MASTERS IN MANAGEMENT (MIM)

MASTERS FINAL WORK

INTERNSHIP REPORT

ENHANCHING CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND RETENTION IN THE EVENT MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY: A CASE OF ONYRIA GROUP

SUPERVISOR: PROF. JOANNA KATARZYNA DE SILVEIRA SANTIAGO
MENTOR: ANA SEQUEIRA

LUÍSA PINHO WILSON

OCTOBER – 2024

MASTERS IN MANAGEMENT (MIM)

MASTERS FINAL WORK

INTERNSHIP REPORT

ENHANCHING CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND RETENTION IN THE EVENT MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY: A CASE OF ONYRIA GROUP

LUÍSA PINHO WILSON

JURY:
PRESIDENT: PROF. JOSÉ MANUEL CRISTOVÃO VERISSIMO
RAPPORTEUR: PROF. ANÍBAL ANTÓNIO SÁ DA COSTA LÓPEZ
SUPERVISOR: PROF. JOANNA KATARZYNA DE SILVEIRA SANTIAGO

OCTOBER – 2024

ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry is a rapidly evolving sector that focuses on providing customers with exceptional services, ranging from accommodation and food to event management. In this highly competitive market, building strong customer loyalty and retention has become crucial for long-term business success. Event management, a key area within hospitality, relies on delivering personalised services and creating memorable customer experiences (CX) to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty.

This study examines the strategies employed by the Onyria Group to enhance customer loyalty and retention within the event management sector. The study explores how tailored services, continuous communication, and attention to customer preferences throughout the customer journey contribute to long-lasting client relationships. Furthermore, it assesses the impact of sustainability practices on customer satisfaction, aligning with key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through semi-structured interviews with event coordinators, the research provides insights into the operational approaches that foster customer loyalty, including the need to exceed expectations and create emotional connections. Theoretical and managerial implications highlight the need for implementing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems and loyalty programs to improve client retention in the competitive event management landscape.

Keywords: Hospitality Industry, Event Management, Customer Loyalty, Customer Experience, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Retention, Sustainability, Onyria Group.

RESUMO

A indústria hoteleira é um setor em rápida evolução, focado em oferecer aos clientes serviços excecionais, que vão desde a acomodação e alimentação até à gestão de eventos. Neste mercado altamente competitivo, construir uma forte lealdade e retenção de clientes tornou-se crucial para o sucesso empresarial a longo prazo. A gestão de eventos, uma área chave da hospitalidade, depende da oferta de serviços personalizados e da criação de experiências memoráveis para os clientes (CX), garantindo a satisfação e lealdade do cliente.

Este estudo examina as estratégias usadas pelo Grupo Onyria para aprimorar a lealdade e retenção de clientes no setor de gestão de eventos. O estudo explora como os serviços personalizados, a comunicação contínua e a atenção às preferências dos clientes ao longo da sua jornada contribuem para relacionamentos duradouros com os clientes. Além disso, avalia o impacto das práticas de sustentabilidade na satisfação do cliente, alinhando-se aos principais *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. Através de entrevistas semiestruturadas com coordenadores de eventos, a pesquisa fornece informações sobre as abordagens operacionais que promovem a lealdade dos clientes, incluindo a necessidade de superar expectativas e criar conexões emocionais. As implicações teóricas e gerenciais destacam a necessidade de implementar sistemas de *Customer Relationship Management (CRM)* e programas de fidelização para melhorar a retenção de clientes no competitivo setor de gestão de eventos.

Palavras-chave: Indústria Hoteleira, Gestão de Eventos, Lealdade do Cliente, Experiência do Cliente, Satisfação do Cliente, Retenção do Cliente, Sustentabilidade, Grupo Onyria.

ABBREVIATIONS

CX: Customer Experience

SERVQUAL: Service Quality Model

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

OG: Onyria Group

BEO: Banquet Event Order

F&B: Food and Beverages

SMP: Permanent Medical Services

SMM: Urgent Medical Services

WOM: Word-of-Mouth

CRM: Customer Relationship Management

INDEX

TABLE INDEX

FIGURE INDEX

CHAPTER 1-INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Objectives of the Study

In today's fast-paced and highly competitive event management and hospitality industries, businesses face the constant challenge of not only attracting customers but also retaining them in the long term. Customer loyalty has become a critical success factor, as repeat clients and positive word-of-mouth are key drivers for sustainable business growth (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000; Oliver, 1999). Within this context, the ability to deliver exceptional service and create memorable experiences is more important than ever. It is not just about meeting customer expectations but exceeding them in ways that build emotional connections and foster loyalty (Mascarenhas, Kesavan, & Bernacchi, 2006; Homburg, Jozić, & Kuehnl, 2017).

This study focuses on identifying the key factors that influence customer loyalty and retention in the event management industry, with a specific focus on the Onyria Group, a prominent player in the hospitality sector. By analyzing how personalised service, attention to detail, and continuous communication contribute to positive customer experiences, this research aims to offer valuable insights into how businesses can build long-lasting client relationships (González & Sanz, 2019; Kandampully, Zhang, & Jaakkola, 2018). Additionally, customer satisfaction plays a pivotal role in fostering loyalty, but research indicates that satisfaction alone is not enough; it must be coupled with a deep emotional bond to secure long-term retention (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Kumar & Shah, 2004).

Furthermore, in an era where sustainability is becoming a priority for both companies and consumers, this research will examine how the Onyria Group's commitment to sustainable practices enhances the overall customer experience. Aligning with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12—responsible consumption and production—this study will investigate how integrating sustainability into service delivery positively impacts customer loyalty and retention (Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Morgan, 2013). Sustainability efforts, especially in hospitality and events, have been shown to not only meet regulatory requirements but also appeal to environmentally-conscious consumers (Chen, 2010).

Through a case study approach, semi-structured interviews with key event coordinators will provide in-depth perspectives on the operational strategies that contribute to customer satisfaction and retention. This research will also explore the role of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems and loyalty programs as tools to strengthen client loyalty and improve retention rates in the competitive event management landscape (Melnyk & Bijmolt, 2015; Payne & Frow, 2005).

This internship report provides a comprehensive overview of the experience acquired at Onyria Quinta da Marinha Hotel. The internship involved working with the events department in planning, coordinating, and managing various events hosted by the Onyria Group, alongside two event coordinators. It allowed a hands-on experience in event coordination, by observing and accompanying customers throughout their whole journey, from the beginning until the last phase. Specific tasks included answering event requests, making proposals, attending weekly meetings about future events, planning the event according to the customer's preferences and coordinating the event on the day. The Onyria Group offers several services for events that range from corporate events to meetings, weddings, birthday parties, baptisms or anything the customer might ask for. For that, effecting event coordination was necessary to deliver an exceptional service experience (Walker, 2020).

1.2. Research Objectives

In today's competitive hospitality industry, maintaining customer retention and ensuring loyalty have become more critical than ever. Companies must go beyond offering high-quality products and services by focusing on creating memorable and seamless customer experiences (CX). This is particularly important in the event management sector, where personalised service and attention to detail play a crucial role in achieving customer satisfaction. Research suggests that satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal, return for future business, and recommend the company by sharing positive experiences (Harrison & O'Neill, 2013). Thus, gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that drive customer loyalty and retention is vital for sustaining business growth and success.

Additionally, the customer journey is recognised as a key determinant of customer satisfaction. By thoroughly analysing and refining every interaction along the customer journey, companies can deliver experiences that not only meet but surpass customer

expectations (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Satisfied customers, in turn, tend to display long-term loyalty and commitment to a company (González & Sanz, 2019).

Given these considerations and the need to understand customer retention and loyalty within the context of event management, the main research objective of this study is to identify the critical factors that influence client loyalty and retention.

To achieve this, the study focuses on three specific sub-objectives:

1) To analyze the customer journey in event management – identifying key touchpoints that impact customer satisfaction and contribute to loyalty;
2) To assess the role of customer experience (CX) in fostering customer retention – understanding how personalised service and attention to detail can enhance customer loyalty;
3) To examine the relationship between customer satisfaction and long-term client relationships – exploring how satisfaction translates into loyalty and repeat business.

By addressing these objectives, the research will provide valuable insights into how companies can better meet customer needs and strengthen client retention in the event management industry.

1.3. Structure of the Report

The report is structured into six main chapters that address key aspects of the research and internship experience. This first chapter gives context to the study, with a brief description of the study´s background, including the objectives, problems and questions behind the research as well as its significance. Chapter 2 covers the Literature Review, providing an overview of aspects related to the service industry, such as Understanding and Managing Customer Experience, The Importance of Customer Satisfaction, The Role of Customer Loyalty in Driving Business Success and Growth, Understanding Customer Retention: Building Lasting Relationships, and Navigating the Customer Buying Journey: Phases and Touchpoints. Chapter 3 of the study presents the Company and Internship Overview, presenting detailed information about the Onyria Group, the business sector in which it operates, the main competitors, the products and services provided by the company and a description of the main activities undertaken during the internship. Chapter 4 delves into the Project Development, focusing on the theoretical

side of the study, with the Frame of Reference, Methodological Approach, Data Collection Method, Sample Characteristics, Data Analysis and Results. Chapter 5 addresses the Discussion and Recommendations for the Company, examining the study´s findings and giving insights for future improvements in the company. Chapter 6 is the final chapter of the study with the Conclusions, highlighting the study´s implications, recognizing its limitations and making recommendations for future research and upgrades.

CHAPTER 2-LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Customer Buying Journey: Phases and Touchpoints

The customer buying journey encompasses the entire process that a potential consumer goes through, involving various phases and touchpoints that shape their overall experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This journey includes stages where customers consider, evaluate, select, and ultimately consume different alternatives (Court et al., 2016). It is viewed as a cyclical process, meaning that the concluding phase of the experience influences the subsequent pre-purchase period (Hu & Olivieri, 2020). Throughout this journey, customers interact with the company across multiple touchpoints; however, only a limited number of these are within the company's control (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Touchpoints are defined as individual communications between the customer and the company (Homburg et al., 2017; Schmitt, 2003) and can be categorized into four types (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The first type includes brand-owned touchpoints, which the company fully controls, such as its social media presence and marketing mix. The second category encompasses partner-owned touchpoints, which involve collaborations between the company and its partners. The third category consists of customer-owned touchpoints that fall outside the company's influence, such as a customer´s personal social media. Lastly, external touchpoints include third-party information sources, such as reviews from other customers. Interactions between the customer and the company generate various responses, including behavioural, cognitive, emotional, spiritual, social, and sensory reactions (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Throughout their journey, customers exhibit multiple responses (Norton & Pine, 2013), leading to different experiences at various stages of interaction (Stein & Ramaseshan, 2019). The number of stages and touchpoints in a customer journey can differ significantly depending on the nature of the journey (Pantouvakis & Gerou, 2022).

