

The Impact of Customized Service and Guest Satisfaction in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Dr E I Edoun

Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment
Department of Quality and Operations Management
University of Johannesburg
Auckland Park, South Africa
iedoun@uj.ac.za

Professor C Mbohwa

Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment
Department of Quality and Operations Management
University of Johannesburg
Auckland Park, South Africa
cmbohwa@uj.ac.za

Mrs Thobile Yvonne Bhila

Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment
Department of Quality and Operations Management
University of Johannesburg
Auckland Park, South Africa
Bdc.thobile@gmail.com

Customer orientation, Operations Management, Hospitality Operations and Service excellence

Abstract

The tourism and hospitality industry is a rapidly growing, fast paced and dynamic industry. The tourism and hospitality industry had a major transformation around the nineteen-sixties, when hotels were no longer exclusively found in city centres, but saw the development of new locations. This fueled the expansion of the industry. Around the nineteen-eighties, the industry evolved a strategy centred on the pampering of the guest.

The industry's growth has been rapid and fast paced. This growth is continuing today, and, the more the industry grows and advances, the more complex their customers/guests become. Service excellence in the tourism and hospitality industry has, therefore, advanced tremendously since a decade ago, and guests have also transformed and became more sophisticated. They demand customized service; they expect service excellence at all times; and they complain much more often than ever before about every possible aspect of their experience. Because of the demand from guests, the industry spends much time training staff on service excellence, motivating staff to prioritize guest experience, and putting measures in place to make sure that the rules are adhered to and guests are happy with the service they receive. The trends in the current experience of hotels includes, for example, staffing kitchens with master chefs to stylize the guests' dining experience at all mealtimes. Therefore, experience has become a key motivator in how service is being customized for the guest.

Key words: hospitality industry, service excellence, customer orientated service.

1. Introduction

Tourism & Hospitality industry

From a historic point of view, advances in tourism have been spectacular states Fridgen (1996:03) Travel is an ancient behavior. History has clearly illustrated how troublesome travelling was in the past. Most people were not able to travel freely and safely from country to country as it is today. Guests travel for various reasons these include religious purposes, medical reasons, business reasons, cultural reasons and or leisure.

According to Fridgen (1996:13) Travelling in the middle ages was not ideal until there was introduced what is referred to as the grand tour around the 1500s to the year 1820.

The grand tour originally started in England and went to France, Rome and then back to England. The grand tour started as an educational experience for the sons of the English and would generally last for several weeks on tour due to the extensive learning that took place during the tour. The grand tour became very popular and therefore many people embarked on the tour which made a great change in the perceptions of people about the travel and tourism industry at large. People travelled on this tour for different reasons these included commercial purposes, trade, religion, education, culture, health, pleasure, curiosity, science and career development and military expeditions.

The grand tour visitors used accommodation/ lodging and transportation services which were offered to pilgrims in earlier times.

The grand tour had a very positive impact on the travel and tourism industry and subsequently the hospitality industry also.

as time continued there was a major transformation in the industry due to the shift in the economics nations from rural agricultural to urban-based industry. The structure in employment also shifted and thus more and more visitors travelled for adventure, health and leisure purposes. Relaxation facilities became more popular that includes spas and relaxation treatments. Accommodation establishments became cheaper and more accessible to guests and consequently the ability to serve more guests made spas and seaside resorts accessible to the growing number of travelers/guests.

The tourism and hospitality industry is a service industry. The product sold by this industry is a service and therefore it is of uttermost importance for the service provided to be service that guests find satisfying for the money they pay.

The Tourism and Hospitality industry today has had a complete transformation and it far more complex today than it was in the past due to a more complex market/guests that require personalized service as opposed to standardized mass production. Powers (1995)

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Trends in service in the Tourism and Hospitality industry

According to Angelo and Vladimir (2011:08) manufactured goods are tangible products. People are able to pick them up and physically carry them around. On the other hand a service is a performance or process. A service requires people and therefore their service attitude plays a vital role in the delivering of the 'service product'. In the past guests were willing to wait for anything they purchase, from food to laundry to tailor services but nowadays in the fast paced working and living environment people live in now, patience to wait for anything has run slim. There are 24 hour services now in food outlets example McDonalds and their food is done and delivered to the customer in a space of minutes. Hotels are a 24 hour business also and guests expect the very same fast paced service and meals served to them in a space of minutes.

