Relationship between Service Quality, Customer Retention and the role of Social Media-Premier Inn Hotel (UK)

Rajab Ghandour*, Bilal Jebai** and Mudassar Hussain*

*Claude Littner Business School, University of West London, UK**
*Business School MIS, Lebanese International University, Lebanon***

Abstract:The aim of this research is to critically evaluate the relationship between service quality and customer retention in Premier Inn Croydon. The objectives studies the concept of service quality in relevance with its characteristics, the objectives also evaluates the significance of customer retention for an organization. The researchers have also analysed and estimated the relationship between the two determinants which are service quality and customer retention of the company Premier Inn Croydon. Researchers have used positivism philosophy, survey strategy, explanatory design and deductive approach for the assessment and evaluation of the relationship between service quality and customer retention. The researchers have employed qualitative and quantitative both type of data obtained through circulating questionnaires and conducting interviews. Through non-probability sampling method and convenience based sampling technique; the sample was of 50 customers, 50 employees and 4 managers of Premier Inn Corydon. The successful completion of this very study has uncovered some area for the future studies especially the role of social media. Along with this, a set of recommendations are also highlighted by the study for the selected company and for the future investigators.

Keywords: Social Media, Service Quality, Customer Retention, Electronic Word of Mouth.

Introduction

According to Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) refered to work by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technologic foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated content". Reference group is defined as the individual or group whose behaviour or opinion is important to the consumer (Hoyer et al, 2012). According to Solomon (2013) "A reference group is an actual or imaginary individual or group conceived of having significant relevance upon an individual's evaluations, aspirations, or behaviour." There are various changes that have been occurred in service market. The service industry has a higher need to enhance its quality to satisfy its customers and make long term relations with them (Lo Liang, 2010). The customer retention is one of the important factor that is to be considered in service industry such as hotels, restaurants etc. Once a particular hotel has identified the insights of consumers then it helps them to meet and satisfy the need of consumers. It has been emphasized that quality of services is a major determinant for the success of hotel industry and customer retention. Therefore, the main purpose of this research is to study a relationship between customer retention and service quality (Mohammad, 2009). The quality of services enables an organization to differentiate its services from competitors. In addition to this, the quality of services helps to develop a unique position in the minds of

consumers. Further, quality enables a company to satisfy its customers and gain long term loyalty. The loyalty and sustainable relationship with customers increases profits and market share of a specific company. In this era of globalization, service sector strives to provide convenience and easy accessibility to its customers. Service quality enhances the image and goodwill of a business in a market that is beneficial for firm in a long term (Mubbsher et al, 2014).

The issue of this study is to evaluate a relationship between customer retention and quality in a service industry and what role does social media plays. Furthermore, this research mainly aims to understand these variables in a perspective of hotel industry. A customer has different perception with respect to a specific hotel in an industry. Hence, it is indispensable for Premier Inn Croydon to assess the extent of services that is provided to customers in order to satisfy them.

To further understand more about service quality, customer retention and the role of social media the researchers have considered the following hypotheses:

> H1: There is a relationship between the reliability in the service and the customer retention of Premier Inn Croydon.
> H2: There is a relationship between the responsiveness in the service and the customer retention of Premier Inn Croydon.
> H3: Social media can play a role in the service plan strategy.

Customer Satisfaction, Service Quality and Social Media

Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality

The customer satisfaction has become a major interest for many of the organizations because it is the most vital way through which the organization can increase their market share in the local as well as in the global market. As the major aim of the organization is to increase the profitability, therefore the customer satisfaction is the major element which helps the organization in achieving this objective (Wilson et al, 2008). As the world has evolved into a global stage where customer and manufacturer's relationship can be influence by the frequency of contact and touch between them. The interactive the company is with its customers the more it would be able to understand customer's expectations from the service. The emergence of social media has been playing a vital role in connecting customers and employers since last decade and today it is used as most important medium to obtain customer feedback over service related problems.

From the perspective of the operation management, it has been found that the customers play a significant role in increasing the profitability of the company and by their valuable feedbacks the organization can improve their organizational process (Lee et al, 2005). The customers always want to get the maximum benefits from the products or services which satisfy their needs and demands. Companies need to understand the expectations of customers that are associated with the quality of service being provided. The social media platform can help managers in creating interactive pages where customers can drop their feedback with regard to the service being provided. Before making the strategies of product or service, the first and major concern of the organization is to determine the needs and demands of the customers that whether their product will fulfil their demand which in result shows the outcome in the form of the customer satisfaction (Johnson et al, 2012).