According to marketing studies, managing the customer journey is positive for both the company and its customers (Court et al., 2009; Hamilton & Price, 2019; Homburg et al., 2017; Kuehnl et al., 2019; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Trujillo Torres & DeBerry-Spence, 2019; Siebert et al., 2020). Whenever a customer journey is considered successful, better results and key outcomes are associated, like profitability, customer

satisfaction, word of mouth, customer loyalty and customer lifetime value (Court et al., 2009; Homburg et al., 2017; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The customer journey can be divided into three main phases: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The prepurchase stage covers the customer´s interaction with the company, category, and environment before the purchase. It includes the customer's journey from the moment they recognise a need, desire, or impulse until they decide to fulfil it by purchasing (Hoyer 1984; Pieters, Baumgartner & Allen 1995). The purchase stage involves all customers contacting the brand and its surroundings during the purchase. It is marked by behaviours like choosing, ordering, and paying (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The post-purchase stage occurs right after the purchase where usage and consumption, post-purchase interaction, and service requests are examples of behaviours. In other words, the stage includes elements of the customer's post-purchase experience that are directly related to the brand, product, or service. At this point, the product becomes a crucial touchpoint (Pantouvakis & Gerou, 2022). Studies about this stage centred on different purchase and nonpurchase behaviours, and more recently on loyalty (Court et. Al, 2009), speculating that a trigger might happen. They are leading to customer loyalty by making another purchase or having further engagement or restarting the process all over again where the customer goes back to the prepurchase phase and evaluates their options (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

All aspects considered, it is up to the companies to identify key elements of each stage by comprehending the company and the customer's view of the journey. Furthermore, they should identify the specific touchpoints that arise along the journey and try to understand what triggers customers to decide whether to keep purchasing (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

2.2. Understanding and Managing Customer Experience

Organizations must understand the concept of customer experience (CX) and its significance throughout service interactions to succeed and surpass their competitors (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Voorhees, 2017). CX is tied to the customer journey and reflects how a customer feels and engages with a business or brand across the entire journey, from the initial stages of awareness and consideration to the actual purchase and post-sale support (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). Recent research highlights that the main

challenge in delivering an exceptional customer experience lies in connecting all these touchpoints in the customer journey to achieve positive outcomes, such as satisfaction, loyalty, and enhanced well-being (Edelman & Singer, 2015; Lemon & Verhoef et al., 2016; Rawson, Duncan, & Jones, 2013; Voorhees et al., 2017).

The experience usually starts with the communication between the customer and the company, causing a response (Nobar & Rostamzadeh, 2018) and happens when customers search for and possibly buy items or experience a service or even both (Brakus et al., 2009). In addition, customer experience is the result of the direct and indirect relations, and the cognitive and affective evaluations of the company by the customer, connected to the consumers' buying behaviour (Klaus & Maklan, 2013).

There are several approaches to planning, executing, and managing customer experience (CX). One approach is from the company's perspective, where the business designs and curates an experience for the customer to enjoy (Berry, Carbone & Haeckel, 2002; Stuart & Tax, 2004). Another perspective is the customer's point of view (Schmitt, 2011). Additionally, CX can be viewed from a co-creation standpoint, which recognizes the customer's active role in shaping the experience while considering it as the result of interactions with other actors in a broader ecosystem (Chandler & Lusch, 2015; De Keyser et al., 2015; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003).

The overall customer experience consists of various encounters (Schembri, 2006) that consumers interpret through their own reasoning (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2015), encompassing social, emotional, behavioral, sensory, and cognitive dimensions (Schmitt, 1999, 2003; Verhoef et al., 2009). However, an experience can also be linked to specific service attributes, such as brand (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009) or technology (McCarthy & Wright, 2004). These experiences are shaped by distinct interactions, or touchpoints, between the company and the customer throughout their journey.

Usually, researchers measure the customer experience by using two variables, customer satisfaction and service quality (Adhikari & Bhattacharya, 2016). This experience can positively or negatively mark the customers, depending on their situation and, consequently, result in their satisfaction. The ones who make a positive judgment are said to be satisfied (Meyer & Schwager, 2007).

An unforgettable and positive experience enhances customer satisfaction (Raina et al., 2019). This means that the customer´s level of satisfaction increases with the

happiness they get from the products or services (Sharma et al., 2016). Alternative reason why customer experiences increase customer satisfaction levels is related to the fact that customers value the special experiences that their service providers offer when observing their behavioural patterns. This, successively, leads to further improved business performance (Cajestan, 2018).

Customer loyalty is directly related to customer experiences, which means that as the value of the customers´ experience increases, their loyalty also rises. (Biedenbach & Marell, 2010). Furthermore, customer loyalty is normally seen as a consequence of a certain customer's experiences when interacting with the product or service supplier (Mascarenhas, Kesavan, & Bernacchi, 2006). These experiences can vary from value chain moments to physical or emotional interactions. (Mascarenhas, 2006). The experience itself can be defined as an interaction that combines relational, behavioural, emotional, and cognitive components of the services received (Jain et al., 2017).

Some organisations are managing service touchpoints and the client experience through engaging online or physical platforms, leveraging "engaging stories" from their customer encounters to enhance their service design and offerings (Anderl, Becker, Von Wangenheim, & Schumann, 2016; Barwitz & Maas, 2018; Kranzbühler, Klejinen, Morgan, & Teerling, 2017; Mahrous & Hassan, 2017).

Customer experience can be seen as a dualist concept since experiences can be considered ordinary or extraordinary. The term "extraordinary "describes anything new, distinct and memorable (Dewey, 1963; LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Mossberg, 2008; Pine & Gilmore, 1999) that allows customers to submerge or transcend themselves in the experience completely (Schouten et al., 2007), happening from time to time (Hanefors & Mossberg, 2003). It has become a multisensory phenomenon that evokes strong emotional engagement, pleasure, and significance (Brakus et al., 2009). These experiences typically occur in service scenarios (Bitner et al., 1994) or a firm-related context (Mascarenhas et al., 2006), throughout a particular service procedure or a prolonged service interaction (Arnould & Price, 1993). That way, research on customer delight (Oliver et al., 1997) emphasises that companies should not only provide a satisfactory experience but go beyond that to give an extraordinary experience as well.

On the opposite side of the extraordinary experience there are the ordinary experiences (Carù & Cova, 2003; Sussman & Alter, 2012), which are frequently familiar

(Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Quan & Wang, 2004), practical (Sandströmet al.,2008), basic and convenient (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2013). Thus, they are sometimes taken for granted (Belk,1989). In some way, these experiences become part of routine duties (Heinonen et al., 2010) and regularly appear in the customers´ daily lives and surroundings (Helkkula & Kelleher, 2010).

All aspects considered, when experiencing a service, a company aims to deliver superior value in order to develop those two behavioural outcomes, customer satisfaction and loyalty (Cronin et al., 2000, Yang and Peterson, 2004, Gallarza and Saura, 2006, Kesari and Atulkar, 2016).

2.3. The Importance of Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction occurs when a product or service meets or exceeds a customer's expectations (Leninkumar, 2017; Oliver & Linda, 1981). This concept is essential for a company's success and competitive edge (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997). In simple terms, customer satisfaction greatly impacts a company's revenue, as satisfied customers are more likely to spend more (Nisar & Prabhakar, 2017) and help the business sustain operations (Forozia et al., 2013).

Satisfaction arises when customers evaluate a product or service after consumption, comparing their actual experience with the expected value (Khokhar et al., 2011). Measuring customer satisfaction is challenging for companies because of customers' unique needs, behaviors, and satisfaction levels (Maiyaki et al., 2011). Satisfied customers tend to recommend the company and its offerings to others and can overlook minor inconveniences, remaining loyal due to their confidence in the brand (Yeung & Ennew, 2000). For companies, ensuring customer satisfaction is crucial, as it leads to long-term benefits such as sustained profitability, positive word-of-mouth, and customer loyalty (Greenwell et al., 2002; Liu & Jang, 2009). On the other hand, dissatisfaction leads to complaints and negative feedback, which may discourage potential customers from choosing the company (Arslan, 2020). Dissatisfied customers may refuse to repurchase, lodge complaints, or even seek consumer protection (Arslan, 2020).

Customer satisfaction is the foundation of loyalty. To achieve customer loyalty, a company must first ensure satisfaction (Schultz & Bailey, 2000; Caruana, 2002;

Chumpitaz & Paparoidamis, 2004). Although distinct, the two concepts are closely related—loyalty results from satisfaction (Gelade & Young, 2005; Silvestro & Cross, 2000). Customer loyalty reflects the ongoing relationship with a company based on past interactions (Brunner, Stöcklin, & Opwis, 2008), and customer retention and loyalty cannot be achieved without first satisfying the customer (Maroco & Maroco, 2013; Sarwar et al., 2012).

Indeed, numerous marketing studies have shown that customer satisfaction is one of the most common factors influencing client loyalty (Flint, Blocker, & Boutin, 2011; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001; Tsai, Tsai, & Chang, 2010). Nevertheless, the fact that a customer is satisfied after a purchase, does not imply a future purchase. Achieving customer satisfaction becomes a secondary objective that the business must accomplish to fulfil its main goal (Tam, 2004). Consequently, guaranteeing a customer's loyalty takes more than satisfaction, since their perception might be low. Because of that, an emotional attachment is necessary (Arslan, 2020).

To accomplish customer loyalty, it is necessary to attend to all the customers´ needs before and after purchases, to prevent unhappiness by fixing any issues related to the product or service, and to handle complaints (Lee & Cunningham, 2011) successfully. When the customers´ level of satisfaction with the company grows, their intention to repurchase the products and loyalty also rise (Anderson et al., 1994).

All facts observed, we can say that it is conceivable to get satisfaction without loyalty, but the opposite is not feasible (Arokiasamy, 2013).

2.4. The Role of Customer Loyalty in Driving Business Success and Growth

Today, companies face significant challenges in thriving within highly competitive markets, making it increasingly difficult to attract and retain customers. Consequently, fostering customer loyalty has become essential, as it drives revenue, improves sales performance, and supports sustainable growth (Bhat, 2022). Customer loyalty serves not only as an effective marketing tool for engaging directly with customers but also as a key indicator of a company's overall performance (Vilkaite-Vaitone & Skackauskiene, 2020).

