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Tourism and Hospitality
International Journal

THIJOURNAL.ISCE.PT
THIJOURNAL.ISCE.PT

ISSN: 2183-0800

THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNICATION ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY TO THE LOCAL HOUSING SECTOR - A CASE STUDY

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Vieira, S. D. (2020). The effects of communication on customer loyalty to the local housing sector - A case study. *Tourism and Hospitality International Journal*, 15(1), 142-174.

Abstract

Currently, the tourism sector is one of the most relevant phenomena from a political, economic, environmental and socio-cultural point of view. It ceased to be seen exclusively as a synonym for leisure and started to play a role as a social agent in the societies where it develops. Given this scenario, and keeping in mind the importance of customer retention, the objective of this article is to study the influence of the relational communication variable on customer loyalty to the accommodation unit. For this, based on the conceptual model, a study was carried out that included customer companies (employees of companies that stayed at least one night) of the accommodation unit, based on questionnaire surveys. In the empirical phase, 55 customer companies of Casa Maria Victória were surveyed, from a convenience sample. The results show that communication and relationships are highly valued by guests and are fundamental factors for their loyalty. This study examines the importance of communication in the relationship between accommodation units and customers; however, the evaluation of the variables under study is done only from the customer's perspective, excluding the perspective of the other *stakeholders* involved in the process. In the future, the research should be followed to deepen the study of some more relational variables pointed out in the literature, as well as their various links in customer loyalty in the accommodation sector. The present study offers a contribution to the accommodation units, by allowing to expand and enlarge the concepts learned, integrating and crossing them with other realities, namely, with regard to customer loyalty, and the positioning of the accommodation units.

Keywords:

Tourism, Local accommodation, Relational marketing, Communication, Loyalty

Introduction

The tourism sector has undergone a major evolution in recent years, notably its increase in the services sector. The tourism sector has become more competitive, and given this situation, relational marketing is seen as a strategic element for customer loyalty.

There is an evolution in the main objective of companies, which in the past was purely about winning and attracting new customers, today, with market competitiveness, it has led companies to seek new strategies to survive, as a way of responding to globalization markets and competition. Situation that has affected the tourism sector in general, and specifically the accommodation sector. The intention of the hotel units involves customer retention and consequent loyalty, valuing the relationships established and strengthened between the accommodation units and their customers.

In a sector that today represents an extraordinarily relevant economic activity on a global scale, the application of relational marketing strategies has been the bet used by the accommodation units for customer loyalty and retention, as a way to increase their profitability.

In view of all these changes, the theme addressed in this study is considered relevant, as tourism is one of the economic activities with a huge growth worldwide and the accommodation units are extremely important for the development of local tourist activity, since seek to attract new visitors and exhibit local products, creating jobs and value for the entire community. The choice of this type of accommodation unit for carrying out the study is related to the significant evolution of local accommodation on the market as an alternative of affordable and pleasant accommodation, which meets the needs of guests. Another determining factor for choosing this type of accommodation is the proximity to it and the need to explore the way in which the relations between the company and the customers are developed. At Local Accommodation, guests seek moments of rest and leisure, so communication between the parties makes all the difference, the relationship between the company and customers takes place in a closer and more intense way.

In order to realize the importance of the communication relational variable in the relationship between accommodation unit professionals and customers, and its relevance in their loyalty, the starting question of this study arose - How does the communication variable, as a relational marketing variable, influences customer loyalty to the accommodation sector?

This study aimed to identify what is valued by the customer in the provision of the service, more specifically, to analyze the importance of communication and which are the communication factors considered most important for the presence of a lasting relationship between both.

Specifically, the interest was to realize the importance of relational marketing in the accommodation sector; to show and value the importance of interpersonal relationships between accommodation units and customers, and finally to understand whether loyalty

had as main premise the interpersonal relationship, that is, the employee - customer relationship.

Theoretical Framework

Tourism

Over time, there has been an evolution in the definition of tourism, however, two important factors always remain, people and places. Based on the thought of Cooper (2006), tourism was understood as the movement for a temporary period to a destination other than home and place of work, in which different activities (visits, itineraries, experiences) and facilities (instalations, transport, tourist information offices) to meet tourist needs.

In 2011, the World Tourism Organization defines tourism as the “set of activities developed by people while traveling to places outside their usual environment for a period that does not exceed one year, for leisure, business and other reasons.”.