2.2 Types of services in the past and today

According to Angelo and Vladimir (2011:04) service can be defined as 'work we do for others'. The hospitality industry is identified as a service industry. Where the guest is more involved in the production process and the guest is part of the product. In the past decade products and services were offered in an as much separable capacity as possible, nowadays service/production and consumption especially in the hospitality industry is inseparable.

Fridgen (1996:14) states that a great shift came about in the economics of nations during the industrial age when there was a shift from rural agriculture to urban- based industry.

Later there was yet again another shift from mass production to customized / personalized services requested by customers.

There are different types of services hotels provide these include:

- **Accommodation and room upgrade**

According to Sloan et al (2009) Guests are provided with a safe environment to stay in with different facilities depending on the grading of the hotel/bed and breast/lodge/guest house they are booked in. Rooms range from standard rooms to penthouse facility. Guests are given special rate offers depending on loyalty club points and how often they visit the hotel also. According to Ball et al (2003) Guests can also be upgraded for example from a standard room to a deluxe room depending on guest's preferences and financial ability. The guests are also given an opportunity to choose which room they prefer to stay in during their visit and they are advised on room rates as each room differs from another in pricing. Hotels on the coast have some rooms facing the sea and or the harbor; guests sometimes prefer rooms facing such natural sites for relaxation purposes and specifically request for these rooms. Hotels have different rooms some are exclusive executive rooms that are much bigger in space and facilities including direct Wi-Fi access in your room. The penthouse is an example of one of these rooms.

- **Food and beverage**

According to Ojugo (1999) every hotel establishment has an in house restaurant that provides food and drinks for their guests. In five star establishments guests are not only sold the food but a total experience from the time they enter the hotel and the restaurant of the hotel. Continental breakfast is served and guests are greeted by name and made to feel at home away from home. Guests are offered to opportunity to meet the chef and have the chef prepare customized meals for them while they watch for example in most five star establishments guests can ask the chef to what to add into their omelet.

- **Spa packages**

Five star hotels establishments have spa packages that are usually in-house or outbound. These packages include body massage, manicure, pedicure, facials etc.

Angela et al (1994) mentions that hotel establishments use spa treatments as an attraction for guests seeking relaxation, rest and leisure. The spa treatments are billed together in the guest's hotel bill.

- **Room special features**

Guests have an option to be upgraded into deluxe rooms which usually corner rooms in the hotel. They have a little more space than a standard room. They include the safe storage of guest's personal belongings.

According to Barrows (2009) Amenities in the rooms defer in quality depending on which level of star grading the hotel has been graded. In five star establishments these amenities are at a top quality, they include a sewing, dental kit, shampoos, conditioners, soaps etc that get replaced in the room on a daily basis

- **Airport transfer and shuttle service**

The hotel concierge desk is responsible to arrange airport transfer and shuttle services for guests if they request for it because some guests prefer to arrange this service for them. The concierge desk is located on the front office area of every hotel and they also arrange sightseeing trips and booking of restaurants for some guests wants particular cuisines and adventure. De Villers (2003)

3. How guests expectations and demands have changed and became complex

According to Angelo and Vladimir (2011) the hospitality industry has grown tremendously in recent decades. Many reasons are found to be the cause of this growth; these include the general increase in standard of living amongst people/guests, growth in education, increased longevity due to results of medical advances and greater opportunities available in a rapidly developing society. Goods and services for example hotel experiences which were in the past available only to the privileged few are now enjoyed by a greater percentage of the population. Guests have changed very much from guests in the past decade, guests now are demanding and their expectation is much more than what was expected by guests in the past. Guests want a service worth their payment and more. Guests differ from leisure guests, to business guests to guests travelling for medical/ health reasons etc. Depending on the reason why the guest is travelling, research has shown different patterns in guests' trends, expectation, behavior states Lamba (2013)

Lamba (2013) further emphasizes by giving an example stating that a leisure guest usually is more demanding and more particular about everything in the hotel because they spend more time in the hotel and they usually pay from their own pockets unlike for example business guests that are usually in back to back meetings and hardly spend time

in the hotel and they are usually paid for by the company and are not very particular about everything because they don't have time being busy all day in meetings.