First, the concept itself must be understood to understand its importance. Loyalty can be defined as the regularity at which a customer consistently selects the same product, service, or company (Zeithalm, 1996). Repurchasing the good or service further on,

sticking with the same supplier, and extending the contract are all examples of loyalty (Selnes, 1993).

Undoubtedly, customer loyalty depends on whether a service takes place or not. If so, the company creating loyalty is the one who is offering the service (Vilkaite-Vaitone & Skackauskiene, 2020).

Furthermore, customer loyalty refers to the customers' willingness to repurchase goods from a certain company. This attitude is affected by the customers´ cognitive, emotional, and behavioural antecedents, as well as by situational circumstances and social norms (Srai & Lorentz, 2019).

In other words, customer loyalty occurs when a customer chooses one business over its rivals, by making a repeated purchase. This can be justified by a customer´s positive emotional interaction with a specific company, resulting in a connection between both (Yoo & Chang, 2005).

According to Day (1969), the behavioural dimension is not enough to differentiate between genuine and fake loyalty, arguing that customer loyalty should be examined through both dimensions. It was not perceptible whether frequent purchases were merely motivated by convenience or financial rewards, or if customers genuinely keep a loyalty mindset. So, to understand this multi-dimensional concept, we can separate loyalty into two dimensions: attitudinal and behavioural (Homberg & Gierining, 2001). The first shows the customers´ commitment by assessing the customer's desire to choose a specific type of service to maintain a connection with the service providers. And the second dimension refers to the frequency of a customer´s purchases and their passion for a specific brand, based on the number of purchases.

Loyal customers boost profitability since they buy more, are less sensitive to price changes and promote the company to others (Wilkins, 2010). It is improbable that they are going for another company because of the price (Bowen & Chen, 2001) and that they make their recommendations through word of mouth, directing their relatives to the business. This type of customer is the least expensive and the most lucrative for companies (Phau & Sari, 2004).

Hence, customer loyalty is significant because obtaining new customers is more expensive than keeping loyal ones (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). Because of this,

companies attempt to deliver flawless and superior products and services, to win over their customers´ loyalty (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006). As a result, the importance of holding onto loyal customers is the same, if not more than getting new ones (Boroujerdi & Husin, 2021).

Taking that into account, customer loyalty is seen as one of the existing and future measurements of a company´s success, considered one of the most desirable goals for companies (Arslan, 2020) since customer loyalty substantially enhances business profitability (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Gould, 1995; Reichheld, 1996). This goal does not come at ease for companies, therefore, it implies a big investment in effort, resources, and time (Iozgo, 2017; Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016; Tseng et al., 2017). Most of these resources are invested in human resources management (Chiang et al., 2018) for their beneficial development, justified by the importance of loyalty in the company´s profitability.

Customer loyalty is significant in attaining long-term financial results and competitive advantage (Grönroos, 2009). Those economic results help the company improve its relationships with the customers and grant the acquisition of new customers at a lower cost (Arslon, 2020).

Indeed, a business's ongoing survival is linked to its customers' loyalty. It is an important step businesses must take to achieve maturity (John, 2011). It can be achieved by identifying, planning, and fulfilling customers' demands (Gul, 2014). Besides, customer loyalty is also responsible for a company´s growth and productivity since it encourages continuous purchases of products and services over an extended period (Khokhar et al., 2011).

2.5. Customer Retention: Building Lasting Relationships

Customer retention refers to the ongoing relationship between a customer and a company (Ibojo & Asabi, 2015). It is assessed by evaluating the effectiveness of two-way communication that a business employs to foster and maintain its customer relationships (Kaguri, 2016). To ensure customer retention, maintaining customer satisfaction is crucial (Bowen & Chen, 2001), which can be achieved through regular communication and actively seeking customer feedback (Alhassan, 2016). Managers can evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing strategies to gauge customer retention levels (Lombared,

2012). Retaining customers is fundamentally about delighting them (Oliver et al., 1997; Liu & Keh, 2015). However, it is important to note that satisfied customers may still consider switching to competitors (Chang et al., 2013; Sumaedi et al., 2014). Therefore, customers who are delighted with their experiences are more inclined to remain loyal to companies that provide superior service. Moreover, customer retention can be viewed as a strategic approach to keep existing customers from shifting to competitors. For effective retention, a positive relationship between the customer and the business is essential. When a company's basic needs are met, customers are more likely to stay loyal and less inclined to explore alternatives (Al-Gasawneh & Dalain, 2023).

Customer retention can be generated and perpetuated through effective customer conflict resolution (Ndubisi, 2007). Handling conflicts is a method of repairing and developing long-term customer relationships (Egan, 2004), which can lead to customer retention or customers choosing a competitor (Ndubisi & Wah, 2005). Besides, whenever the conflict is successfully dealt with, customer satisfaction and retention are significantly impacted (Homburg & Furst, 2005).

CHAPTER 3-COMPANY AND INTERNSHIP OVERVIEW

3.1. Presentation of the Company

Founded approximately thirty years ago, the Onyria Group is a family company that manages hotels, villas, golf courses, restaurants, and later nursing homes. The name of the group is from Greek, and it means dream, which is justified by the integrated management that is done in the spirit of a multigenerational aspiration to provide the finest experiences possible and to preserve special moments (Onyria, 2024).

In keeping with the concept of quality of life, the group owns the SMP- Permanent Medical Service, Premium Selection- Senior Living and the Senior *Residence Professora Doutora Mª Ofélia Ribeiro* (Onyria, 2024).

Everything began in 1986 when José Carlos Pinto Coelho purchased a piece of property in *Quinta da Marinha, Cascais*. Being the "cradle" and Onyria Headquarters, the Onyria Quinta da Marinha Hotel represents a significant turning point in the history of the Group because it was the first significant initiative in the field of hotel management (Onyria, 2024).

Nowadays, the group includes the family's second generation and aims to improve people's quality of life by providing memorable experiences in dreamy settings (Onyria, 2024).

3.1.1. Vision, Mission and Values

Onyria Group´s wants to be the "preferred choice", the place where people feel safe and want to be. Their mission is to provide possibilities and dream experiences for all their partners and employees in order to add value for each and every member of the Onyria Family. In all their projects, the Group value Dreamers who are honest, authentic, family driven, available, ambitious, confident and have team spirit. All these characteristics fulfil their main purpose, which is taking care of their company, and the individuals involved in order to generate long-term wealth. (Onyria, 2024)

3.1.2. Environmental Policy and Social Responsibility

Recently, the Onyria Group has made several changes in order to improve its sustainability.

Starting in 2010 with the use of rainwater for irrigation of the golf course, which was mostly accumulated in the lakes (Onyria, 2024). The *Onyria Quinta da Marinha Hotel* had an Eco-Hotel Certification by TUV Rheinland, between 2011 and 2014. From 2011 to 2018, a partnership was made with the World Wildlife Fund to support the Green Heart of Cork, a project that works to conserve the world's largest cork oak forest (*Associação Natureza Portugal*, 2024). Earth Hour Event was another partnership made with WWF, from 2012 to 2018, known worldwide as the "lights off" moment that consists of turning off non-essential electric lights for 1 hour, from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m., on the last Saturday of March, as a symbol of commitment to the planet (Earth Hour, 2024).

The spread of environmental messages started in 2014, with promotional actions concerning the celebration of international and national ecological days. The golf course irrigation system was improved in 2019 and is now managed by new satellites that are precisely timed to water the course. In 2020, the hotel lighting was replaced by LED. A year later, a new configuration of the PMS system allowed the removal of all paper used on the reservation procedure and they installed chargers for electric cars. Resulting in a more efficient charging system for the hotel´s buggies, in the following year. Also in 2022, it was implemented on the driving range of autonomous electric robots to catch the balls, reducing the number of Buggy turns when catching the balls (Onyria, 2024).

Besides these environmental changes, 80% of the plants in the hotel are real and the use of recycled materials such as wood and bamboo are prioritized. Because of the photovoltaic panels installed in 2022 on the roof, the hotels save up to 30% of electricity. Lastly, the water bottles used in the restaurants, bars, meeting rooms and complimentary waters in the rooms were changed that year to a filtered water system with reusable bottles (Onyria, 2024).

Furthermore, the Onyria Group also shows their concern in social matters. As an example, we can see that the Group created the Onyria Running Challenge when in 2014 a 22-year-old employee discovered he had leukemia. This solidarity challenge consists of a 10 km fundraising race to support a fellow worker, and later on the Group managed to financially support the Portuguese Association Against Leukemia (Onyria, 2024).

The *Onyria Quinta da Marinha Hotel* is part of the exclusive collection of Great Hotels of the World, it is one of sixty around the world and one in eight hotels in Portugal to be part of this portfolio. The company links hotels with tour operators, travel agencies, and individual tourists by offering marketing, sales, and distribution services (Great Hotels of the World, 2024).

As a result, it is notable that, throughout the years, the Onyria Group has improved their environmental policy and social responsibility, contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), that aim to compel companies to participate alongside other interested parties (SDG Compass Guide, 2020; Malay, 2021). Therefore, it is noteworthy that SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production SDG 13 – Climate Action and SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals (United Nations, 2024).

3.2. Business Sector and Main Competitors

3.2.1. Business Sector

The Onyria Group belongs to the tertiary sector and is present in different industries. First, in the hospitality industry, the Onyria Group has a Resort in Cascais with Villas and two hotels, the *Onyria Quinta da Marinha Hotel* and the *Onyria Marinha Boutique Hotel,* with a golf course in between. They also have a *House in Estoril* that can accommodate guests in Estoril (Onyria, 2024).

As a complement to the first, the Group has four restaurants spread through Portugal, one in the south *Monte Mar Lagos* and the other in the capital *Monte Mar Cascais, Monte Mar Time Out* and *Monte Mar Lisboa* (Onyria, 2024).

In addition, the partnership with the German brand, Engel & Volkers, allows the Group to offer a differential type of service in the real estate market. More specifically, it is for the residential and commercial parts in the premium and luxury segment (Onyria, 2024).

More recently, the Group integrated the healthcare industry, with the SMP - Permanent Medical Service that acquired the Senior Residence *Professora Doutora*

Maria Ofélia Ribeiro in 2023, the Premium Selection - Senior Living Quality Brand for
Nursing Homes, SMM to provide medical assistance in Madeira (Onyria, 2024).

In conclusion, the hospitality industry is the Group´s starting point and, therefore,
its most relevant sector. However, in the last years, the Group has been spreading, through
other industries such as the restaurant, real estate and healthcare industries.

