

# Customer Care Practices of Standard Hotels in Northern Philippines: A Stakeholders' Perspective

DR. MA.EDEL LOURDES ALZATE- GALIZA<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Isabela State University, Cauayan Campus Isabela

<sup>1</sup>m.alzate@yahoo.com

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**ABSTRACT:** Service attitude is central to the customer's perception of the influence, knowledge, ability and behavior of the front line employees. Service attitude can influence customers' mental states and physical needs. Thus, this study focused on the customer care practices of the identified standard hotels in Isabela. Specifically, it looked into the profile of the hotels, and the extent to which the customer care are being afforded to their customers. It is descriptive in method. It involved nine standard hotels with a total of 265 employees assigned in the different departments. The data gathering tool was the questionnaire, although there were interviews conducted to confirm the answers of the hotel-participants. The results revealed that although customer care practices are similar among the identified standard hotels in Isabela, such as the front office service and the housekeeping customer care, there are differences by which the food and beverage, and security and maintenance are afforded to the customers. Therefore, it is recommended that the hotels add more to the number of their employees in the different departments especially on food and security. The employees should also be trained more on the tasks assigned to them. There are increasing number of tourists coming to the province. The local government should continue on improving its tourists destinations and accommodations.

**KEYWORDS:** customer care, frontline service, food and beverages, housekeeping, security and maintenance

## I. INTRODUCTION

Customer care service is an internal and integral part of the processes of each hotel. If there is any place where customers are likely to be paying attention to the type of service they receive, it is within the hospitality industry. The job as a hospitality service provider is to maintain customer happiness and satisfaction. Keeping the customers at the forefront of operational plans to hold the hospitality business afloat is imperative. Gone are the days when customers were happy just receiving "please" and "thank you" or getting service with a nice smile. Although those go into the recipe for proper etiquette, it is just not enough. Customers are looking for a memorable experience and dynamic service where it counts. (Belcher, 2019)

Customer care was defined by Kotler (1998) as a service that one can offer to another which is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything but brings about customer delight and satisfaction. In other words, customer care is a service that seeks to acquire new customers, provide superior customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty. As time changes so do customers care. The hospitality industry is one that is constantly undergoing change and because of this, the customer care service program must be kept constantly updated as well.

In the hotel industry, most of the companies believe that the only way to deliver quality customer care and to achieve satisfaction is to empower employees. Every organization must pay attention on how to deliver customer care that results to customer satisfaction to battle against the high demand of competition in the industry. The hospitality industry needs to satisfy every guest in aiming to earn a competitive market advantage.

The most important goal that companies must follow is to maintain customer loyalty so their management must focus on the customer-centric approach in their organizational and marketing strategies (Jain and Singh, 2002). Bowen and Chen (2001) they claimed that having customers are not sufficient. There has to be really loyal customers. This is because customer satisfaction directs to customer loyalty. Similarly, Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt (2000) said that "*there is a rising recognition that the last objective of customer satisfaction measurement should be customer loyalty*".

Isabela is the 10th richest province in the Philippines in 2011, and the only province of Northern Luzon to be included in the list. (Provincial Tourism Office of Isabela)

The population of standard class hotels in the province has bloomed because of the its unrelenting economic prosperity. This influx brought about competition among these hotels and customer care among other aspects have been critical in spelling a hotel’s success. The issue on providing customer care to guests had been investigated in other cities but has not been conducted for the province of Isabela.

Customer care and customer satisfaction study of the standard class hotels is a much-needed in progressive cities. This is because standard hotels are necessary infrastructure and support for progress in a city. Hotel industry plays important roles in providing the needed place for rest, entertainment, meetings and the like for guests of the business and tourism industry. Providing the right customer care practices can bring about the most satisfaction to their customers. This can increase the positive image of the city and provide opportunities for growth in the economy of the city.