Tourism surrounds a set of services with vast contact between people, and these human contacts stimulate and enhance the tourist experience.

Currently, tourism is considered as one of the phenomena that best describe life in today's society, causing a set of needs in different areas, such as leisure, culture, religion, professional activity and knowledge of other lands and other peoples.

Tourism in Portugal

In Portugal, in recent years, there has been a strong investment in the tourism sector, through the improvement of accessibility and infrastructure, and the diversification of the offer of new products and services. Tourism is the main driver of the Portuguese economy and the results achieved confirm the importance of strong investment and structured work between public and private entities, which began more than a decade ago. As mentioned in the Tourism Strategy 2017, the year 2016 was marked by historical results for national tourism in the main indicators, such as overnight stays, revenues, guests, employment and exports, even being considered the largest export economic activity in the country, with 16, 7% of exports (TP, 2017).

We can affirm that Portugal with each passing day proves its capabilities in Tourism, either by the number of tourists visiting us, or in the growing affirmation of its relevance as an economic activity, becoming the second country with the best performance in the sector and it is currently one of the most sustainable touristic destinations. This growth is due to its geographical location, mild climate, sunlight and proximity to the sea. (Publituris, 2017).

Portugal wants to evolve in terms of tourism, seeking to work with different partners, to increase its notoriety in international markets, boost the economy and enhance the territory, proof of this desire is the entrepreneurial evolution of Portuguese companies that, in recent years, have reinforced the offer of accommodation, increased tourist

entertainment, opened themselves up to innovation and risked promoting Portugal to the most demanding markets, increasing air flow in the parents.

Currently in Portugal, the tourist offer is divided into four areas, local accommodation; travel and tourism agencies; tourist entertainment agents; and tourist developments, all of them with specific characteristics. The area of local accommodation, the area at the heart of this study, is where establishments providing temporary accommodation services, especially to tourists, are paid for a fee and which do not meet all the points to be classified as tourist developments. In this modality, we can find houses, apartments, rooms and accommodation establishments. Tourist developments are establishments that are intended to provide accommodation services, upon payment of the same. This typology includes hotel establishments, tourist villages, tourist apartments, tourist complexes (*resorts*), housing tourism enterprises, tourism enterprises in rural areas and camping and caravanning parks (TP, 2019).

Relational Marketing

The globalization of markets has brought changes in the productive sector, in commercial relations, in communications, in technologies and in transport. We experienced the “communications boom”, which was also responsible for changing mentalities, through technological innovation, the information revolution and the possibility of allowing interactive communication. In view of these events, customers became more informed and began to have greater power of choice, and as a result, companies began to find it easier to reach the customer, and there was more competition between suppliers. In this competitive business scenario, companies realized that many customers could be acquired through a relationship between the company and the customer.

This progress imposed quick responses on the part of companies, namely, in getting to know the customer, understanding their increasingly changing needs, in order to provide quality products and / or services at a fair price. Therefore, companies needed to develop capacities for greater adaptability, flexibility and anticipation. In this way, it would be possible to achieve greater customer satisfaction and retention, and consequently greater gains for the company, which facilitates the process of establishing stable and lasting relationships with customers.

This development in the marketing philosophy, goes towards a more individualized and learning relationship with each of its customers, through a great interactivity, in order to obtain the necessary information to be able to offer a personalized product / service and adjusted to the needs specific to each customer.

According to Gronroos (2004), the key processes of relational marketing are communication, interaction and value. Following this thought, if relational marketing aims to be successful, it is necessary to integrate all marketing communication messages to support the creation, maintenance and strengthening of relationships with customers and stakeholders, with integrated management of activities marketing communication,

regardless of the origin of the communication messages, necessary in relational marketing (Gronroos, 2004).

The focal point of relational marketing is based mainly on managing the relationship between the company and its customers, but also with employees and strategic partners. To be successful, the service provider has to align its resources, skills and processes with the customer's processes, generating value, identifying exactly what customers value and how to continuously create value for them, leading to interaction to develop as a concept that takes the place of the product concept (Gronroos, 2004). The principle of this new concept is that it is more profitable to retain current customers than to dedicate all efforts to attract new customers.

This evolution in marketing thinking, goes in search of a more individualized relationship and learning with each of the customers, through interactivity, in order to obtain the necessary knowledge to be able to offer a personalized service and adjusted to the specific needs of each customer. The philosophy of relational marketing thus grows in importance, with the conviction that building lasting relationships with customers generates positive results in terms of customer retention (Peppers & Rogers, 2017).