2.5 What is guest satisfaction?

According to Hassanien (2010) the hospitality industry is a mature industry. The stages of rapid growth and innovation have been long past by this industry and it is well established and settled now in the market. Hospitality being a matured industry needs to understand their customer and their needs in order to have guest satisfaction. The industry needs to have a clear understanding on what service is and what satisfaction is in the guest's point of view. Payne-Palacio (2012) mention that service is defined as 'work done for others'. Hotels use Frequent – traveler surveys and travel writer suggestions to keep themselves updated on their guest comments, suggestions and complaints. Guests have certain expectations that when either meet or not meet distinguish to them whether service is good or bad and whether or not they are satisfied and will come back or not. Chon and Sparrowe (2000).

4. Findings

The research study was completed using survey questionnaires that were sent out throughout the Johannesburg North because the research was focusing on the guests visiting hotels in the Johannesburg North region and this was the limitation of the study. Respondents were selected using random and convenience sampling methods due to the guest's busy schedules and it was not possible to always find them as they generally would be out on meetings during the day and not available later in the evenings, so convenience sampling was used and 150 (one hundred and fifty) respondents completed the survey. These were generally business guests and some that were visiting friends and family.

The findings were as follows:

4.1 Gender

Table 4.1.1

DESCRIPTIVES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
GENDER		
Male	128	85.3
Female	22	14.5
Total	150	100

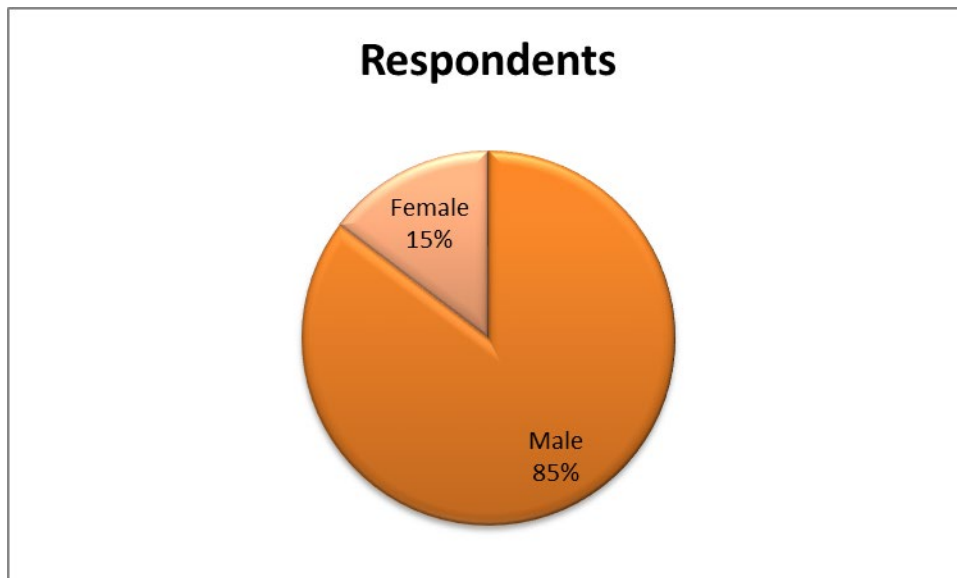


Figure 4.1

The research study findings indicate that 85 per cent of males are frequent travellers that visit hotels in Johannesburg North and only 15 per cent are females. This means the males are dominating as compared to females that travel and visit hotels in the Johannesburg North region.