By utilizing social media, firms can communicate the positive message about its service amongst the online customers with the lowest cost possible. The quality of the service can be improved by obtaining customer reviews and opinions about the service through social media. The reason behind this is that the service quality is a result of the service which organization offer to its customers to make them more loyal (Saravanan et al, 2007). The customer satisfaction is the broader concept and there are many other factors which show

their impact on the satisfaction level of the customers such as price, quality of product; however, the service quality is just another factor which help in making the customers more loyal (Agbor, 2011). In the opinion of Sureshchandar, Rajendran and Anantharaman (2002), it has been argued that many of the studied has been carried out in the context of the customer satisfaction and the service quality, however; only few are able to link clearly the relationship between the service quality and the customer satisfaction. Therefore, in the given research it was found that these factors are independent but they are closely related to each other that the one-unit increase in the variable of any one factor will lead to the increase in the unit of the other factor.

Factors of Service Quality
The service quality of the organization defines the offering of the firm in terms of the services and the expectations of the customers from that offering (Munusamy et al, 2010). The customer judge the quality of the services on the basis of the scale of high or low. If the service quality of the product is low then the organization did not meet with the expectations of the customers, nevertheless, if the service quality of the product is high then the organization fully meet with the expectations of the customers. As stated by El Saghier and Nathan (2013), there are many factors which lead the service quality of the organization which is discussed below:

Responsiveness
The term responsiveness is defined as the willingness of the employees to offer services to the customers. It also includes the basic understanding of the need and demands of the customers, attention given to the problems of the customers and the safety of the customers during the transactions (Kumar et al., 2009). Moreover, this factor also includes the availability of the customer representatives to promote the organizational service and also to help the customer by offering more value to them (Shing et al., 2012). Social media pages like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram can help firms in increasing company's responsiveness towards the customers of the firm.

Reliability
The reliability in the context of the service quality is defined as the offering the right services to the customer at the first time so that the customers get more satisfied. Furthermore, the factor of reliability is mostly found in the conventional services. Additionally, the factor of reliability also reflects the fulfilment of the order accurately, keeping the accurate records, maintaining the bill accurately as well as keeping the promise of service (Yang and Fang, 2004).

Empathy
The terms empathy is defined as the care and the attention which the organization gives to its customers while offering the services. This factor includes the customers' attention and the employees who best understand the demand of the customers. For instance, in the banking sector, particularly in the private banks, the representatives give individual attention to the customers, maintain their record accurately and fulfil their needs and demands (Ananth et al., 2011). The service in terms of the empathy is also measured in many ways for instance in the hospitality industry, the hotels take care of the cleanliness of the room, surrounding and the food to show the customers that they value them through which the customers visit the hotels over again (Ford et al., 2011). The holiday decision-making process and social media.

Service Quality Management

To offer the valuable services to the customers, the organization should manage the service quality so that the needs of the customers can be satisfied (Oakland, 2014). The term service quality management is defined as the assurance of the quality which is offered to the customers in order to satisfy the expectation level of the customers. The service quality management improves the quality of the services and avoids the unconformities. It is significant for the organization to manage the service quality because it increases the profitability of the organization and also move the company towards the competitive edge (Tarí et al., 2013). One of the major principles of the service quality management is the system approach to management. According to this principle, the organization should identify, understand and manage the integrated process of the service quality management as it plays an essential role in increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization and also helps in accomplishing the objectives of the research study. The major benefit of this principle is that the integration of the process and its alignment will give the best desired results and also improve the quality of the customers (Dragolea and Ungureanu, 2008).

Model of Relationship Commitment

As per the statement of Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007), the model shown below identifies the determinants of the relationship commitment. The three main factors are considered in the model are communication effectiveness, technical quality and the functional quality, all of the determinants are affected by the trust and commitment. The factor of trust was looked by Tsai and Huang (2007), as it is the main trigger that drives all of the three determinants is trust as it deals with the beliefs of the customers and their expectation with the services providers. Developing trust results in building positive relations with the firms, which enables firms to keep their customers satisfied by considering their requirements.

It is argued by Aurier and N'Goala (2010), the quality of services is further divided into two categories, the technical quality and the functional quality. The functional quality of the services depends on the delivery of the services and the interaction between the person to whom delivery is provided and the person who delivers. While on the other hand, the technical quality depends on the results of the services perceived by the customers, the technical quality also highlights the ability of the service providers and the company in order to full fills the requirements of the customers. Moreover, as stated by Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007), the communication effectiveness refers to the concept of formal and informal sharing between the customers and the advisors.