3.2.2. Main Competitors

Competitors can change according to distinct factors, such as location, services provided
and target market. Location plays an important advantage for the accommodation industry
when comparing businesses (Adam & Amuquandoh, 2014; Yang, Luo, & Law, 2014).
Customers' priority and perceptions of performance about key service features determine
quality (Martilla and James, 1997).   The factor of target market occurs upon the
segmentation of part of the traveller populations, chosen to be served by an organisation,
because of their similar attributes (Kotler & Amstrong, 2010).

Since the Onyria Group has more than one type of business, we must separate this
analysis into every kind of industry to better identify the main competitors.

Keeping this in mind, in the hospitality industry, the resort has as its main
competitors the *Penha Longa Resort* and *The Oitavos*, since both are luxury resorts with
golf courses. Suppose we look into the resort itself, one of the hotels is a boutique hotel
which makes us consider another competitor, the *Farol Hotel*. These competitors are
luxury hotels in the Cascais region that offer similar services. The three-star *A House in
Estoril* directly competes with the *Londres Estoril Hotel*.

Regarding the competition of the *Monte Mar Restaurants*, it depends on their
location. *Monte Mar Cascais Restaurant's* main competitors are *Furnas do Guincho
Restaurant* and *Mar Do Inferno Restaurant*. In Lisbon, there are two other restaurants,
one of them is located in Time Out Market and its competitors are the Sea Me Restaurant
and the *Marisqueira Azul Restaurant*, the other one is next to the Sea *Marisqueira Ibo
Restaurant. Monte Mar Lagos* competition is the *O Camilo Restaurant*. In terms of
competition, all the restaurants are seafood-oriented, with a prestige service and a sea
view, excluding the one in Time Out Market and its competitors.

Engel & Volkers, partners of the OG, have their main competitors Sotheby´s and *Porta da Frente*. Although headquartered in different locations, they are prestigious real estate agencies that operate in Portugal.

Lastly, about the healthcare industry, the Senior Residence *Professora Doutora Maria Ofélia Ribeiro* competition is the Residence *Montepio* and Residence *Orpea* which offer similar services, however, Onyria stands out because they blend luxury hospitality with medical care. The group also provides two different healthcare services the SMP and the SMM clinic in Funchal that offer home medical assistance and general medical appointments (Onyria, 2024), both competing with *Lusíadas*.

3.3. Products and Services

The Onyria Group provides various products and services in luxury hotels and villas. The main is accommodation services that include complimentary products, also known as amenities and noncomplimentary products. As well as fine dining services, from breakfast to lunch to dinner to snacks and drinks for every type of situation. In the resort, it is possible to enjoy spa services and acquire spa-related products, on both hotels. There is also the possibility of hosting all types of events in the hotel's venues and meeting rooms, from weddings, birthday parties, conferences, product launches, and other special occasions. Besides this, in the golf store, the Group allows guests and external customers to book classes, play golf on the course, participate in tournaments, or buy golf-related products.

The Onyria Group offers a wide range of interconnected services across various sectors. In real estate, their Engel & Völkers stores in Cascais and Lagos specialize in providing luxury services, helping clients find high-end accommodations and exclusive properties.

On the healthcare side, the Group offers a variety of services both in their four facilities and directly at clients' homes. These include occupational medicine, rehabilitation, elderly care, in-home medical support, nursing services, and assisted living accommodations (Onyria, 2024).

For dining experiences, customers can enjoy fine meals at Monte Mar Restaurants, which also cater to private events.

Overall, the Onyria Group delivers a cohesive portfolio of premium services and products that complement each other across these sectors.

3.4. Internship Scope and Main Activities

From 1st October 2023 until 31st January 2024, the internship was with the Onyria Group, more specifically, in events coordination, which integrates the Food and Beverage Department (F&B). The main office was in *Onyria Quinta da Marinha Hotel,* however, since this was an efficient job, it involved getting out of the office to other parts of the resort.

The internship consisted of coordinating different types of events. Different event management styles were experienced since the team that coordinated events without accommodation consisted of two members. The first was my internship supervisor, who was responsible for orientating and supervising my journey during the internship. The second was an event coordinator who would take this responsibility when my orientation was absent. Table 1 shows the main activities undertaken during the internship.

Table 1 - Internship Main Activities

Weekly Tasks	Daily Responsibilities	• Answering requests on *Casamentos.pt* and Zank you. • Taking care of event process phases.
	Monday Priorities	• Follow-up on sent proposals for event requests without feedback.
	Wednesdays	• BEO Meeting with event coordinators and heads of departments to explain and align upcoming events.
	Guests Interactions	• Handling scheduled or unexpected visits from guests who wanted to see the venues and meeting rooms available for the events.
Event Process	Initial Request	• Received from customers via email, phone call, or in person.
	Proposal	• Personalised proposal according to the request.
	Contract and Budget	• The contract and budget defined previously are sent via email.
	Event Confirmation	• Signing the contract and making the first payment confirmed the event.
	BEO and CAPA	• Upon the event confirmation, the BEO and CAPA with all event details were prepared and sent to hotel teams for their organization. • Most of the time it was necessary to make changes. Every time that happened the teams were informed via email.

	Event Day	- Most events took place on the weekends, except some corporate events. - Event coordinators were not present during the whole event which required trusting their team workers of other departments. - Collaboration with different departments, like F&B, Housekeeping, and Maintenance, to ensure smooth event operation. - Double-checking details to ensure all event setups were aligned with the guests' preferences on the day of the event.
	Follow Up	- After the event, follow up with clients to gather feedback on their experience and address any concerns. - Ensure all payments are completed, review the final invoice and send it to clients. - Gather any internal feedback with hotel teams to evaluate the event´s success and discuss improvements for future events.
	Maintaining ongoing communication with the customers via email, or WhatsApp with guests was crucial through all these phases to make changes and adjustments.	

Source: own elaboration

CHAPTER 4-PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

4.1. Frame of Reference

The figure illustrates a flowchart that explains the process of retaining customers which is divided into three phases. The first phase includes the inputs, Customer Journey and CX, including all the touchpoints the customers encounter along their journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The middle phase is Customer Satisfaction which is determined by the quality of both the journey and experience that customers have with a company (Fornell et al., 1996). Once customer satisfaction is achieved, the final phase starts, consisting of the outcomes of Customer Loyalty and Customer Retention (Oliver, 1999). In summary, the three phases include the inputs (Customer Journey and CX) that shape how customers feel, Customer Satisfaction as the key outcome of those experiences and the outputs (Customer Loyalty and Retention) that demonstrate the long-term success of meeting customers' needs.
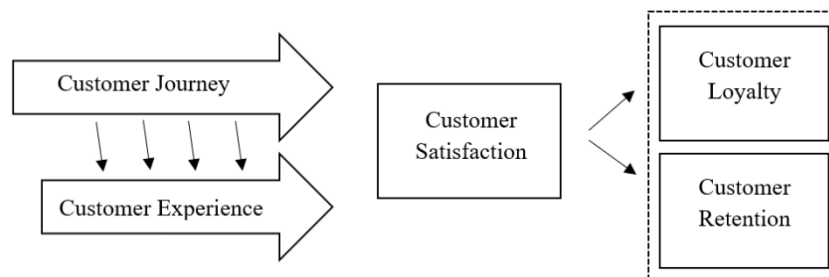

Figure 1 - Customer Retention Process

Source: Own Elaboration

The frame of reference of this study took into consideration some of the five generic service quality dimensions from the SERVQUAL model upon the elaboration of the interview questions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988). To better understand the event coordinators´ perspectives about the capacity to deliver reliable and precise service, the employees´ values and trustworthiness, the extent of care and personalised attention the company offers to its customers and the desire to respond to the consumers´ requests and provide prompt services, when elaborating the interviews questions, it was considered the following SERVQUAL dimensions: Reliability, Assurance, Empathy and Responsiveness, respectively (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Table 2 shows the frame of reference for this study.

Table 2 - Frame of Reference

	Definition	Authors	Interview Questions
Customer Journey	• Process a potential consumer undergoes, through all phases and touchpoints, that create the overall experience. • Is viewed as a cyclical process; therefore, the latter phase of the experience precedes the subsequent pre-purchase period	• Lemon & Verhoef, 2016 • Hu, L. & Olivieri, M., 2020	• What was the most challenging stage of the customer journey? • Can you explain how you assisted the customer, during their journey?
Customer Experience	• Tied to the customer journey and reflects how a customer feels and engages with a business or brand across the entire journey, from the initial stages of awareness and consideration to the actual purchase and post-sales support.	• Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020	• What does customer experience mean to you? • How did you ensure customers had a positive experience?
Customer Satisfaction	• Occurs when a customer's expectations of a product or service are met or surpassed. • Satisfaction occurs after customers consume a certain product or experience a specific service, comparing the actual experience versus the expected utility of the product.	• Leninkumar, 2017; Oliver & Linda, 1981 • Khokhar et al., 2011	• What steps did you take when you feel the customer is not satisfied?
Customer Loyalty	• Regularity at which a customer consistently selects the same product, service, or company. • Customers' willingness to repurchase goods from a certain company. This attitude is affected by the customers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural antecedents, as well as by situational circumstances and social norms. • The behavioural dimension was insufficient to differentiate between genuine and fake loyalty, arguing that customer loyalty should be examined through both dimensions.	• Zeithaml, 1996 • Srai & Lorentz, 2019 • Day, 1969	• What type of strategies did you use when dealing with customers? • What are the key factors that make a customer choose to do the event in the hotel? • How was the communication with the customer after the event?
Customer Retention	• Describes the persistence of a relationship between a customer and a company. • Is measured by observing the level of two-way communication a business utilises to maintain its customer relationship. • Results from delighting a customer.	• Ibojo & Asabi, 2015 • Kaguri, 2016 • Oliver et al., 1997; Liu & Keh, 2015	• Did you have any strategies to keep customers coming back to do more events in the hotel?

Source: own elaboration

All aspects considered, the main goal of this process is to perceive the key elements that lead to customer retention/loyalty, from the perspective of event

coordinators. To achieve this, some sub-goals have been established. First, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the customer journey provided by the company. Second, it seeks to explore and make conclusions about CX. Lastly, the study aims to comprehend Customer Satisfaction.

4.2. Methodological Approach

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the study. It also describes the instruments and methods employed to gather and analyse data.

A qualitative approach was used to investigate the experiences and perspectives of event coordinators, providing a detailed understanding of their functions, challenges and strategies for handling events and ensuring customer satisfaction. This type of approach is appropriate for investigating complex topics where deep knowledge is essential.