4.2 Level of educational qualification

Table 4.2.1

DESCRIPTIVES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION OBTAINED		
None	27	18
Matric	5	3.3
Certificate or diploma	6	4
Bachelor's degree	4	2.6
Post graduate degree	108	72
Total	150	100

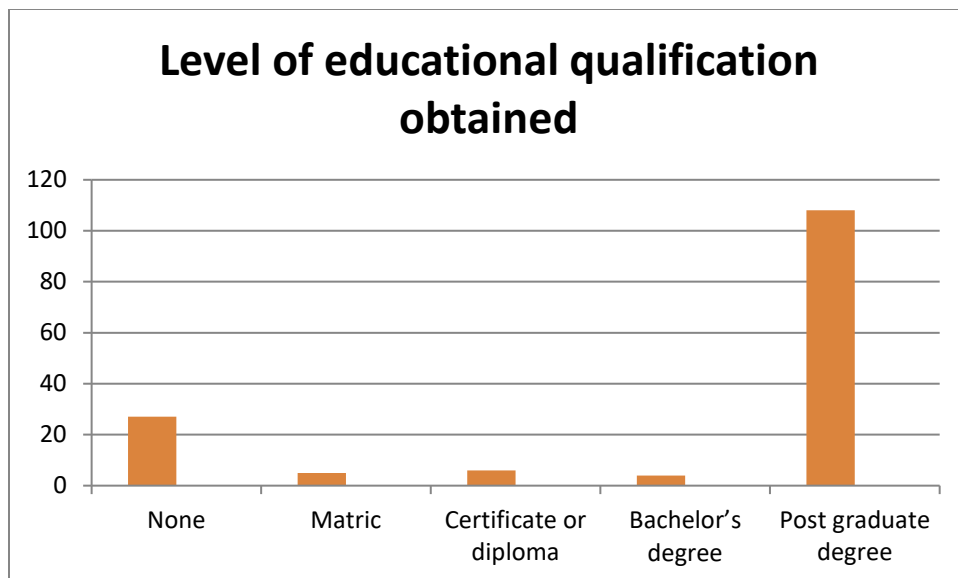


Figure 4.2

The graph above indicate the educational qualification obtained by tourists travelling to the Johannesburg north region constitutes of 27 guests who have no formal education at all. 5 guests out of 150 who have Matric level pass (Grade 12) and not more than that. 6 guests who have a certificate or formal diploma followed by 4 guests that indicated that they have acquired higher education and training and they obtained bachelor's degrees and a 108 guests who indicated that they have post graduate degrees.

4.3 Type/kind of guest

Table 4.3.1

DESCRIPTIVES	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
TYPE OF GUEST		
Domestic	43	28.6
International	107	71.3
Total	150	100