As the businesses continue to grow so does the opportunities for growth in the standard hotel business. It is important that these hotels should put their resources on the activities that result to customer satisfaction. The practices in the hotel result to increase the costs but may not increase the satisfaction of the customers. This will hurt the hotel’s financial performance and lessen their ability to sustain its operation. Thus, this study is conducted to determine which customer practices can contribute satisfaction in the Front Office department, Housekeeping department, Food and Beverage department, and Security and Maintenance department.

#### Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to identify the customer care practices of the standard hotels in the three cities of Isabela. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the standard class hotels in the three cities of Isabela in terms of:
  - 1.1. Years of operation
  - 1.2. Type of service
  - 1.3. Number of employees
2. To what extent are the customer care practices employed in the following departments?
  - 2.1. Front Office Department
  - 2.2. House keeping Department
  - 2.3. Food and Beverage Department
  - 2.4. Security and Maintenance Department
3. What are the customer care practices that satisfy the guests?
4. Is there significant difference in the extent of customer care practices when grouped according to profile variables?

#### Hypotheses:

There is no significant difference in the extent of customer care practices when grouped according to profile variables.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study used the descriptive method of research to describe the profile, customer care practices and difference in the customer care practices.

### Participant of the Study

The participants were the identified standard hotels in the city of Ilagan, Cauuayan City, and Santiago City

The table below shows the number of employees of the different hotels:

**Table 1. Number of employees in the different hotels**

HOTEL	No. Of EMPLOYEES
Hotel A	35
Hotel B	32

Hotel C	23
Hotel D	29
Hotel E	32
Hotel F	35
Hotel G	31
Hotel H	20
Hotel I	27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>265</b>

**Research Instrument**

The questionnaire was used in this study to gather the data. Part 1 of the questionnaire consisted of questions addressed employees. Part 2 determined the extent to which practices were accorded to the guests

**Data Gathering Procedure**

In gathering the data for this study, the researcher undertook the following:

The data was collected through the informed consent of the hotel employee-participants for the selected standard class hotels in the three cities of Isabela.

The researcher chose 5-experts to validate the self-made questionnaire to find out the reliability of the questions formulated which showed that the content validity index is 0.95.

The researcher distributed the questionnaire to the standard hotel employees/supervisors. This involved questions that helped the researcher look into the hotels’ customer care practices and whether these affect customer satisfaction. The researcher also conducted interviews with participants to verify their answers in the questionnaire. Observation was also done to understand the customer care services of the hotel-participants.

**Analysis of Data**

To interpret the data gathered from the study, the following statistical tools were used:

1. Frequency and percentage count. This were used to analyze the profile of the participants.
2. T-test. This was used to test the significant difference in the level of care practices when grouped according to profile variables
3. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). This was used to test the significant difference according to profile variables.

**III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**1. Profile of the Hotel-Participants**

**Table 2. Profile of the Standard Class Hotels in the Three Cities of Isabela in Terms of Years of Operation, Type of Service, and Number of Employees**

Hotel	Years of Operation	Type of Service	Number of Employees
Hotel A	8	Casual & Fine Dining	35

Hotel B	7	Casual & Fine Dining	32
Hotel C	6	Casual & Fine Dining	23
Hotel D	6	Casual & Fine Dining	29
Hotel E	6	Casual & Fine Dining	32
Hotel F	6	Casual & Fine Dining	35
Hotel G	5	Casual & Fine Dining	31
Hotel H	4	Casual & Fine Dining	20
Hotel I	4	Casual & Fine Dining	27

Table 2 presents the profile of the hotels in terms of years of operation, type of service, and the number of employees. It shows that out of the 9 hotels, hotel A has the longest length of operation with 8 years, hotel B has 7 years in operation, hotel C, D, E, and F have 6 years in operation, and hotel G has 5 years in operation. Hotel H and I have been operating for 4 years. All the nine hotels offer the same types of restaurant service which are casual and fine dining. In terms of the number of employees, hotel A and F have 35 employees; Hotel B and Hotel E have 32 employees; Hotel G has 31 employees; Hotel D has 29 employees; hotel E has 27 employees; Hotel H has 20 employees.