The construction of solid relationships with costumers requires that all organizational strategies must be directed to costumers, as they are responsible for the movement of the institution (Murakami & Anjos, 2017).

According to Peck, Payne, Cristopher and Clark (2004) the fundamental principle of relational marketing is in the idea that the increase in the level of customer satisfaction must be generated from the relationship with the service provider, and not only through the service he buys. Based on this relationship, it is intended to achieve an increase in customer retention and, consequently, an increase in the company's profitability.

We can say that relational marketing is increasingly important, as we live in an increasingly globalized world, and it is essential that companies distinguish themselves from each other in order to retain their customers. Naturally, companies are becoming increasingly aware that their success in an excessively competitive market, such as tourism, depends on building long-term relationships with each of their customers and partners (Lombard & Steyn, 2008).

Relational marketing and the accommodation sector.

According to Vieira (2003), the hotel product can be perceived as a set of tangible and intangible products designed to satisfy the wishes and interests of guests.

Attracting new guests has been one of the most difficult and expensive tasks for accommodation units, so the best option is to keep them. It is in this perspective that relationship marketing stands out. The accommodation unit seeks to build customer loyalty, maintaining a long-term relationship and mutual loyalty.

One of the main ways to build a solid and long-term relationship is through the process of buying and delivering customer service, through personalization of the

service being a common practice in today's companies, which define their strategies with a focus on due to the high number of companies.

The importance of customer retention has become clear and decisive for a company's profitability and success. Marketing efforts had to be adjusted to support this new point of view, and innovative ways of dealing with customers were sought. This paradigm renewal led to the birth of the concept of relational marketing and the management of the relationship with the customer (Loots & Grobler, 2014).

The accommodation units are also concerned with the differentiation of their services, as they all offer the same purpose, which is the hosting of the customer, although in this regard the accommodation unit that wants to differentiate and conquer the largest number of customers must offer aggregate services. The accommodation unit that provides differentiated services and serves the customer in the best possible way, is not only offering services to the customer, but is confirming the status of its customer to society. It is important that the front office employees are trained and motivated, in order to create a team that is adapted to provide a good service to customers. Thus, all employees are oriented to satisfy customers. The other important point in this sector is the quality of service, as it depends on the interaction between employees and customers, that is, the customer not only analyzes the technical quality of the service, but also the functional quality.

The application of relational marketing practices in the hotel industry has been increasing, as the need to focus on the customer is beginning to be recognized, and not only on the services offered. The accommodation units are in an ideal position to create relationships with their customers due to the ease of developing a database through the large amount of information contained in the reservation system (Mesquita, 2013).

Relational marketing must be, above all, the will of the hotel to implement it, as its success depends on profound changes in the way of thinking and acting. In order to implement it in the hotel, it is necessary that there is an awareness of all members and that they are convinced that this is the central objective.

It is important for the hotel unit to keep in mind that the basis of relational marketing is customer satisfaction, with customer needs as a guide. Customer satisfaction can lead to behavior especially as the loyalty and communication word-of-mouth. Several surveys identify relational marketing as the most important factor in the service sector and state that it influences customer satisfaction and loyalty (Feng & Papatla, 2012).

According to Serra (2005), guest satisfaction is a relationship between what the customer received and what he expected to have received. For a customer to become loyal, the accommodation unit must always present a competitive advantage over the competition.

Communication as a Relational Variable in the Tourism Sector

The concept of relational marketing was first stated by Berry, the author used the term in the service sector, and defined relational marketing as a strategy for attracting,

maintaining and improving customer relationships (Bahri, Sabahi, Taheri & Hatami, 2013).

According to Kotler (2011), relational marketing is a concept to create, maintain and improve customer relationships.

Relational marketing is oriented towards the creation, maintenance and development of relationships for the creation and delivery of mutual value, requiring a narrow and intense communication process, that is, communicating with customers comprises both listening and speaking. It is through dialogue that relationships are built and services are designed, adapted and accepted.

Through an effective relational marketing strategy, the company must seek new forms of communication, dynamic and innovative, capable of establishing a deep and lasting bond with customers, suppliers and all intermediaries, as a way to obtain a sustainable competitive advantage.