In order to ensure a logical structure for all aspects of the research process, the study was based on the Research Onion. Each layer of the onion corresponds to a stage that must be taken into account when planning research (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 108). The analysis of each layer is broken out as follows.

The interpretive philosophy used in the study is consistent with qualitative research since it is centred on understanding the subjective experiences and points of view of the Interviewees. Therefore, the objective was to dive deeper into their perspectives of their lived experiences, understanding the meaning behind their methods, strategies and challenges in event management.

Regarding the approach, an inductive approach was followed. Instead of using a predefined theory, this study intended to develop an understanding based on the knowledge gathered in the interviews. Normally, in qualitative research using this type of research helps reach the goal of generating patterns and themes from the raw data rather than testing preconceived hypotheses.

The primary strategy implemented was the first steps of action research where two event coordinators were chosen. The fact that they were directly involved in planning and managing events, enabled the examination of their responsibilities, methods and challenges in detail. The selection of this strategy enabled the collection of rich and contextual data in a real-world setting.

The research method applied in the study was the mono-method where the only focus was the gathering and examination of qualitative data. The primary data collection method used was semi-structured interviews. The interview followed a set of pre-planned questions and, the use of a semi-structured format gave the flexibility to explore new subjects as they emerged throughout the conversation. This flexibility is a key strength of the qualitative approach, which allows the participants to share unique insights and experiences, which transcribe into detailed data to be used in the study. The interview script was cautiously prepared to cover fundamental aspects of event coordination, such as the coordinators´ responsibilities, their strategies for guaranteeing customer satisfaction and the challenges they go through. The use of open-ended questions encouraged the participants to talk about their experiences and thoughts in their own words, which resulted in a more genuine and comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. This method harmonized with the interpretivist philosophy and inductive approach of the study.

The data was gathered at a particular moment in time, following a cross-sectional time horizon. The interviews with the event coordinators were conducted once, documenting their perspectives and experiences as they were until that time.

4.3. Data Collection Method

The primary data collection method used was semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with two event coordinators, chosen for their direct involvement in event planning and management. Covering key areas like the coordinators´ responsibilities, their challenges, and strategies for guaranteeing customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the data collected from the interviews were examined using thematic analysis, where the responses were identified and categorized as recurring themes and patterns. This method allowed the methodical examination of the main issues faced by the event coordinators and to come to meaningful conclusions about their strategies and practices regarding customer satisfaction throughout their journey.

All in all, this study used an interpretivist, qualitative technique with an inductive reasoning process, based on the Research Onion framework (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 108). The use of semi-structured interviews and a thematic analysis allowed to seize the

complexity of the event coordinators´ experiences, offering comprehensive knowledge that may guide future investigation and practice in the field of event management.

4.4. Data Collection Procedures

As it was mentioned before, this study primarily relied on qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews. The participants gave detailed insights into their roles, responsibilities, challenges and strategies for guaranteeing customer satisfaction when planning and managing events.

The interviews were conveniently scheduled according to the participants' convenience. A safe and comfortable environment was provided so that participants could speak openly and freely. To guarantee the data accuracy, the conversations were recorded, with the participants´ permission, and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

This procedure was carefully done allowing a thorough examination of the data, using a thematic analysis. Firstly, the participants´ responses were identified and, later, categorized into themes and patterns. This systematic examination of the main issues allows for making meaningful conclusions about the event coordinators´ strategies when ensuring customer satisfaction.

The study´s emphasis on semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis allowed the collection of broad and qualitative data that offered insightful information on event coordination that would not be achieved through quantitative methods alone.

4.5. Sample Characteristics

The sample used for this study includes two female event coordinators, both of whom have significant experience in event management. Both Interviewees have already left the company and are currently in another company. Interviewee 1 has worked in the company for 3 years always in the same role and Interviewee 2 has worked for around half a year in Kids Club, changing roles to event coordination where she worked for around a year. Both were chosen due to their vast knowledge of coordinating events and their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and administration of several events. Table 3 provides a summary of the key characteristics of the samples collected for the purpose of this study.

Table 3 - Key Characteristics of the Sample and Interview Duration

Dimensions	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2
Interview Duration	32 minutes	26 minutes
Company Name	Onyria Group	Onyria Group
Role	Event coordinator for events without accommodation: • Expertise: Weddings • Corporate Events • Birthday Parties • Baptism • Meetings	Event coordinator for events without accommodation: • Weddings • Corporate Events • Expertise: Birthday Parties • Baptism • Meetings
Other Roles in the Company	None	Monitor at Kids Club
Time working on the company	Around 3 years	2 and a half years

Source: Own Elaboration

Both Interviewees specialize in organizing events without accommodation, including birthday parties, weddings, corporate events, baptisms, meetings and many others. On the one hand, Interviewee 1 has developed expertise in handling weddings. On the other hand, Interviewee 2 focused more on birthday parties. This diversity in roles enabled a vast and diverse collection of data on event organization in many circumstances.

Their daily activities include answering requests for events and answering emails from customers regarding the event. Every Wednesday they would attend the weekly meeting related to the events held in the hotel venues for the following week. They were also responsible for coordinating the event on the day and resolving any unexpected problems while making sure everything went according to the clients´ preferences.

This sample was selected based on its relevance to the study´s goals, since both participants have been directly involved in the event management process, providing insightful information about strategies, best practices and challenges faced by them in this industry.

4.6. Data Analysis

Table 4 shows that the responses were systematically analysed and category based on the recurring themes. By focusing on each aspect - customer journey, CX, satisfaction, and retention - we categorized the insights from the interviews to reveal common patterns and key strategies employed by the event coordinators. This analysis helps to better understand how personal interactions, attention to detail, and tailored services contribute

to building long-term relationships with clients and improving their overall loyalty. An analysis of the interviews is done to compare the perspectives of the event coordinators on different topics.

Table 4 – Interview Categories

Categories	Interviewee Quotes
Daily Activities	• "My daily activities included planning and executing events, answering customers' questions, and attending weekly meetings." (Interviewee 1) • "Answering requests for events and coordinating the event on the day." (Interviewee 2)
Strategic Focus: Customer-Driven	• "The company's strategic focus is mainly customer-driven. Their priority is making sure the customers are satisfied." (Interviewee 1) • "The company's strategic focus is both sales and customer-driven." (Interviewee 2)
Customer Experience	• "Customer experience is the perception a customer has of a company, based on their interactions." (Interviewee 1) • "For me, customer experience means all the experience the client has from the first to the last part." (Interviewee 2) • "We can evaluate a customer's experience from what they tell us and through their actions." (Interviewee 1) • "I evaluate the customers' experience through their feedback." (Interviewee 2)
Ensuring Positive Experience	• "Communication and effective coordination are crucial in ensuring a positive experience." (Interviewee 1) • "Sympathy and honesty are the key." (Interviewee 2)
Customer Acquisition	• "I always tried to get new customers, so I would say acquisition." (Interviewee 1) • "Acquisition is the most difficult part, after that we just need to make the customer happy." (Interviewee 2)
Customer Journey	• "The hardest part of the customer journey is planning and assembling the whole event." (Interviewee 1) • "The most challenging stage is when we have to plan and set up the events." (Interviewee 2)
Customer Assistance	• "I assisted the customers during their journey from the first request until the end of the event and its follow-up." (Interviewee 1) • "I assisted the client during the whole event by being present." (Interviewee 2)
Handling Dissatisfied Customers	• "I listen to the customers' concerns, address the problem, and follow up to confirm the issue is resolved." (Interviewee 1) • "Making sure the client is heard is the most important thing to do." (Interviewee 2)
Post-Event Communication	• "We would usually send a follow-up email to get the customers' feedback for future improvements." (Interviewee 1) • "We always try to send an email asking if everything went exactly as it should." (Interviewee 2)
Customer Retention Strategy	• "My main strategy was to be a good professional and maintain good communication." (Interviewee 1) • "The main strategy is to do our best from the first time and always be nice and honest." (Interviewee 2)

Source: Own Elaboration

Table 5 presents the responses from the two interviewees, organized according to the key themes of this study: customer journey, customer experience (CX), customer

satisfaction, and customer retention and loyalty. These interviews were essential in gathering qualitative insights into the operational practices of event management at the Onyria Group, particularly how these factors influence customer loyalty.

Table 5 - Comparison of Interviews

Dimensions	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2
Customer Journey	• The hardest part of the customer journey is planning and assembling the event, requiring attention to detail and continuous communication with customers and operational teams. • Assists customers from the first request to post-event follow-up, handling logistics and addressing unexpected issues.	• The most challenging stage is planning and setting up events, which can be difficult depending on customer communication styles, requiring understanding and patience. • Ensures clients are supported throughout the entire event journey, being present to resolve any issues as they arise.
Customer Experience	• *"Perception a customer has of a company, based on their interactions. Not only the quality of the service or product but how they feel as well"*. • Ensures a positive customer experience through effective communication and coordination, avoiding unplanned surprises. When that is not possible, fast and effective problem-solving comes in. • Evaluation through customer feedback complemented by actions and conversations.	• *"All the experience that the client has from the first to the last part"*. • Focuses on empathy and honesty when planning events to meet customer expectations. • Values being contactable from the beginning until the end of the event to assist the customer when needed. • Evaluation through customer feedback during the whole journey.
Customer Satisfaction	• Achieved by exceeding expectations and maintaining strong communication to ensure all details are addressed. • Evaluation through direct feedback and conversations. • In case of dissatisfaction, listen to concerns, address issues with solutions, maintain communication, and follow up for satisfaction.	• Important to meet customer expectations during the event, with evaluation based on feedback at the end and throughout the journey. • Prioritizes understanding customer needs and addressing concerns promptly. • In case of dissatisfaction, understands the issue, communicates openly with the client, and focuses on improving future interactions.
Customer Loyalty and Retention	• Maintains customer loyalty by providing excellent service and communication, aiming to exceed customers' expectations to encourage repeat business. • Follows up with customers post-event to gather feedback, reinforcing the relationship for future engagements.	• Builds loyalty through personalised service and consistent support from the initial contact to the event's conclusion. • Aims to deliver on all promises while fostering honesty and sympathy when dealing with customers to encourage repeat business.