It implies that Hotels A and F have the greatest number of employees while hotel H has the least number.

**2.            Extent of Customer Care Practices Employed in every Department**

**Table 3. The extent of Front Office practices employed by Hotel-participants**

FRONT OFFICE DEPARTMENT	EMPLOYEE	
	Mean	Int.
When the hotel is fully booked, the frontline staff calls up other hotels to help guests find another hotel	3.40	VGE
The staff escorts the guest to the room as your check-in and check-out	3.38	VGE
A number was given to the guests for its turn so they can sit down and do not have to line up in the waiting line	3.35	VGE
The bellboy attendant greets the guests well upon entering the hotel	3.32	VGE
The staff calls the guests by name when having a conversation	3.32	VGE
The staff allows guests things to be left safe in the hotel when they arrive earlier than the check-in time	3.31	VGE
The concierge helps the guest in carrying their things to and from your room	3.30	VGE

Front office staff are both friendly and polite in meeting guest.	3.28	VGE
The staff offers candies, food or drinks while the guest is on the waiting line	3.26	VGE
The hotel gives welcome drink to the guest upon check-in	3.25	VGE
The staff offers or give the guests water while waiting for the booking	3.25	VGE
Attention is given to a person with a disability or sickness	3.23	GE
The staff introduces the guest to all of the facilities & amenities they have in the hotel	3.22	GE
The staff gets a ride for the guest when they need one to keep log the nameplate of the vehicle	3.19	GE
The staff gives newspaper/magazines/something that guests can read while waiting for booking	3.17	GE
The staff gives guest directions of the places they may want to go to the area	3.15	GE
Category Mean	3.25	VGE

Table 3 shows the extent of practices employed in the front office department. The table reveals that the employees are practicing to a very great extent of calling other hotels to help the guest find another hotel when their hotel is fully booked, with the highest mean of 3.40. This is followed by the practice that when the staff escorts the guest to the room as they check-in and check-out with a mean of 3.38 or very great extent practiced. It implies that the level of customer care practices in the Front Office department is rated as Great Extent.

In a hotel, the first communication between the personnel and the guests is the process of checking-in. Accepting guests is done by the Front Office Department. Check-in processes, customer complaints, check-out processes, and post-checkout communication are all done by the Front Office Department. Briefly, in accommodation facilities, the front office is the center of contact between the hotel and the guests and it takes part in satisfying both their needs (Safizadeth, at al. 2003: 557-576; Gökdeniz and Dinç, 2006: 21; Şener, 2011: 2-22; Gray and Liguori, 1994:101-111; Kandampully and Suhartanto: 2000).

**Table 4. The extent of practices employed in the Housekeeping Department**

HOUSEKEEPING DEPARTMENT	EMPLOYEE	
	Int.	Mean
The Housekeeping attendant entertains guest needs in the room	VGE	4.00
The attendant maintains his/her duty to make-up the room	VGE	4.00
Room amenities is complete when the guest enters the room	VGE	4.00
Housekeeping staff entertains for the guest errands	VGE	4.00
Guest feel comfortable on the bedtime	VGE	4.00
There are customer satisfaction feedback forms available	VGE	4.00
Special and caring attention is given to a person with a disability or sickness	VGE	4.00

The room has toiletries for guest consumption	VGE	4.00
The room is extremely cleaned upon guest arrival	VGE	4.00
The staff observes cleanliness	VGE	3.94
The room has a welcome note from the manager on the table of the guest in the room	GE	3.49
There is an extra pillow for guest' comfort	g	3.41
The room has specific instructions on how to use the equipment (cable TV, shower and the like)	VGE	3.10
The room has instruction on the emergency exit.	GE	2.93
Categorical Mean	VGE	3.78

Table 4 shows the extent of practices employed in the housekeeping department. The table reveals that employee-respondents considered the majority of the customer care practices employed in the housekeeping department as “Very Great Extent” with means of 3.41 to 4.00.