Given this scenario, and bearing in mind the importance of the relationship between two parties, it was considered important to analyze the relational variable, communication.

Communication was defined by Anderson and Narus (1997) as the formal and informal sharing of information between the parties in the relationship. Communication includes the way in which information is shared between the parties and their openness to the exchange of information. Mohr, Fisher and Nevin (1996) argue that, since trust requires credibility and benevolence, it is necessary for the parties involved to have, reciprocally, information about their partner's past behavior and promises kept, confirming that the quality of communication and communication exchange of information are some of the most important characteristics of the relationship. Therefore, communication is crucial for customer loyalty since it facilitates contact with important customers, transmits timely and reliable information about the service and its changes (Sirdeshmukh, Singh & Sabol, 2002).

Empathy and security, which represents interpersonal communication, have a strong influence on the customer's willingness to return to the accommodation unit, demonstrating that the interpersonal component associated with the quality of service should not be overlooked in the search for the offer of a quality service (Anbori, Ghani, Yadav, Daher & Su, 2010).

It is known that one of the goals of relational marketing is to initiate and develop relationships with customers, in order to retain them, making them profitable, so there is no way to establish any type of relationship if the parties do not communicate.

We can conclude that communication is considered a significant factor in the development of trust in the relationship between the service provider and the customer. Efficient communication improves satisfaction, level of commitment and performance between the customer and the institution (Abdallah, Ghaith, Hanadi, & Amer, 2015).

Loyalty

Due to the influence of globalization on tourist flows, leading to increased competition in the tourism sector, including the accommodation sector, the long-term survival of the hotel industry in a competitive environment depends on the capacity of the accommodation unit to meet the demand of efficiently and effectively.

Customer loyalty is a challenge for all sectors, but for the accommodation market, it is even more complicated, due to the amount of choices and offers that guests can find. Nowadays, customers are more demanding, as they know in advance the services and the respective prices provided by specialized Internet operators.

In the accommodation sector, the provision of services has a direct impact on customer satisfaction and retention, with high levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty expected. In this sense, accommodation units must be concerned with preserving positive relationships with customers, must create long-term relationships with customers, must value the type of communication they have with customers, must involve the entire team of the accommodation unit in the importance of customer loyalty, in order to increase the quality of service and provide customer loyalty (Esteves, 2011). Thus, the objective of loyalty in the accommodation sector is to retain customers by preventing them from shaking off the competition, and to increase the value of the business they provide. Thus, loyalty means building opportunities for the customer to return to the accommodation unit.

The authors Lukosius, Aguirre and Joonas (2010) state that if customers are satisfied with the services offered by the accommodation units, they will recommend it to other people, as they prefer services they know, in order to reduce risks and perceive a feeling of confidence.

A quality service leads to greater customer satisfaction and, eventually, there is the creation of loyal customers, willing to return or recommend the institution to other customers, that is, effectively customer satisfaction is the effective way to achieve their loyalty. On the other hand, the more the accommodation units are able to satisfy their customers with excellent service and serve them as if they were the only ones, treating them individually, the more satisfied they will be with the same, thus creating their loyalty.

According to Vieira (2015), a guest can be considered captive from the moment the accommodation establishment feels that the customer is loyal, demonstrating some aspects such as: general satisfaction with the services of the accommodation unit, continuity in making room bookings accommodation and recommendation of services to friends and family.

We can conclude that the interpersonal component of service quality is very important in customer loyalty in the accommodation sector. In this sense, the management of the accommodation units should be concerned with knowing which aspects are most important to customers in terms of service quality, having mechanisms to prioritize them and ensure that they are in place, helping customer satisfaction and the desire to return to use its services.

Research Methodology

In this study we intend to deepen, the influence of the relational variable “Communication” acts in the development of lasting relationships, between customers and accommodation units, that is, the importance of different elements in their influence on customer retention is analyzed, resulting from the relations between the costumers and the professionals of the accommodation units.

Thus, the objectives that were proposed for this study are as follows:

Main objective: to analyze the impact of the communication variable, as a relational variable, as an influence on the degree of customer loyalty to Casa Maria Victória.

Partial objective 1: Understand the importance of relational marketing in the accommodation sector through the recognition of perceived benefits.

Partial objective 2: To show and value the importance of interpersonal relationships between accommodation establishments and customers.

Partial objective 3: To understand if loyalty had as main premise the interpersonal relationship, that is, the employee - customer relationship.

