosters employee engagement which leads to exceptional service and personalized experiences, ultimately contributing to guest satisfaction and loyalty.

Secondly, the research identifies a gap in the lack of a standardized tool to measure the specific relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction. Future research is recommended to develop such a tool.

In third place, the study identifies the crucial role of Concierge and Front Office staff in fostering emotional connection with guests through personalized attention and a positive "welcoming moment."

Finally, the research defines fair work in the hospitality industry and argues that fair work practices lead to a more motivated and committed workforce, resulting in better service and reduced turnover. It emphasizes the importance of fair wages, career development, decent working conditions, and work-life balance. The study identifies the need for a unified, international standard for fair work practices, acknowledging the role of the ILO and the need for national adaptation based on cultural and legal contexts.

In general terms, this thesis has contributed to highlighting some of the specificities of the luxury hospitality sector, emphasizing the important role of employees in relation to customer satisfaction.

Managerial Implications

This thesis has managerial implications both for the hospitality industry and for the luxury hotel sector.

Firstly, implications for employees, as this research underscores the importance of employee engagement for achieving customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Human Resources managers should develop strategies to create a positive work environment that fosters employee engagement.

Secondly and in terms of General Management strategies, the idea to promote Emotional Connection through nurturing a company culture that emphasizes emotional connection with guests. Train staff, particularly front-of-house

personnel like Concierge and Front Office, to deliver exceptional service that creates positive emotional experiences for guests.

Thirdly, the importance of investing in Fair Work Practices. The study demonstrates the business benefits of fair work practices, including increased employee motivation, commitment, and reduced turnover. Human Resources managers should advocate for implementing fair work practices that ensure fair wages, career development opportunities, decent working conditions, and work-life balance for employees.

Research Limitations

The main limitations of this thesis from a general perspective, taking into account that limitations have been developed in each chapter, are that the research is focused on luxury hotels, so it is not related to all types of hotel classifications. Moreover, although an attempt has been made to analyze all luxury hotels located in the city of Barcelona, representative responses were not obtained for all luxury hotels located in the city of Barcelona and worked with the results of the most representative hotels in terms of responses. Only eight of the forty-four luxury hotels of the city were analyzed in-depth, which may not allow to apply these results to all luxury establishments of Barcelona, neither in other locations.

In relation to the timing of the development of the methodology related to the employee engagement and motivation surveys, (last quarter 2019 until the first quarter of 2020), the levels of engagement and responses obtained in relation to the number of questionnaires distributed may have been influenced by the exceptional situation suffered in the tourism and hotel sector due to the Covid and ERTE situations in Spain, that are not the best fitted to foster employee engagement.

Regarding the internal client part (employees), different limitations were found:

The first one, concerning Indeed and Glassdoor content analysis, the language criteria only restricted to Spanish and English reviews. This led to few results in terms of reviews and considering that some of the comments could come from former employees, with the intention of damaging the reputation and image of establishments on employee opinion platforms.

The second limitation is that even if insights on the need of directors and managers to be highly engaged to communicate and transmit the company's culture to their teams, the levels of employee engagement was not analyzed per hotel department. General results revealed an importance in food and

beverage, reception, and concierge departments, but they could not be applied to the in-depth analyzed hotels.

Another limitation was a gap found in the level of awareness of hotel general managers to design and implement strong organizational culture, mission, vision, and values. Being provided by two experts opposite opinions on the matter, no concrete conclusion could be made on whether Spanish hotel companies, in particular for Barcelona, are aware of the need of supporting employees and customers a well-designed organizational culture and philosophy.

Finally, the methodology mainly used in the development of the thesis is qualitative. Although it is considered adequate for the objectives set, a more representative sample of results would have been more appropriate.

Regarding the external client part (customers), firstly, the number of reviews for the elected hotels on Ctrip was too small. That leads to some hotels having a few reviews, but a higher percentage of staff related ones. In other words, this can lead to a reduction in the referability to the hotel data and it was more difficult to use this insufficient data to demonstrate significant relevance of the study.

Secondly, the existing data collection of online reviews can provoke a loss of the reviews from loyal customers of hotel chains. Among five-star hotels, many hotel chains operate through their own booking applications, as for example Marriott Group and Hyatt Group. This will make loyal customers of such hotels be more willing to use the hotel's application instead of TripAdvisor or Ctrip.

Thirly, there is a limitation of possible lack of reviews from group clients. The all-inclusive package tour visitors tend to leave the feedback directly to their tour guide or travel agent, rather than the online opinion-sharing travel communities. Moreover, business customers and airline crews whose stay at the hotel is booked by the company, signed a one year contract with the hotel, incites that reviews will usually never be shown on the OTA.

And finally, if a relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction exists, the main gap of this study was found on the fact that there is no existent tool that would scientifically measure the specific relation between both variables. A need for defining such measures that would analyze the variables on the same scale is therefore emerging from this thesis, with the goal of establishing and explaining the factors that characterize this relationship.

Future lines of Research

Given these limitations and taking into account the lines of research suggested in the previous chapters, the following proposals for future research are presented.

Firstly, the extension of the study to other cities and in other countries is line of future research. These types of studies will allow comparisons between cities and different countries. Deepen the analysis of the effects of the factors analyzed considering the influence of other factors found in the literature such as burnout or customer engagement.

Secondly, by expanding the research field to the other luxury hotels not included in the analysis of employee engagement and motivation, employee, and customer reviews. It would permit to compare the engagement and satisfaction between all hotels, as well as analyzing if there are variations in employee's opinions, as well as the type of general opinions (negative or positive).

Thirdly and from an employee perspective, analyzing more in-depth the departments that are the most engaged in their work, what also is considered important, in order to specifically relate the findings on departments fostering customer satisfaction with their corresponding levels of engagement. This would highlight if there is a bigger influence in customer satisfaction with engagement of frontline employees or engagement of directors and managers, as well as the strategies they implement in the organization. For employee reviews platforms, expanding the research field to other languages than Spanish and English would provide more insights on the internal client's opinion for each establishment.

Following the same line of research, new studies examining how staff training programs in cultural sensitivity impact guest satisfaction in luxury hotels. Or from a customer perspective, to deepen explore the emotional drivers of guest motivation for seeking luxury travel experiences. In addition, future research could address the actual challenge of talent retention in the hospitality industry through the role of training, as well as the role of digitalization, or how technology can be leveraged to personalize guest interactions and enhance the human touch in luxury hospitality.

Fourthly and from a customer perspective, analyzing customer ratings and reviews in the hotel chain's application software would allow to learn more about the emotional connection between these loyal customers and the hotel, because these customers have a more authentic experience and the right to speak about the hotel's loyalty programs and systems.

Finally, establishing a scientifically verified tool that will measure the variables of customer satisfaction and employee engagement on the same scale is considered the main objective for future investigations, in order to detail the specific factors influencing this relationship.

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