Figure 1: The model of determinants of relationship commitment (Source: Tsai and Huang, 2007).
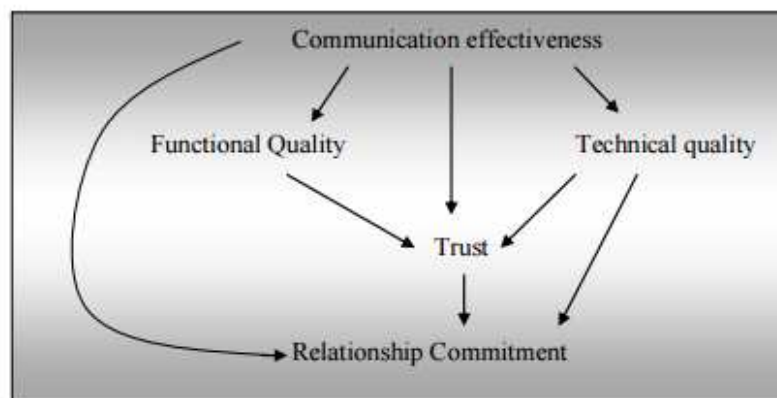
Social Media and Preference Group

Tsimonis and Dimitriadis defines web 2.0 as "a collection of open-source, interactive and user-controleed online applications expanding the experiences, knowledge and market power of the users as participants in business and social processes" (2014, p.329). Hausmann (2012) suggested with the embracing phenomenon of social media in modern society, web 2.0 applications such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter has provided organisations with the opportunity to develop their marketing techniques to new statures. Furthermore, Hausmann (2012) informs that social media applications from web 2.0 provides consumers with the opportunity to communicate and network. These interactions develop into relationships and groups between users (Hausmann, 2012). The relationships developed from these web 2.0 applications has seen the development of reference groups through social media (Solomon et al 2014). These reference groups' have a powerful influence on consumer consumption. For example, the Manchester United Football Club fan bases whom exert comparative influences have the ability to influence their clubs branding association decisions (Solomon et al 2014). Furthermore, these influences can be distinguished as normative social influence which according to Solomon et al (2014) are events when people make their purchasing decisions on the basis of meeting the expectations and/or conforming to that of a group or individual. Developing further according to Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) the development of social media has provided the opportunity for companies to develop relationships with existing and new customers. Additionally, social media has offered companies and consumers the opportunity to collaborate sub-cultures which benefit both consumer and companies alike (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). Although there are many classifications of reference groups, the individual's consumption behaviour is affected by the following three reference groups. Dissociative group is the group where the individual doesn't want to be a member and want to dissociate himself from. Membership group is the group in which the consumer is currently the member. Aspiration group is the group where the individual want to associate himself. An individual's consumption will be dependent on the group to which the individual best to. The reference groups set certain social norms to the members of the reference group. The members of the group adopt these norms and adhere to the group behaviour. If a new member wants to become a member of the group, they are expected to exhibit a similar behaviour (O'Shaughnessy, 2012). For example, if the members purchase certain product or brand, the other members also confirm their membership to the group by purchasing the same brand or product. When a member doesn't exhibit similar behaviour, he is no longer considered to be the member of the group.

Knowing the reference group of the customer helps the company to decide what the customer requires at each stage of their purchase decision making and helps the companies to provide with what the customers' want (Ingwer, 2012). According to Wei and Yu (2012) social identity theory provides an explanation on the impact which reference groups can have on self-brand connections. Wei and Yu informs that "Social identity is a self-concept derived

from perceived membership in social groups and the identification process specifically pertains to a role relationship with referent group" (2012, p. 41). More precisely group memberships form an important sense of self-satisfaction which complies members to make choices in order to comply with group norms.

Methodology

The plan of action or the strategy employed by the research is accountable for the effective completion of the research as it plays a noticeable role in data accumulating processes. Experiment, survey, case study, action research, ethnography and observations are the common types of research strategies (Kumar, 2011). The current study has employed the survey strategy because it is helpful in accumulating the latest, fresh and primary data. This research adopted quantitative/ deductive methodology and adopting the positivistic paradigm using online questionnaire. The current research has implemented the deductive approach because it suits the ongoing issue. The current research is based on the assessment or investigation of the theory that is already present i.e. relationship between service quality and customer retention. In view of the fact that ongoing study seeks to evaluate the relationship between service quality and customer retention in Premier Inn Croydon, the customers and employees of the selected company are determined as the research population.