After defining the objectives, the following hypotheses were outlined:

- Is the majority of respondents satisfied with the services offered by Casa Maria Victória?
- Does Casa Maria Victória's customer service meet their expectations / needs?
- Does the guest's loyalty to Casa Maria Victória have as main premise the interpersonal relationship, that is, the employee - customer relationship?

Used Method

The research, regarding the objectives, is characterized as descriptive, as it seeks to understand a phenomenon. The chosen methodology was based on a quantitative approach to the processes to be investigated, seeking to collect data on how the study participants live and interpret their reality.

In this sense, and based on an exploratory investigation, it is imperative to define a conceptual framework, which allows the research to be operationalized by focusing on the relevant variables, in order to answer the starting question: How does the communication variable, as a variable of relational marketing, does it influence customer loyalty to Casa Maria Victória?

The quantitative data collection instrument was developed specifically for this study, and consists of structured questions, with a quantitative approach. The questionnaire was constructed in order to characterize the profile of the sample and verify the opinion on the issues related to the theme under study.

Referring to the study in question, where it is intended to understand how the communication variable, as a relational marketing variable, influences customer loyalty to Casa Maria Victória, the dependent variable is the influence itself exerted on people, while people Independent variables include all factors related to communication with

the characterization of the costumer, which interfere, determining the manifestation of the first.

Casa Maria Victória, in the year 2017, computerized its customer database and currently has a portfolio of 300 computerized customers. It was based on this costumer portfolio that the sample of this study was collected.

In the present study, the accessible population was made up of all companies that were able to use the services offered by Casa Maria Victória, and are liable to answer questions posed on this topic. In this context, the population consisted on 138 costumer companies (computerized costumers) of Casa Maria Victoria. The questionnaires were requested to 138 business customers, carried out in person and by email, and 55 responses were obtained, which corresponds to a 40% response rate.

The low response rate verified did not allow extrapolating the results obtained for all 138 companies, since the 55 companies observed do not constitute a representative sample of the study population.

In order to collect data through the questionnaire, we sought to talk to the majority of customers, informing them about the objective of the research, emphasizing the importance of sincerity in the answers.

In order to achieve the objectives planned in the present investigation, an empirical study was carried out, whose methodological aspects were summarized in the technical sheet that was elaborated in Table 1. This sheet presents the technical aspects related to the collection of information.

Results

The costumer companies of Casa Maria Victória were the target selected for this purpose, however, given the intangibility of the companies in the response to the study, the employees of the companies were considered, as representatives of the same, who had stayed at least one night in the local accommodation, without valuing their age range, as they were only considered as customers, with a response from 55 company representatives.

Responding customers are mostly male. The ages are mainly between 41 and 50 years old and between 26 and 40 years old, most of them have a higher academic degree. The largest share of respondents are employed and have been part of the company's staff for over 5 years. Most respondents receive an individual remuneration level of up to 1000 Euros.

Contact Channel to relate to Casa Maria Victória

The choice of the contact channel shows the proximity that exists between the respondents and the accommodation establishment, and it appears that customers prefer a close relationship, using telephone contact and direct contact with the manager (Table 1).

Age of Respondents with Casa Maria Victória

It appears that the majority of respondents (39 respondents; 70.9%) have been customers for at least a year or more than a year. In general, costumers frequent the establishment of accommodation weekly, monthly or the vast majority whenever they need to stay in Beja (43.6%) (Tabels 2 and 3).

It is noticed that there is some degree of satisfaction between the services offered by the accommodation establishment and the customers, as there is a repeated demand and close contact between the parties.

Casa Maria Victória's Customer Service Rating

In general, respondents consider Casa Maria Victória's customer service excellent (67.3%) and good (20%), totaling 48 responses (Table 4).

Whatever the facet of the Casa Maria Vitória service classification, it is perceived that it is considered as excellent and good (Table 5 and 6).

Of the 55 respondents, only three (5%) aged 51-64 years, considered the service at the accommodation unit to be terrible.

Service is one of the important factors that lead customers to choose Casa Maria Victória; this factor is more evident in individuals aged between 41 and 50 years old and with a tendency to have a higher level of education, however respondents aged between 18-40 years old, also give some importance to this factor.

The academic degree of the individuals does not interfere in the opinion about the care of the accommodation unit, as there is always a huge appreciation for it.