Source: Own Elaboration

During the whole customer journey, both Interviewees assist the customer by planning and personalizing the event, being present during the event to coordinate every detail, possibly solving any issues and getting their feedback for future reference. Within

the customer journey, some stages are considered more challenging than others. However, for different reasons, both Interviewees found the planning and setup stage to be the most challenging. Both explained those reasons by giving an example of a challenging situation and explaining how it worked out in the end. Interviewee 1 finds that attention to detail is crucial in this stage, requiring clear and constant communication with both customers and hotel teams. As the bridge between external clients and internal operations, event coordinators play a key role in ensuring both parties are on the same page and, most importantly, satisfied. The challenging situation was at the tasting menu session where the bride was constantly changing her menu preferences and criticizing the chef. To solve this Interviewee 1 had a conversation with the bride and encouraged the chef to keep up with the good work, and everything went well on the wedding day. Interviewee 2 emphasizes that customers are the main challenge since most people are not easy to deal with, so it requires a lot of patience and understanding. The challenging situation happened at a kids' party, where the adult responsible for the party refused to pay for the adults who ate the food at the party. Interviewee 2 had a conversation with the responsible at the end of the party and calmly explained why it needed to be paid and, in the end, everything was paid for.

When defining customer experience, both Interviewees agreed on similar techniques, emphasizing clear communication and effective coordination. Interviewee 1 affirmed that customer experience is "*the perception a customer has of a company, based on their interactions*" while Interviewee 2 says that it "*means all the experience that the client has from the first to the last part*". The first invests in constant communication to better manage things and ensure customer satisfaction keeping in mind their preferences. The second adds that sympathy and honesty as the main factors in a positive customer experience.

Both Interviewees agree that the evaluation of an experience and understanding of the level of satisfaction is mainly done through the customers´ feedback and that some are more open and opinionated than others. If they feel customers are not satisfied, interviewees have a similar process. Interviewee 1 listens to concerns, addresses issues with solutions, maintains communication, and follows up for satisfaction. Interviewee 2 understands the issue, communicates openly with the client, and focuses on improving future interactions. Besides, post-event communication is done through email to

understand the customers´ satisfaction, maintain relationships for future events and seek suggestions for future improvement.

After that, comes the strategies for creating retention and loyalty. Interviewee 1 strategy is to be a good professional, by exceeding customer expectations while maintaining good communication. Interviewee 2 adds that always being nice and honest is essential because the customers "*will come back for sure!*". Also, as it comes to customer retention and loyalty towards the company, for the Interviewees, the key factors for choosing the company for events are its strong reputation and continuous customer assistance. Interviewee 1 argued that the hotel´s strong reputation for excellent service and professionalism "*reassures the customers that their event will most likely run smoothly and accordingly to their preferences*". Interviewee 2 emphasized the importance of assisting the customer and affirmed that "*from the beginning to the end, we are always here to help with everything*". She added that the company is "*also very flexible, and it is possible to personalize everything*".

Other topics talked about in the interview are also important to talk about, since it gives an overview of the company, from the event coordinators´ perspectives. Both Interviewees focused on using an acquisition strategy, which although was the most challenging strategy, they considered to be the most crucial when dealing with customers. Especially during events, they would make sure everyone was satisfied as a way to indirectly encourage retention and development, hoping that positive word-of-mouth (WOM) would draw new customers into the company. Moreover, both Interviewees agreed that the company prioritizes a customer-driven strategy. Interviewee 1 highlighted the company´s efforts to exceed the customers' expectations, to make them want to come back not only to do more events but to have other experiences. Interviewee 2 also mentioned the focus on increasing sales through drawing big groups with incentives, while maintaining a high level of quality.

4.7. Discussion of Results

The main goal of this study was to perceive the crucial elements that lead to customer loyalty/ retention within the event management sector, particularly focusing on the role of customer experience during the whole journey and customer satisfaction. The interviewees´ responses demonstrate that providing customised service, meticulous

attention to customer preferences, and consistent communication are key to achieving customer satisfaction, which subsequently leads to loyalty and retention (González & Sanz, 2019; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Regarding customer journey, planning and setting up the event are the most challenging phases, so it requires effective problem-solving techniques, paying attention to detail and maintaining clear communication with the customers. That way, it is easier to manage customer expectations and to guarantee a successful event execution. In addition, handling last-minute changes and coordinating every detail with both customers and the internal team by keeping both parties informed can help avoid complaints. This phase requires precise coordination to reduce risks and ensure that customers´ expectations are aligned with the service delivered (Yeoman, Robertson, & McMahon-Beattie, 2012).

Customer experience includes all the interactions a customer has from the first interaction until the end of the event, including the post-event feedback. A positive customer experience requires clear and continuous communication, personalised experience and emotional engagement, aligned with empathy and honesty. Moreover, fostering customer satisfaction and loyalty calls for open communication with the customer since it helps to manage expectations (Kandampully, Zhang, & Jaakkola, 2018).

Evaluating customers´ satisfaction includes gathering their feedback throughout the whole customer journey, by directly asking for their insights into the experience or by observing their behaviours and reactions. Even though some customers are more straightforward than others when it comes to giving feedback, post-event follow-ups can help understand the customers´ experience. Either way, it is essential to gather customers´ feedback since it is an important tool for determining satisfaction and finding critical points for improvement (Bowen & Chen, 2001). On top of that, satisfied customers will most likely spread positive WOM which attracts new customers.

That way, focusing on creating a customer-driven experience with tailored experiences and fulfilling customers' expectations helps retain customers. This aligned with keeping professionalism while building trust with dependability and high-quality service promotes repeated business and ongoing loyalty (Oliver, 1999).

In conclusion, this analysis of the insights from both Interviewees emphasises the importance of creating a positive customer experience during their whole journey through

tailored service, transparent communication, evaluation of customer service and problem-solving skills, while also acknowledging the challenges event coordinators face when planning and managing events. Furthermore, focusing on customer satisfaction can help in retaining customers and making them loyal to the company.

4.8. Recommendations for the Company

In order to better evaluate customer retention and loyalty towards the Onyria Group, the company could invest in Customer Relationship Management (CRM) technology to measure the customers´ level of satisfaction during their journey. The system would help in personalizing services based on the information collected, monitoring customer event preferences and behaviours allowing them to anticipate their needs, making tailored offers for future events through marketing campaigns and promotions and improving customer retention since the system enables building stronger relationships with customers. According to data from hospitality industry studies, CRM systems assist companies in fostering strong relationships and improving customer retention by providing more personalised experiences (Chuang & Lin, 2017).

Research shows that loyalty programs can be effective instruments for creating enduring connections with customers and increasing customer retention, encouraging positive WOM which is essential for attracting new customers (Melnyk & Bijmolt, 2015). That way, further investing in loyalty programs with incentives like discounts, exclusive deals or customised services for future events or even other services offered by the company could promote repeated business.

To continue the progress in sustainable event management offerings, the Onyria Group could integrate more eco-friendly practices, including waste reduction techniques. Aligning with SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production (United Nations, 2024) might result in attracting more environmentally conscious customers. In addition, the company could explore the possibility of creating partnerships with sustainable tourism organizations and local eco-friendly suppliers, contributing to SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals (United Nations, 2024) and emphasizing the company´s commitment to sustainability. Studies indicate that implementing sustainable company practises can lead to increased customer satisfaction, customer retention and loyalty (Leonidou et al., 2017). Additionally, staff training is essential for maintaining service

quality and promoting sustainability, both of which are critical to customer satisfaction and retention (Jackson et al., 2011).

The implementation of all these recommendations, supported by the research, can help the Onyria Group further develop customer retention and loyalty strategies, ultimately fortifying its position in the competitive hospitality industry, in event management.

CHAPTER 5-CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND STUDY LIMITATIONS

5.1. Main Contributions and Connections with SDGs

This analysis of the customer journey, especially within event coordination, highlights the vital need to oversee every interaction in each phase since it includes crucial touchpoints that shape overall customer satisfaction. During the pre-purchase phase, touchpoints such as initial event requests and customised proposals are essential for aligning customer expectations with the services offered (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). During the purchase phase, coordinating the event itself, setting up the venue, and addressing customer requests in real time create critical interactions (Homburg et al., 2017). Event coordinators play a pivotal role in managing these touchpoints by offering tailored services based on customer preferences, ensuring smooth communication, and providing continuous support (González & Sanz, 2019). The post-purchase phase involves gathering feedback and conducting follow-ups, both of which are crucial in securing long-term relationships and encouraging repeat business (Oliver, 1999).

Customer experience plays a crucial role in fostering customer retention by delivering personalised service, maintaining consistent communication and attention to detail throughout the event (Kandampully, Zhang, & Jaakkola, 2018). Fulfilling clients' preferences and being present during the event to address any issues, fosters trust and creates emotional connections with customers (Mascarenhas et al., 2006). This customised approach, alongside empathy and honesty, helps ensure customers feel valued, ultimately leading to enhanced customer loyalty and higher retention rates (Oliver, 1999). Moreover, the post-event feedback process allows event coordinators to maintain relationships by addressing any concerns and improving future service offerings (Melnyk & Bijmolt, 2015).

Furthermore, the findings illustrate that achieving customer loyalty involves more than mere satisfaction, it also requires exceeding client expectations and building emotional bonds through personalised services (Oliver, 1999; Mascarenhas et al., 2006). It requires going above and beyond by offering ongoing support and handling challenging situations with flexibility, which results in strong relationships that encourage repeat business (González & Sanz, 2019). These efforts turn into satisfied customers who are

likely to spread positive word-of-mouth, attracting new clients and strengthening the long-term sustainability of the business (Oliver, 1999).

Additionally, the Onyria Group's commitment to sustainability, especially in accordance with SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production (United Nations, 2024), are viewed as enhancing the overall customer experience, promoting higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty (Leonidou et al., 2017). The study suggests that by focusing on customer-oriented strategies, such as CRM technologies and loyalty programs, the company can further enhance its customer retention and loyalty performance (Melnyk & Bijmolt, 2015).