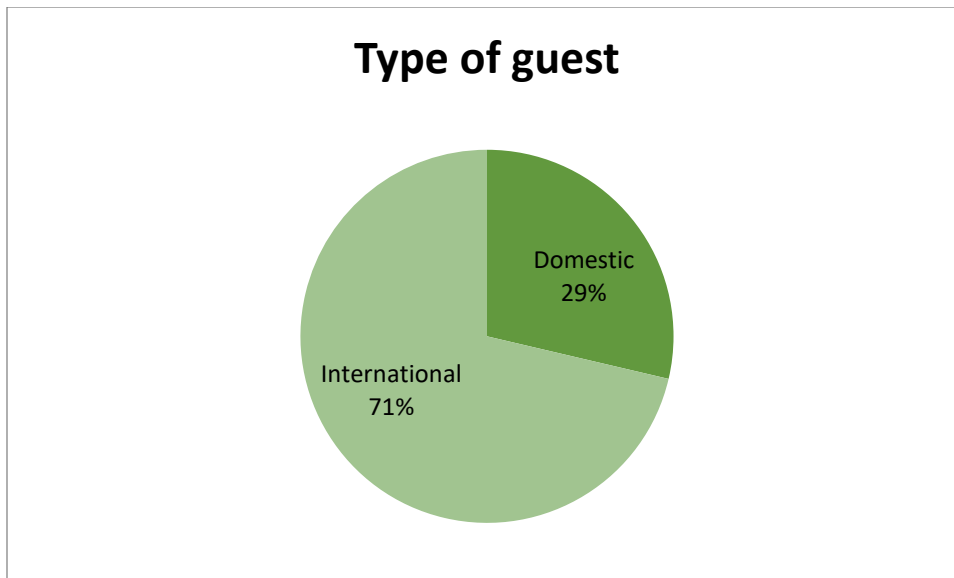


Figure 4.3

The graph above indicates that the type of guests visiting hotels in the Johannesburg North region are as follows: 71 percent are international guests that is guest travelling from countries outside of South Africa and 29 per cent are domestic tourists that is guests that are travelling from within South Africa.

4.4 Does guest belong to a loyalty program?

Table 4.4.1

DESCRIPTIVES	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
DOES THE GUEST BELONG TO A LOYALTY PROGRAM?		
No	63	42
Yes	87	58
Total	150	100

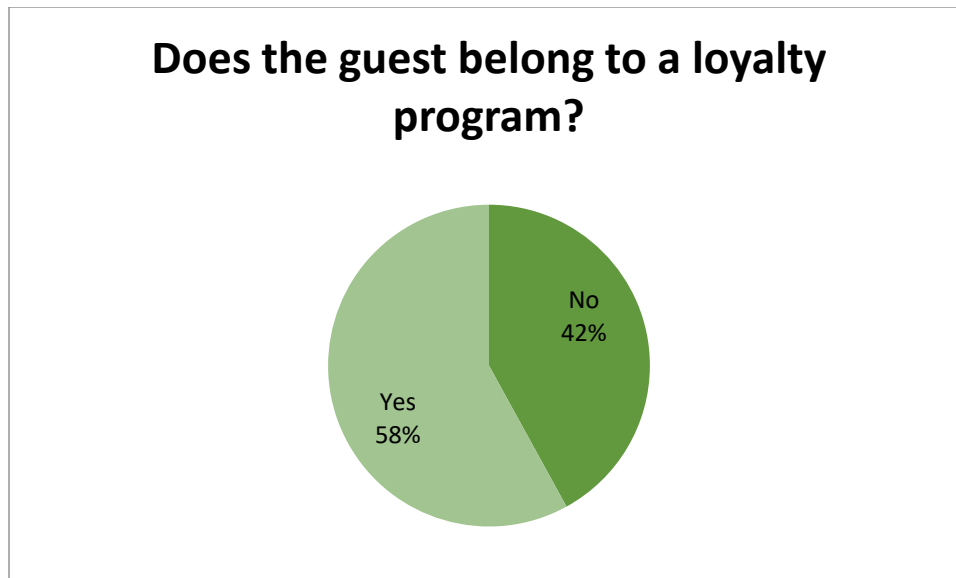


Figure 4.4

The graph above indicates that 58 per cent of the guests visiting hotels in the Johannesburg North region are part of a loyalty program within the hotel. This loyalty program is generally awarded to guests that travel and utilize the services of the hotel frequently and 42 per cent are not part of any loyalty program in the hotel. This is an indication that these guests either do not travel frequently to that particular hotel or has not gained enough points to be awarded a loyalty program card.

4.5 Does customized service create a more satisfaction?

Table 4.5.1

DESCRIPTIVES	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
DOES CUSTOMIZED SERVICE CREATE A MORE SATISFACTION?		
No	24	16
Yes	126	84
Total	150	100