Classification of Casa Maria Victória's customer relationship

The relationship between the customer and the Casa Maria Victória accommodation unit is considered to be excellent (Table 7).

From the relationship between the relationship factor and the age group of the respondents, it appears that it is essentially the respondents in the age group between 41-50 years, who consider the relationship with the costumer in the accommodation unit to be excellent (29%), followed by if the age group of 51-64 years (20%) (Tables 8 and 9).

When relating the classification of the relationship with the costumer of Casa Maria Victória and the educational qualifications of the respondents, it appears that there is a general contentment regardless of the academic degree of the respondent.

Relationship is a very important factor in the choice of Casa Maria Victória, regardless of the gender of the respondents, however, it is those in the age group between 41-50 years, who demonstrate the greatest importance in the relationship. Customers with higher educational qualifications are those who value the relationship the most (43.6%).

It can be concluded, with the idea that Casa Maria Victória's relationship with customers exceeds their expectations.

Relationship of Respondents to other Accommodation Establishments

It can be seen that most respondents do not want to know the services of other accommodation establishments because they are happy with Casa Maria Victória (76.4%) (Tables 10 and 11).

It appears that of the respondents who consider Casa Maria Victória's relationship with the customer to be excellent, only nine seek to know the services of other accommodation establishments to compare them with those offered by Casa Maria Victória.

It should be noted that 76.4% of respondents do not seek to visit other accommodation establishments, as they are loyal to the accommodation unit.

Indicators that you Consider Crucial to Maintain a Long-Lasting Relationship with an Accommodation Establishment

Regarding the long-term relationship with the accommodation establishments, the respondents considered the ability of interpersonal communication, as the most important indicator (56.4%) to maintain a good relationship with them (Table 12).

Transparency and trust in service were also presented as an important indicator for creating a long-term relationship (25.5%).

In order to have a long-term relationship with an accommodation establishment, it is important that there is a good ability for interpersonal communication, transparency and trust in the service. These two factors were presented by customers of different ages, however with different weightings, according to the age group.

The higher the individual's level of education, the greater the interest in having a good capacity for communication, transparency and trust in the service.

Complied with the indicators "Good interpersonal communication skills"; "Transparency and trust in the service", certainly that the customer becomes loyal to the establishment of accommodation, creating a lasting relationship between the parties.

Discussion

Evaluation of Objectives

Moving on to the evaluation of the objectives, the first objective was fulfilled, as customers stated that there is an excellent relationship with the accommodation establishment, they make reservations frequently (from weekly to whenever they need to stay in Beja) and mostly stated that have been customers for at least a year.

The second objective was proven, the respondents valued variables, such as interpersonal communication, service, personalized service and relationship in their relationship with the accommodation unit. They rated interpersonal relations and service with Casa Maria Victória as excellent.

With regard to the third objective, the 55 respondents stated in their responses that there is a link between interpersonal relationships and customer loyalty, they valued aspects of interpersonal communication (verbal and non-verbal), transparency and trust in service, for the presence of a lasting relationship.

Hypothesis Checking

Despite the data analysis providing the main conclusions from the information collected on the ground, it was crucial to cross-check these conclusions with the answers to the structural questions of the study, that is, it became pertinent to evaluate and test the hypotheses, based on the results from the application of the questionnaires carried out.

In this sense, each hypothesis corresponded to certain questions in the survey.

Is the majority of respondents satisfied with the services offered by Casa Maria Victória?.

In order to test this hypothesis, it became crucial to define the concept initially outlined for relational marketing, that is, to verify whether the service and the relationship were determining factors for the existence of a lasting relationship between the respondents and Casa Maria Victória.

The reasons considered most important, by the respondents when choosing Casa Maria Victória, show the main reasons mentioned by the respondents for choosing the accommodation establishment, which were the conditions of the facilities (100%), the relationship between Casa Maria Victória and the customer (87.3%), the service (81.8%) and, finally, the services offered (78.2%).

Regardless of the facet with which it crosses, the attendance factor and the relationship factor were the ones that brought together the most occurrences in all age groups, especially the 41-50 year old group. It was found that people with a medium and higher academic degree were the ones who gave it the most importance.

After analyzing the answers given by the respondents, it can be concluded that the hypothesis was validated, confirming that there is satisfaction with the services offered by Casa Maria Victória.