**Table 5. The extent of Practices Employed in the Food and Beverage Department**

FOOD AND BEVERAGE DEPARTMENT	EMPLOYEE	
	Mean	Int.
There is a staff welcoming the guests at the door and bringing them to their table.	4.00	VGE
Water is served while guests are waiting for their food	4.00	VGE
A staff warmly introduce to guests the menu well	3.87	VGE
Food is served on time	3.62	VGE
Staff members are joyful, warm and accommodating	3.59	VGE
The staff knows the food and beverage that are be served	3.56	VGE
Food quality is appropriate in their pricing	3.46	VGE
Free appetizer such as nuts are served while guests are waiting for their food	3.26	VGE
The staff members are sensitive to the needs of the guests	3.14	GE
The staff gives the guests a recommendation on which food they can order	3.12	GE
There are seats designed for persons with disabilities, aged and kids	3.11	GE
Staff is prompted to assist when there are utensils or some food that has slipped down	3.10	GE
The staff is calm and helpful when there are emergency cases	3.04	GE
Plates, spoon, and forks are not taken away by the staff while the guest is still eating	2.99	GE
Special and caring attention is given to a person with disability or sickness	2.99	GE
Categorical Mean	3.39	VGE

Table 5 displays the extent of customer care practices employed in the Food and Beverage Department. The table shows that employee-participants rated most of the items as “Very Great Extent” practice with the highest weighted mean of a perfect 4.00 in two of the items which are as follows: the staff welcoming the guests at the door and bringing them to the table; and the practice of serving water to the guests while waiting for their food. The other six practices employed in the Food and Beverage department were also assessed to be practiced at a “Very Great Extent” having the means ranging from 3.26 to 3.87. These include practices of staff on warmly introducing the menu well, food is served on time, staff members are joyful, warm and accommodating; the staff has knowledge on the food and beverage that are served; Food quality is appropriate in pricing; serving of free appetizers while waiting for food to be served.

**Table 6. The extent of practices employed in Security and Maintenance**

<b>SECURITY AND MAINTENANCE DEPARTMENT</b>	<b>EMPLOYEE</b>	
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Int.</b>
Appropriate shifting on their security personnel	4.00	VGE
They provide special security access upon arrival and departing of the guest	4.00	VGE
Doors and windows are protected by security devices like “ram raids”	4.00	VGE
There are working security lighting installed that adequately lights the entry points	4.00	VGE
The hotel has an appropriate check-in/out process for VIP Visitors.	4.00	VGE
The hotel secures guests property at all times.	4.00	VGE
The staff orients guests with the emergency exits.	4.00	VGE
The location is safe and cash counting area is excluded from any publicly displayed plan of the premises, (The area should not be shown on any evacuation plan for public display	4.00	VGE
The hotel informs the guests of the promo sales discount on their website or the guest's email	3.94	VGE
The staff assures the safety of guest in the hotel throughout their stay	3.49	VGE
The hotel provides 24-hour CCTV in every corridor	3.41	VGE
The security personnel are hospitable and not threatening to the customers.	3.10	GE
There are adequate fire extinguishers and are placed in strategic location. There are smoke detectors and sprinklers in every room.	2.93	GE
Categorical Mean	3.76	VGE

Table 6 shows the customer care practices employed in the Security and Maintenance department. As seen on the table, the employee-participants assessed all of the practices in the security and maintenance department as “Very Great Extent”. Majority of the practices obtained a perfect mean of 4.00. These practices are the following: appropriate shifting of security personnel; they provide special security access upon arrival and departing of the guest; doors and windows are protected by security devices like “ram aids”; there are working security lighting that adequately lights the entry points; the hotel has an appropriate check-in/out process for VIP visitors; the hotel secures guests property at all times; the staff orients guests with the emergency exits; and the location is safe and cash counting area is excluded from any public plan of the premises, (The area should not be shown on any evacuation plan for publicly displayed.