5.2. Study Implications

The theoretical implications of this study extend existing frameworks on customer experience (CX) by emphasizing the importance of sustainability, personalised service, and attention to detail in shaping customer satisfaction and loyalty. While traditional CX theories primarily focus on service quality, this research highlights the growing role of sustainability in modern CX models, particularly through alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) on Responsible Consumption and Production (United Nations, 2024). This study suggests that integrating sustainable practices into customer retention strategies can appeal to consumers' ethical values, fostering long-term loyalty. Additionally, by addressing the importance of personalised service and attention to detail, the research underscores the value of creating emotional connections with customers, a key driver of satisfaction and loyalty.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for event coordinators and hospitality professionals. Managers should prioritize maintaining continuous communication and paying close attention to detail, particularly during critical phases such as event planning and execution (Bowie & Buttle, 2011). Personalizing the CX not only enhances customer satisfaction but also strengthens emotional bonds, increasing customer retention and loyalty. By surpassing customer expectations and establishing trust and a positive reputation (Berry, 2002), companies can drive repeat business and long-term success. These managerial implications highlight how the study's findings can be applied to improve CX, build customer loyalty, and ensure sustainable growth in the hospitality and event management industry.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

Despite the valuable insights in gathering insights for conducting research on customer retention and loyalty within event coordination at the Onyria Group, limitations arise and affect the generalizability of the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The main limitation is the fact that the study is limited to the perspective of two event coordinators, without considering the customers' insights. Although the opinions offered are insightful, they most likely do not accurately reflect the experiences of other event coordinators outside this particular setting. Since both of them previously worked for the same company and in the same role, it could result in a biased perspective. Moreover, because of the qualitative nature of the study, the insights are subjective, lacking the use of quantitative data. The insights are based on the interviewees´ subjective experiences which might not be the representation of the general due to the differences in individual personalities, work experiences and specific event circumstances. The awareness of these limitations puts the findings into perspective and identifies areas for future improvements (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

5.4. Suggestions for Future Research

Event management in luxury hotels involves a complex interplay of planning, coordination, and execution. According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), service quality can be measured by the difference between customer expectations and their perceptions of the actual service delivered. This gap is particularly relevant in event coordination, where attention to detail and responsiveness can significantly influence the overall customer experience. By adopting frameworks such as the SERVQUAL model, hotels can assess and improve their service delivery, ultimately enhancing customer satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2014). Therefore, incorporating customer perspectives would balance the findings and offer a more complete understanding of the customer journey. Besides, a larger range of participants from other companies where it would be possible to collect feedback from the customers and event coordinators would allow for gathering more information and guarantee that the findings represent a broader variety of experiences. Another possibility is to incorporate quantitative data for future research to provide a more holistic view of customer experiences and to complete the qualitative data. The use of metrics related to customer satisfaction, event success rates or even financial outcomes would provide insights into understanding the process of retaining customers and making them loyal. In

conclusion, future research should include a wider and more diverse sample, perhaps from different companies, and it should include both the event coordinators and customers´ perspectives as well.

References

Arslan, I. K. (2020). The Importance of Creating Customer Loyalty in Achieving Sustainable Competitive Advantage. *Eurasian Journal of Business and Management*, *8*(1), 11–20. https://doi.org/10.15604/ejbm.2020.08.01.002

Berry L. L., Carbone L. P., and Haeckel S. H. (2002). Managing the Total Customer Experience. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 43 (3), 85–89.

Bhat, D. A. R., & Sharma, V. (2022). Enabling service innovation and firm performance: the role of co-creation and technological innovation in the hospitality industry. *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management*, *34*(7). https://doi.org/10.1080/09537325.2021.1919614

Bowen, J. T., & Chen, S. L. (2001). The relationship between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 13(5), 213-217.

Bowie, D., & Buttle, F. (2011). *Hospitality Marketing: Principles and Practice*. Oxford University Press.

Brakus, J. J., Schmitt, B. H., & Zarantonello, L. (2009). Brand experience: what is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty?. *Journal of marketing*, *73*(3), 52-68.

Chang, C.-W., Tseng, T. H., & Woodside, A.G. (2013). Configural algorithms of patient satisfaction, participation in diagnostics, and treatment decisions' influences on hospital loyalty. Journal of Services Marketing, 27(2), 91-103.

Chen, Y. S. (2010). The drivers of green brand equity: Green brand image, green satisfaction, and green trust. Journal of Business Ethics, 93(2), 307-319.

Chuang, S.-H., & Lin, H.-N. (2017). Co-creating e-service innovations: Theory, practice, and impact on firm performance. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 34(3), 936-973.

Court, D., Elzinga, D., Mulder, S., & Vetvik, O. J. (2009). The consumer decision journey. *McKinsey.* www.mckinsey.com

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.). *SAGE Publications*.

Egan, J. (2008). *Relationship marketing: Exploring relational strategies in marketing*. Pearson education.

Dowson, Ruth, Albert, Bernadette, Lomax, & Dan. (n.d.). *PRAISE FOR EVENT PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT*.

Edelman, D. C., & Singer, M. (2015). Competing on customer journeys. *Harvard business review*, *93*(11), 88-100.

Fornell, C., Johnson, M. D., Anderson, E. W., Cha, J., & Bryant, B. E. (1996). The American Customer Satisfaction Index: Nature, Purpose, and Findings. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(4), 7-18.

González, I., & Sanz, P. (2019). Event management and customer satisfaction: The new era of marketing. Tourism Management Perspectives, 31, 126-135.

González, M., & Sanz, J. (2019). The customer experience-loyalty link: Moderating role of motivation orientation. *Journal of Services Marketing, 34*(6), 793-805. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-04-2019-0113

Harrison, T., & O'Neill, M. (2013). Using the customer journey to road-test and refine the business model. *Journal of Business Strategy, 34*(5), 10-17. https://doi.org/10.1108/10878571311318196

Heinonen, K., & Lipkin, M. (2023). Ordinary customer experience: Conceptualization, characterization, and implications. In *Psychology and Marketing* (Vol. 40, Issue 9, pp. 1720–1736). John Wiley and Sons Inc. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21830

Homburg, C., & Fürst, A. (2005). How organizational complaint handling drives customer loyalty: An analysis of the mechanistic and the organic approach. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(3), 95–114. doi:10.1509/jmkg.69.3.95.66367

Homburg, C., Jozi'c, D., & Kuehnl, C. (2017). Customer experience management: Toward implementing an evolving marketing concept. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(3), 377–401. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-015-0460-7

Hu, L., & Olivieri, M. (2020). Social Media and omni-channel strategies in the tourism industry: An analysis of Club Med. In F. Martínez-López & S. D'Alessandro (Eds.), *Advances in digital marketing and eCommerce. Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics* (pp. 47–55). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47595-6_7

Ibojo, B., & Asabi, O. (2015). Impact of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty: A case study of a reputable bank in Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria. International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research (IJMSR), 3 (2), 59-69.

Jackson, S. E., Renwick, D. W. S., Jabbour, C. J. C., & Muller-Camen, M. (2011). State-of-the-art and future directions for green human resource management: Introduction to the special issue. *German Journal of Human Resource Management: Zeitschrift für Personalforschung*, 25(2), 99-116.

Kandampully, J., Zhang, T., & Jaakkola, E. (2018). Customer experience management in hospitality: A literature synthesis, new understanding, and research agenda. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 30(1), 21-56.

Kolk, A., van Tulder, R., & Kostwinder, E. (2017). Business and partnerships for development. *European Management Journal*, 35(1), 32-45.

Klaus, P., & Maklan, S. (2013). Towards a better measure of customer experience. International Journal of Market Research, 55(2), 227-246. https:// doi.org/10.2501/IJMR-2013-021

Kotler, P., Bowen, J. T., & Makens, J. C. (2014). *Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism* (6th ed.). Pearson.

Kuehnl, C., Jozic, D., & Homburg, C. (2019). Effective customer journey design: Consumers' conception, measurement, and consequences. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 47*(3), 551–568.

Kumar, V., & Shah, D. (2004). Building and sustaining profitable customer loyalty for the 21st century. Journal of Retailing, 80(4), 317-330.

Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of Marketing*, *80*(6), 69–96. https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0420

Leonidou, L. C., Katsikeas, C. S., & Morgan, N. A. (2013). "Greening" the marketing mix: Do firms do it and does it pay off? Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 41(2), 151-170.

Leonidou, C. N., Katsikeas, C. S., & Morgan, N. A. (2017). "Greening" the marketing mix: Do firms do it and does it pay off? *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(2), 252-276.

Liu, M. W., & Keh, H. T. (2015). Consumer delight and outrage: scale development and validation. Journal of Service Theory and Practice, 25(6), 680-699.

Liu, Y. Y., Chen, S. H., & Zhang, J. X. (2021). Applying importance–satisfaction model to evaluate customer satisfaction: An empirical study of Foodpanda. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, *13*(19). https://doi.org/10.3390/su131910985

Melnyk, V., & Bijmolt, T. H. A. (2015). The effects of introducing and terminating loyalty programs. *European Journal of Marketing*, 49(3/4), 398-419.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). *SAGE Publications.*

Mascarenhas, O. A., Kesavan, S., & Bernacchi, M. (2006). Lasting customer loyalty: A strategic commitment. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 23(7), 395-405. https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760610701755

Melnyk, V., & Bijmolt, T. H. A. (2015). The effects of introducing and terminating loyalty programs. European Journal of Marketing, 49(3/4), 398-419.

Ndubisi, N. O. (2007). Relationship marketing and customer loyalty. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 25(1), 98–106. doi:10.1108/02634500710722425

Ndubisi, N. O., & Wah, C. K. (2005). Factorial and discriminant analyses of the underpinnings of relationship marketing and customer satisfaction. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 23(7), 542–557. doi:10.1108/02652320510629908

Nobar, H. B. K., & Rostamzadeh, R. (2018). The impact of customer satisfaction, customer experience and customer loyalty on brand power: Empirical evidence from hotel industry. Journal of Business Economics and Management, 19(2), 417-430. https://doi.org/10.3846/ jbem.2018.5678

Norton, D.W. & Pine, B.J., II. (2013). Using the customer journey to road test and refine the business model. *Strategy & Leadership*, 41, 12–17. https://doi.org/10.1108/10878571311318196

Oliver, R. L. (1999). Whence consumer loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*, 63, 33-44. https://doi.org/10.2307/1252099

Oliver, R.L., Rust, R.T., & Varki, S. (1997). Customer delight: foundations, findings, and managerial insight. Journal of Retailing, 73(3), 311-336.

Onyria Quinta da Marinha Hotel. (n.d.). Retrieved May 2, 2024, from https://www.quintadamarinha.com/pt/onyria/onyria-quinta-marinha-hotel.aspx

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing*, 64(1), 12-40.

Payne, A., & Frow, P. (2005). A strategic framework for customer relationship management. Journal of Marketing, 69(4), 167-176.

Rawson, A., Duncan, E., & Jones, C. (2013). The truth about customer experience. *Harvard business review*, *91*(9), 90-98.

Reichheld, F. F., & Schefter, P. (2000). E-loyalty: Your secret weapon on the web. Harvard Business Review, 78(4), 105-113.