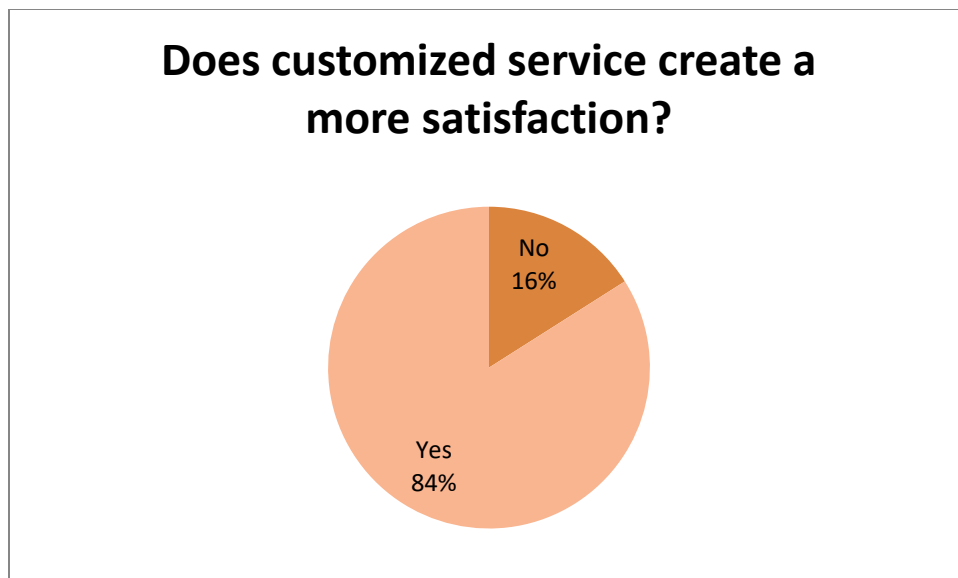


Figure 4.5

The graph above indicates that 84 per cent of the guests visiting hotels in the Johannesburg North region believe that customized service creates satisfaction for them during their stay in the hotel and only 16 per cent did not believe customized service create satisfaction in their stay. They indicated that they were satisfied with that standard service.

4.6 How often does the guest travel?

Table 4.6.1

DESCRIPTIVES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
HOW OFTEN DOES THE GUEST TRAVEL		
0 - 10 trips a year	11	7.3
11 - 30 trips a year	38	25.3
31 - 50 trips a year	12	8
50 or more trips a year	89	59.3
Total	150	100

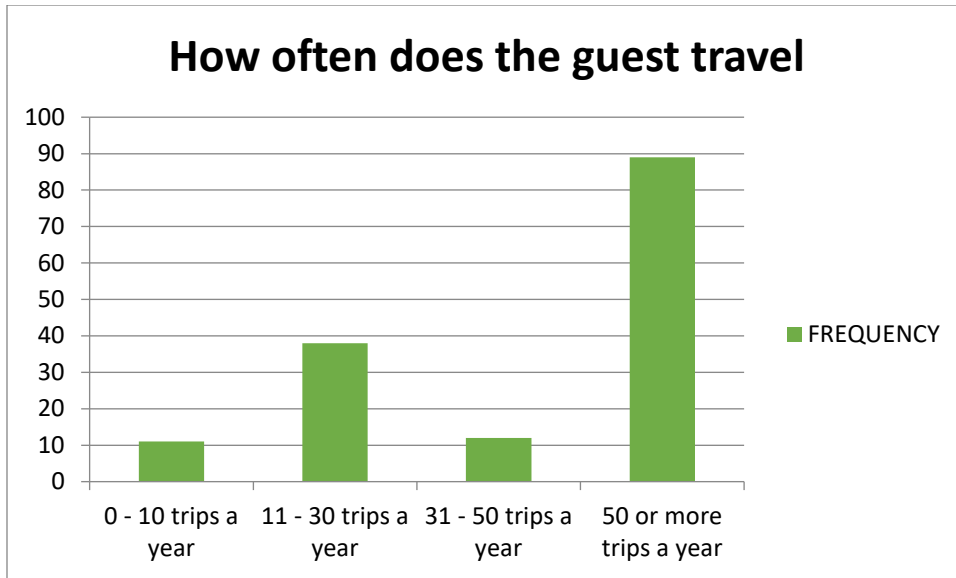


Figure 4.6

The graph above indicates that 59 per cent of the guests visiting hotels in the Johannesburg North region are frequent travellers and this gives us an insight that these guests are amongst the ones that have loyalty membership with particular hotels in the region of Johannesburg North. 25 per cent are the ones that travel 11 – to 30 times a year. 8 per cent are the guests that travel 31 – 50 times a year and 7 per cent are the guests that less often than everyone mentioned.