**3. Customer Care Practices that Satisfy the Guests**

The Standard Class Hotels consist of the four departments namely Front Office, Housekeeping, Food and Beverage, and Security and Maintenance department. The customer care practices that were identified in the four hotel departments that highly satisfied the guest-participants are as follows: First, the staff gives newspaper/magazines/something that the guest can read while waiting for the booking. Second, the Housekeeping attendant entertains guest needs in the room. Third, housekeeping staff entertains guest errands. Fourth, the room has a specific instruction on how to use the equipment (cable TV, and showers). Fifth, water is served while the guest is waiting for the food. Special attention is given to a person with disability and sickness; plates and spoons are not taken from the guest while they are eating; food is served on time; the staff is calm and helpful when there are emergency cases; and the hotel provides 24-hour CCTV in every corridor were the sixth to 10<sup>th</sup> respective customer practices that satisfied the customer-participants. Moreover, the Food and Beverage department has the most number of higher means of the practices that are satisfying the guests.

**4. Difference in the Level of Practices of Hotel-Participants**

**Table 7. Significant differences in the Extent of Customer Care Practices of the Hotel-Participants when Grouped According to Their Years of Operation**

	Mean	Df	t-ratio	p-value	Decision at 0.05
Front office department	4-6=3.25 7-10=3.22	584	1.362	0.174	Accept Ho
Housekeeping department	4-6=3.26 7-10=3.23	584	1.391	0.165	Accept Ho
Food and beverage department	4-6=3.23 7-10=3.22	584	0.514	0.607	Accept Ho
Security and maintenance department	4-6=3.25 7-10=3.22	584	1.225	0.221	Accept Ho

Table 7 presents the test for a significant difference in the extent of customer care practices of the hotel-participants when grouped according to their years of operation. The table reveals that all the p-values, 0.174, 0.165, 0.607, and 0.221 are greater than 0.05 which means that the null hypotheses are accepted.

This implies that the extent of customer care practices of hotel-participants in the different department does not vary when grouped according to years of operation.

**Table 8. Significant Difference in the Level of Practices of the Hotel-participants when Grouped according to Number of Employees**

	<b>Means</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>t-test</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Decision at 0.05</b>
Front office department	20-29=3.21 30-39=3.25	584	1.994	0.047	Reject Ho
Housekeeping department	20-29=3.28 30-39=3.24	584	1.992	0.047	Reject Ho
Food and beverage department	20-29=3.24 30-39=3.22	584	0.887	0.375	Accept Ho
Security and maintenance department	20-29=3.22 30-39=3.25	584	1.243	0.214	Accept Ho

Table 8 presents the significant difference in the level of practices of the hotel-participants when grouped according to several employees. The computed value of 0.047 has p-values lesser than 0.05 level of significance. These findings revealed the null hypotheses for the level of practices of hotel-participants in front office department and housekeeping department are rejected. However, the p-values of 0.375 and 0.214 are greater than 0.05 in the food and beverage department and security and maintenance department which means that the null hypothesis was accepted.

This implies that the hotel-participants differ on the level of practices in two departments. The other two departments have no significant difference in their level of practices when grouped according to employment.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Customer care practices are similar or different in one way or the other. While it is true that some are similar in food and beverage preparation and service and security and maintenance service, other services may not seem to level or at par with the other services such house keeping and the way the customers are received or accommodated.

#### **V. RECOMMENDATION**

- 1 . The Department of Tourism, educational or training institutions or Hotel management may consider implementing the program for the hotel employees to upgrade their skills in dealing with their customers.
- 2 . The standard hotels may look into the number of employees in their workplace to determine if it is sufficient to promote customer care practices.
- 3 . Standard hotel administration may consider implementing the findings of this study on policy formulation.

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