Roggeveen, A. L., & Sethuraman, R. (2020). Customer-interfacing retail technologies in 2020 \& beyond: An framework and integrative research directions. *Journal of Retailing*, 96(3), 299–309.

Schmitt, B. H. (2003). *Customer experience management: A revolutionary approach to connecting with your customers*.

Sharma, P., Manhas, P. S., & Sarangal, R. (2022). Assessing The Impact of Innovative Practices on Customer Experience Satisfaction and Loyalty: A Study on Quick-Service Restaurants in North India. *ASEAN Journal on Hospitality and Tourism*, *20*(2), 83–99. https://doi.org/10.5614/ajht.2022.20.2.06

Siebert, A., Gopaldas, A., Lindridge, A., & Simões, C. (2020). Customer experience journeys: Loyalty loops versus involvement spirals. *Journal of Marketing, 84*(4), 45–66.

Stein, A.; Ramaseshan, B. (2019). The customer experience - loyalty link: moderating role of motivation orientation. Journal of Service Management, 31–78. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-04-2019-0113

Stuart Ian F. and Tax Stephen S. (2004), "Toward an Integrative Approach to Designing Service Experiences: Lessons Learned from the Theatre," *Journal of Operations Management*, 22 (6), 609–27.

Sumaedi, S., Bakti, I. G. M. Y., Rakhmawati, T., Astrini, N. J., Widianti, T., & Yarmen, M. (2014). The empirical study on patient loyalty: The role of trust, perceived value, and satisfaction (a case study from Bekasi, Indonesia). Clinical Governance: An International Journal, 19(3), 269-283

Trujillo-Torres, L., & DeBerry-Spence, B. (2019). Consumer valorization strategies in traumatic extraordinary experiences. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 47*(3), 516–531.

United Nations. (n.d.). *Sustainable Development Goals*. Retrieved May 4, 2024, from https://sdgs.un.org/goals

Walker, J. R. (2020). *Introduction to Hospitality Management* (6th ed.). Pearson.

Yeoman, I., Robertson, M., & McMahon-Beattie, U. (2012). *Event Management: An International Approach*. Cengage Learning.

APPENDIX

Appendix A – Interview Draft

Question 1: Could you please introduce yourself?
Interviewee 1: I am a woman, and I have 24 years, and I am currently working as an Event Coordinator in another hotel
Interviewee 2: I am a woman, and I am 26 years old, and I am currently working as a Sales and Product coordinator at Portugal Golf Experience
Question 2: How long did you work at this company?
Interviewee 1: I worked at the company for a total of 3 years
Interviewee 2: I worked at Onyria for about 1 year and 6months
Question 2a: What made you change jobs?
Interviewee 1: I had a proposition from another company, and I decided to take that opportunity since
Interviewee 2: As I mentioned, I changed to another role in another company since I felt like this job didn´t match my personal life, for example, I had to do a lot of extra hours, especially on the weekends. I also felt like I needed something that had more professional interest for me, perhaps with the possibility of moving up in my career.
Question 3: Could you explain your role in the company? Did you always work in this role, if not what did you do?
Interviewee 1: I have always worked as an event coordinator for the whole time I was at the company.
Interviewee 2: I was an event coordinator. Before that, I used to work at the kids club.
Question 4: Can you explain what were your daily activities?
Interviewee 1: My daily activities included planning and executing events as well as all the logistics behind this. From answering to the customers´ questions, making visits with the customers to the venues and attending weekly meetings about future events with the heads of departments.
Interviewee 2: My daily activities consisted of answering requests for events without accommodation, like weddings, birthday parties, and meetings. Also, coordinate the event on the day making sure everything went exactly like the client wanted.
Question 5: In your opinion, what is the company´s strategic focus (quality/ price efficiency/ sales/customer-driven)?
Interviewee 1: I would say that the company's strategic focus is mainly customer-driven. Their priority is making sure the customers are satisfied in every aspect, from the quality of the service to the price and overall experience. The goal is to make them feel satisfied and go beyond their expectation to keep them coming back for more events or other experiences.
Interviewee 2: The company's strategic focus is both sales and customer-driven since they invest a lot in bringing big groups to the hotel, for example, they always try to bring big companies for meetings and for that they give incentives. However, they also focus on quality since they always make sure the client gets what they paid for and try to go beyond that.
Question 6: What does customer experience mean to you?
Interviewee 1: Customer experience is the perception a customer has of a company, based on their interactions. Not only the quality of the service or product but how they feel as well.
Interviewee 2: For me, customer experience means all the experience that the client has from the first to the last part they are in touch with for example the hotel, in this case.
Question 7: How did you ensure that customers had a positive experience?
Interviewee 1: Two things that I consider to be crucial in ensuring a positive experience are communication and effective coordination. I always try to communicate a lot with the customers to ensure every detail is talked about and avoid unplanned surprises. Of course, there are always some hiccups and here comes the effective coordination, where I always try to solve those problems the best I can. All in all the main thing is to manage everything to ensure the customer´s satisfaction.
Interviewee 2: I would say sympathy and honesty are the key. It is essential to do everything that we discussed and settled with the customer for the event while being honest, for example, when the customer asks something and we already know from previous experience that it won't work, I would explain that and suggest a close alternative. Besides, I would try to always be contactable to assist with everything that the customer may need from the beginning until the end of the event.
Question 8: What strategies did you use when dealing with customers (acquisition, retention or development)?
Interviewee 1: I always tried to get new customers so I would say acquisition. After it was important to make them happy since this could help us to get more customers. For example, as we know, events bring a

lot of people so always ensuring a perfect experience for everyone is crucial since those people at the event can become new customers at the hotel.

Interviewee 2: Acquisition is the most difficult part, after that, we just need to make the customer happy, so I would say acquisition.

Question 9: What was the most challenging stage of the customer journey?

Interviewee 1: The hardest part of the customer journey is planning and assembling the whole event. This process involves paying attention to a lot of details which requires being straightforward and maintaining continuous communication with the customer. The same goes for the hotel operational teams that need to be informed of every change. That way, everyone is happy during the event.

Interviewee 2: The most challenging stage is when we have to plan and set up the events. After the first negotiation, setting everything is definitely the hardest part. Some customers are easier to talk to than others and this was really hard to deal with, it required a lot of patience and understanding.

Question 9a: Can you give me an example of a real challenging situation you had to go through and explain how you solved it?

Interviewee 1: So, I had a challenging situation when planning a wedding related to the menu tastings. Usually, we make menu tasting sessions with the chef and bride and groom to make sure everything is as they like. From the start, I noticed the bridge was very demanding, constantly changing her mind in a harsh manner towards the chef. At the end of the tasting, she decided on a modern menu. One month before the wedding, she changed her mind again and now wanted a traditional menu. At this stage, I had a meeting with her and explained that she had to make her final decision and that the chef and his team were doing their best to accommodate her vision. I also met with the chef and reassured him that there weren't going to be any more drastic changes to the menu. In the end, she finally made up her mind and everything went perfectly on the wedding day.

Interviewee 2: I used to coordinate most of the kids´ birthday parties, so this challenging situation happened at one of those parties. For the parties, we had food menus for kids and for adults with different prices, that had to be pre-ordered. At this party, as usual, I asked for the number of kids and adults. The customer said that they only wanted the food menus for the kids since the kids´ parents were just going to leave the kids and leave. On the day of the event, the kid's parents decided to stay at the party and started eating the food, so I had to talk to the party responsible and inform them that I had to charge for the number of adults that stayed at the party, as I previously informed. She refused to pay and said, "I'm not their mother, I cannot tell them not to eat it's not my fault". So, I waited until the end of the party and explained again that she had to pay for the adults who stayed at the party because the food was meant to be for the number of kids that she paid for.

Question 10: What are the key factors that make a customer choose to do the event in the hotel?

Interviewee 1: I would say that the key is to maintain a strong reputation for excellent service and professionalism. This reassures the customers that their event will most likely run smoothly and according to their preferences.

Interviewee 2: The main key is the assistance they have through all the events stages. From the beginning to the end, we are always there to help with everything. We are also very flexible, and it is possible to personalize everything.

Question 11: Can you explain how you assisted the customer, during their journey?

Interviewee 1: I assisted the customers during their journey from the first request until the end of the event and its follow-up. I made suggestions and presented solutions tailored to each customer during the whole process. Planning involved handling logistics and coordinating teams to ensure every detail was according to the customers' requests. On the event day, I was there most of the time to manage every detail and come up with solutions for unexpected problems. After the event, I used to send a follow-up email to get the customers' feedback and suggestions for future reference.

Interviewee 2: I assisted the client during the whole event by being present and making sure everything happened as it was settled from the beginning. Being present during the event helps the customer not be worried about things that may not go well. If something happens, I'm there to make sure the problem is solved as fast as I can

Question 12: How do you evaluate the customer´s experience of the event?

Interviewee 1: I think we can evaluate a customer's experience of the event from what they tell us. Normally, an unsatisfied customer shows their opinion more easily than a satisfied one. But I think I can always understand their experience through their actions and conversations with me. Besides, I always try to get feedback during the whole process.

Interviewee 2: I evaluate the customers' experience of the event through their feedback. Not only at the end of the event but during their whole journey as well. Of course, some customers are always more opinionated than others, but I think you can tell when a customer is not satisfied

Question 12a: What steps do you take when you feel the customer is not satisfied?

Interviewee 1: First I listen carefully to the customers´ concerns to fully understand the issue. Then, I address the problem by offering solutions or adjustments that align with their expectations. I maintain open communication throughout this process, ensuring they feel heard and supported. Finally, I follow up to confirm the issue is resolved and ensure their satisfaction moving forward.

Interviewee 2: If the client is not happy, we make an effort to understand what went wrong and how we may improve in the future or until the issue is resolved. Making sure the client is heard is the most important thing to do, that way, the customer will feel that we are truly with him and trying our best to fix everything.

Question 13: How was the communication with the customer after the event?

Interviewee 1: We would usually send a follow-up email to get the customers' feedback for future improvements and to maintain a relationship with the customers to hopefully work with them in the future.

Interviewee 2: After the event, we always try to send an email asking if everything went exactly as it should and after all if they enjoyed and had fun. Also, try to understand if we can change something to be better next time.

Question 14: Did you have any strategies to keep customers returning to do more events in the hotel?

Interviewee 1: I guess my main strategy was to be a good professional. This means doing my best to ensure that the customer is not only satisfied but going beyond that while always maintaining good communication to understand the customers' preferences.

Interviewee 2: I think the main strategy is to do our best from the first time and try to give everything that the client asked for while always being nice and honest. They will come back for sure!