5. Conclusion

Companies in the tourism and hospitality industry have become customer oriented to meet the demands and expectations of their beloved customers. According to Angelo and Vladimir (2011:18) the companies in the hospitality industry have an obligation to deliver on the promise they make to customers, owners and its employees. There have been many theories and ideas about service delivery to guests but implementation of these theories remains a challenge. Guests today are demanding and difficult and expect value for the money they pay.

Angelo and Vladimir (2011:16) further mentions that successful hospitality companies focus a great deal of management attention on establishing quality standards for services, communicating these standards to their employees through training programs and measure performance and guests feedback.

Guests of the 21st century have evident or significant difference to the guests from a decade ago when the industry started. The difference in these guests is clear and visible by their requirements, behaviors, expectations and overall likes and dislikes and hoteliers are to take heed and educate themselves on such matters so to please and keep their guests and in the long run maintain them on their side and not captured and swept away by their ever trying competitor.

6. References

Angelo R. and Vladimir A. (2011) Hospitality today seventh edition. United States of America. American hotel and lodging educational institute

Fridgen D. J. (1996) Tourism and hospitality industry. United States of America. Michigan. American hotel and lodging educational association

Steadmom E and Kasavana M (1988) Managing front office operations. Second edition. United States of America. Michigan. American hotel and lodging educational association

Mason P. (2014) Researching Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality for your Dissertation. Woodeaton, oxford. Good fellow publishers limited.

Powers, T. (1995) Introduction to Management in the Hospitality Industry. Fifth Edition. John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Canada.

Sloan, P. Legrand, W. Chen, J.S. (2009) Sustainability in the Hospitality Industry- Principles of Sustainable Operations. Butterworth- Heinemann. Burlington. United Kingdom.

Ojugo, C. (1999) Practical Food and Beverage cost control. Delmar publishers. Columbia, New York.

Angela, R.M., & Vladimir, A.N (1994) Hospitality Today. Second Edition. Educational Institute of the American hotel and motel association. East lansing, Michigan.

De Villers, M (2003) Water – The fate of our most precious resource. Second edition. Jacobs Communications corp. Canada.

Barrows, C.W. & Powers, T. (2009) Introduction to management in the hospitality industry. Ninth edition. John Wiley and sons, Inc. New Jersey

Cichy R.F (1994) Quality sanitation management. Educational Institute of the American hotel and motel association. East lansing, Michigan.

Lamba, K. (2013) Hotels and Tourism. First edition. Anmol publications pvt .Ltd. India

Hassanien, A. Dale, C. Clarke A (2010) Hospitality business development. Butterworth- Heinemann. Burlington USA

Payne- Palacio, J. Theis, M. (2012) Foodservice management. Twelfth Edition. Pearson Education Inc. New Jersey.

Chon, K. Sparrowe, R.T. (2000) *Welcome to hospitality – an introduction*. Second Edition. Delmar Thomson Learning. USA.

Ball, S. Jones, P. Kirk, D. Lockwood, A. (2003) *Hospitality Operations– A systems approach*. London.

Mrs Thobile Yvonne Bhila is a Human Resource Management Lecturer at Pearson Institute of Higher Education. She has a National Diploma in Hospitality Management (Durban University of Technology), Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration (Durban University of Technology) and a Masters in Quality and Operations Management (University of Johannesburg). She has worked in the higher education sector for more than 13 years in both public and private universities. She is currently completing PhD in Quality and Operations Management (University of Johannesburg). She is an IEOM member. She is also a member of ENACTUS UJ which is an entrepreneurship society that works closely and frequently with the local community with various community engagements and charity projects.