The researchers of this study have targeted 50 employees and 50 customers of a selected organization in order to gather primary data. The employees and customers were given with the questionnaires so that their responses in relation to area being inquired can be assorted. Also, 4 managers were interviewed. The raw data was entered into SPSS for analysis.

The data collected (Customer Data - Table 1) showed that the majority of customers were females' i.e. 58 percent and the 42 percent were males. Based on the data collected 30 percent of the customers were from ages between 18-27 years, 10 percent of the customers were aged between the groups of 28-37, and 20 percent of the customers were between the ages of 38-47. While 22 percent of the customers were from the age range of 48-57and the remaining 18 percent were of ages 50 years and above.

Moreover, the result indicated that the majority of respondents would use social media or preference groups to recommend the hotel with 65 percent. In addition to that the majority satisfaction level regarding the services being provided to them in the hotel, in response to which 72 percent of the customers gave positive feedbacks, 8 percent gave neutral answers and the remaining 20 percent disagreed. However, regarding customers' preferences when it comes to the selection of a specific hotel, in response to which about 58 percent of the customers agreed that they do prefer staying in Primer Inn Croydon, while 14 percent gave neutral answers and the rest 28 percent disagreed.

Table 1- Customers' Demographic Data

Variable	Percentage
Gender	
Male	42%
Female	58%
Age	
18-27	30%
28-37	10%
38-47	20%
48-57	22%
Over 57	18%
Customer Satisfaction	
Positive Feedback	72%
Neutral	8%
Negative	20%

Customer Preference Choice	
Agreed	58%
Neutral	14%
Disagreed	28%
Customer recommendation	
Agreed	65%
Neutral	5%
Disagreed	30%
Minor Issue-Switch to another hotel	
Yes	52%
No	28%
Not Sure	20%

The employees' data collected showed that the majority of them were males with 54% and 46% females. The age of the employees, as about 32% of the employees were between the age group of 18- 37. While the age group ranging between 38- 57 occupies 52% employees, however, the remaining 16% of the employee were 50 and above. The employees were asked regarding efforts made by the hotel representatives in resolving customer issues. The response generated showed that 48% of the employees agreed that they do give priority in resolving the issues of customers, 18% gave neutral answer and the rest 34% gave negative response. From the responses, it is measured that majority of the employees cater the issues of customer.

Also, the employees were asked about adjusting to the customer needs, it showed that 60% of the employees agreed to it, 10% gave neutral answer and the rest 30% gave negative response. The responses showed that considering the needs of the customers according to their desires always fallouts in increasing their satisfaction level and thus, organizations are able to sustain in the market. The feedback of the employees showed that responding to the complaints from the customers end is essential in order to retain them, majority of the employees agreed to the statement resulting 56%, while 22% gave neutral answers and the only 22% disagreed. Moreover, employees were asked question regarding the environment of the hotel. The response generated was that 54% of the employees gave positive feedback and 42% of the employees gave negative answers.

Table 2- Employees Demographic Data

Variable	Percentage
Gender	
Male	42%
Female	58%
Age	
18-27	30%
28-37	10%
38-47	20%
48-57	22%
Over 57	18%
Resolve Issues by Priority	
Agreed	48%
Neutral	18%
Disagreed	34%
Adjust to customer needs	
Agreed	60%
Neutral	10%

Disagreed	30%
Response to complaints	
Agreed	56%
Neutral	22%
Disagreed	22%
Hotel Environment	
Yes	52%
No	28%
Not Sure	20%

The managers were interviewed provided important input to the study. A question inquiring about the significance and effectiveness of service quality for retaining customers and the role of social media. For this question, two of the approached managers said that "Customers anticipate receiving the finest quality for them when they pay a certain amount of money for some product or service". The accomplishment of this anticipation leads to customer's satisfaction which further helps them in their retention. The second manager said "the market competition is so high that customers are able to replace their needs and demands with a number of products. The choices for the customers are in large extent from which they are able to choose the right replacement for their requirement and need. Therefore, service quality is the major attribute on the basis of which customers decide about selecting a certain product or service". Further, one more manager added "the quality of service helps in expanding the satisfaction and loyalty of the buyers which is the key element that facilitates the marketers in retaining the customers". The managers knew the importance of what is going on the social media regarding reviews and recommendation. Thus, it has been determined that managers of the selected company understand the significance of relationship between service quality and customer retention which denotes that they frequently practice the strategies that leads towards the customers' retention and the role of social media.