Does Casa Maria Victória's customer service meet their expectations / needs?.

Interpersonal relationships were the most important, which can be considered to analyze such a hypothesis. In general, respondents rated Casa Maria Victória's customer service as excellent (67.3%) and good (20%), totaling both 48 responses (87.3%).

Ease of access to the manager is an important factor for customers (72.7%), followed by the proximity of the manager in monitoring each customer (69.1%).

Specialized and personalized service was a factor that revealed the importance of customer satisfaction with the accommodation unit (37 respondents, 67.2%), and it is important to highlight that individuals expressed importance in their speed (69.1%).

In conclusion, this hypothesis was confirmed by the data obtained that confirmed that the accommodation unit provides good customer service, always seeking to meet the needs and expectations of the same.

Does the guest's loyalty to Casa Maria Victória have as main premise the interpersonal relationship, that is, the employee - customer relationship?.

Based on the theoretical framework of the aforementioned study, factors such as interpersonal relationships, based on customer service and relationship, can be considered as a starting point to analyze the referred hypothesis. Another factor considered important was the customer's interest in looking for the same service, in another accommodation establishment.

According to the responses collected, satisfaction of a social nature was the most targeted, whose values corresponded to 40 and 45 respondents. In general, respondents considered Casa Maria Victória's customer service and relationship excellent and good.

Of all respondents (55 respondents; 100%), only 13 individuals (23.6%) sought to know the products / services to compare them. It should be noted that 42 individuals (76.3%) did not want to visit more accommodation establishments in the Beja area, as they are happy with the services offered by Casa Maria Victória.

It was considered relevant to explain that the respondents who rated Casa Maria Victória's service as regular and terrible, tried to know the products and services to compare them, totaling 5 responses (9%), it is important to mention that 6 individuals (10.9 %) who showed high satisfaction with the interpersonal relationship, also expressed interest in knowing other services and making a comparison with the services offered by the accommodation establishment. On the other hand, the 13 respondents (23.6%) who rated the relationship from regular to good, only 2, sought to know the products and services to compare them, the remaining 11 respondents did not seek to know the products and services at the counterparts, as are happy with their accommodation unit.

The reasons that led customers to maintain a lasting relationship with Casa Maria Victória are the first image, the friendliness and friendliness of the employees (83.7%), the attitude and good presentation are equally valued (80 %), followed by initial compliance (74.5%).

With regard to the method that customers prefer to make their reservations at Casa Maria Victória, customers preferred to use the telephone (56.4%), and another large

share, 36.4% of respondents, made their appointment. accommodation, directly with the manager of the accommodation establishment, therefore, it can be verified that there is a close relationship between customers and the accommodation establishment.

The results confirmed the importance of social appreciation in customer loyalty, as individuals valued the interpersonal relationship and presented a high degree of loyalty to Casa Maria Victória.

In conclusion, it can be said that interpersonal relationships played a major role in the degree of loyalty of individuals, regardless of the variables they encounter.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to analyze the importance of communication, in the degree of customer loyalty, to the establishment of accommodation Casa Maria Victória.

It was found that, when there is a need to stay overnight in Beja, customers choose Casa Maria Victória. The reasons that led respondents to choose Casa Maria Victória to spend a night are the conditions of the accommodation unit's facilities, the services offered, the interpersonal relationship and the attendance.

It was noted that there is a close relationship between customers and the accommodation establishment, as they, despite the evolution in terms of technology, use telephone contact and direct contact with the manager to make their reservations, that is, they value the interpersonal relationship. It was found that respondents aged between 18 and 64, regardless of academic degree, use the same channel to relate to the accommodation unit, however, the study showed that a slice of respondents with higher education prefers direct contact with the manager.

When analyzing the service and the relationship between Casa Maria Victória and the customer, it was noticed that it is considered from good to excellent, which means that the customers remain in the accommodation unit for at least a year or more, and that their stay is weekly, monthly or in the vast majority whenever they need to stay in Beja. This means that customers do not seek to relate to other accommodation establishments, that is, they do not seek to know the services of other accommodation units, as they are satisfied with the services offered by Casa Maria Victória.

It can be concluded that the main objective of Casa Maria Victória is no longer simply the sale of random and sporadic overnight stays, but rather the increase and maintenance of its customer portfolio. It is concerned with creating stable and long-lasting relationships with customers, supporting its strategy in interpersonal relationships, creating a competitive advantage over the competition.