Findings

The regression test conducted for the specific hypothesis (H1: There is a relationship between the reliability and the customer retention) revealed that the value of R square is 0.497, which means that the relationship between reliability and customer retention is strong.

Table 3-Regression (Model summary and Coefficient[a])

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.705[a]	.497	.486	.47942

a. Predictors (Constant), Responsiveness

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	(Constant)	1.254	.200		6.254	.000
	Responsiveness	.508	.074	.705	6.881	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Retention

The table 3 shows that the value of significance is identified as 0.000 which depicts the acceptance of the first hypothesis of this research.

(Customer retention) = reliability (0.508) + 1.254 = 1.762

This equation of regression developed above has been demonstrating that 1 % change in the reliability of the service quality will lead towards 1.762 percent change in the customer retention.

To test for (H2: There is a relationship between the responsiveness and the customer retention) regression showed there is a relation. The table below (Table 4) showed that there is moderate relationship between responsiveness and customer retention as the value of R square is 0.315.

Customer retention = (Responsiveness) 0.477 + 1.291 = 1.768

The second equation developed from the coefficient table has been demonstrating that the 1 percent change in the responsiveness factor of the service quality can bring in the change of about 1.768 percent in the retention of the customers.

The third hypothesis made for the research was about testing the relationship between cleanliness of the hotel and the retention of the customer that visits the hotel on regular basis. The regression test shows that there is a strong relationship between both the variables as the value of R square is found as 0.528. Customer retention = (cleanliness) 0.559 + 1.116 = 1.675

The value found from the regression equation depicts that 1.675 percent change in the dependent variable i.e. customer retention can be observed from the 0.559 % change in the independent variable i.e. cleanliness.

Regarding the fourth hypothesis (H4: Social media can play a role in the service plan strategy) the managers of the Premiere Inn Croydon showed that they would consider review or feedback from the social media. However, there is no current strategy that would bring in social media closely to the hotel plans. Nevertheless, the managers are aware of the importance of social media especially for customer retention and customer loyalty.

The Pearson correlation test identifies the ratio of positivity between the three variables. The value shows that the relationship among all three variable is highly positive as the value of responsiveness is 0.705, the value of reliability is 0.561 and the value of cleanliness is 0.733.

Table 4-Regression (Model Summary and Coefficient^a)

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.561^a	.315	.301	.55930

a. Predictors (Constant), Reliability

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.291	.280		4.615	.000
	Reliability	.477	.101	.561	4.696	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Retention

Table 5-Regression (Model summary and coefficient^a)

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.733^a	.538	.528	.45949

a. Predictors (Constant), Cleanliness

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.116	.203		5.501	.000
Cleanliness	.559	.075	.733	7.470	.000

a. Dependent Variable: CustomerRetention

Table 6-Correlations

	Responsiveness	Reliability	Cleanliness	Customer Retention
Responsiveness	1	.556	.349	.705
Reliability	.556	1	.190	.561
Cleanliness	.349	.190	1	.733
Customer Retention	.705	.561	.733	1

Limitations and Future Research

The researcher has faced some limitations during completing the study under contemplation. These limitations are acknowledged different contexts which are stated: Sample of the study although researchers have used the possible sample size for the study, the sample selected for this research could have been larger but due to cost and time constrain the current sample was accepted. Location or Geographical implication he research is limited to a specific company i.e. Premier Inn Croydon because it has been selected as the research context. Hence, it has been anticipated that, geographical location is also a limitation for the study. A longitudinal research design might be applied as it will allow the impact of social media to be measured in the time when it is happening.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore the relationship between service quality and customer retention and to explore the role of social media. Social media is not yet a final clear concept but it is obviously affecting how business is conducted. Customers who relied on social media to get feedback were looking for a more detailed information regarding the hotel and the services. Social preference groups and social networks considered the platforms the customers would use to give feedback and recommendation to both family and friends

It can be concluded that current issue being inquired is resolved as the objectives of the study settled by the researchers are accomplished successfully. The findings of the study indicated that there is a positive and strong relationship between service quality and customer retention. The independent variables i.e. responsiveness and reliability sustain a strong association with the customer retention. Also, the study highlighted the role of social media or preference group with respect to reviews and recommendations. The successful completion of this very study has uncovered some area for the future studies which are briefly explained above. Along with this, a set of recommendations are also highlighted by the researchers for the selected company i.e. Premier Inn Croydon and for the future investigators.

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