The close relationship allows the accommodation unit to get to know its customers better, seeking to satisfy them, responding to their requirements. At the same time, it creates a feeling of trust in the customer, through personalized service, that is, a service that knows what the customer wants and has the right service to offer.

A suggestion for future studies is the importance of evaluating the variables under study not only from the user's perspective, but also from the perspective of other

stakeholders involved in the process. It is important to explore all the relational variables pointed out in the literature and their connection to customer loyalty.

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Table 1
Study technical file

Information collection process	Structured and self-administered questionnaire
Type of questions	Closed single response and control or filter
Search universe	Customers of Casa Maria Victória
Geographic Scope	Portugal
Contact form	<i>Email</i> and in person
Response Index	40% (55 replies)
Fieldwork period	November 2018 to December 2018
Information processing	Computer processing through SPSS Version 25

Source: Author

Table 1
Contact channel selected by respondents

	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency	Valid Relative Frequency	Accumulated Relative Frequency
Telephone	36	65.5	65.5	65.5
Email	2	3.6	3.6	69.1
Social networks	3	5.5	5.5	74.5
Manager	14	25.5	25.5	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

Table 2
Relationship between the contact channel and seniority os frespondentes in companies

	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency	Valid Relative Frequency	Accumulated Relative Frequency
<6 months	16	29.1	29.1	29.1
1 year	10	18.2	18.2	47.3
> 1 year	17	30.9	30.9	78.2
> 5 years	10	18.2	18.2	96.4
> 10 years	2	3.6	3.6	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

Table 3

Number os reservations made by respondentes at Casa Maria Victória

	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency	Valid Relative Frequency	Accumulated Relative Frequency
Only once	10	18.2	18.2	18.2
Weekly	14	25.5	25.5	43.6
Monthly	6th	10.9	10.9	54.5
Annually	1	1.8	1.8	56.4
Whenever I need to stay in Beja	24	43.6	43.6	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

Table 4
Casa Maria Victória customer service classification

	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency	Valid Relative Frequency	Accumulated Relative Frequency
Great	37	67.3	67.3	67.3
Good	11	20.0	20.0	87.3
Regular	4	7.3	7.3	94.5
Terrible	3	5.5	5.5	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

Table 5
Relationship between Casa Maria Victória's classification of customer service and the age group of respondents

Casa Maria Victória's customer service rating	Age Range					Total
	18-25 years	26-40 years	41-50 years	51-64 years	> 65 years	
Great	7	8	16	5	1	37
Good	0	4	4	3	0	11
Regular	2	2	0	0	0	4
Terrible	0	0	0	3	0	3
Total	9th	14	20	11	1	55

Source: Author

Table 6
Relationship between Casa Maria Victória's customer service rating and respondents' educational qualifications

Casa Maria Victória's customer service rating	Literary abilities					Total
	1st cycle	2nd cycle	3rd cycle	High school	University education	
Great	0	11	5	2	19	37
Good	1	4	0	1	5	11
Regular	0	0	0	2	2	4
Terrible	3	0	0	0	0	3
Total	4	15	5	5	26	55

Source: Author

Table 7

Casa Maria Victoria customer relationship classification

	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency	Valid Relative Frequency	Accumulated Relative Frequency
Great	42	76.4	76.4	76.4
Good	8	14.5	14.5	90.9
Regular	5	9.1	9.1	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

Table 8

Relationship between the classification of the relationship with the customer of Casa Maria Victória and the age group of the respondents

Classification of the relationship with the customer of Casa Maria Victória	Age Range					Total
	18-25 years	26-40 years	41-50 years	51-64 years	> 65 years	
Great	7	8	16	11	0	42
Good	0	3	4	0	1	8
Regular	2	3	0	0	0	5
Total	9th	14	20	11	1	55

Source: Author

Table 9

Relationship between the classification of the relationship with the customer of Casa Maria Victória and the educational qualifications of the respondents

Classification of the relationship with the customer of Casa Maria Victória	Literary abilities					Total
	1st cycle	2nd cycle	3rd cycle	High school	University education	
Great	4	11	4	2	21	42
Good	0	4	1	1	2	8
Regular	0	0	0	2	3	5
Total	4	15	5	5	26	55

Source: Author

Table 10

Relationship between respondents and other accommodation establishments

	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency	Valid Relative Frequency	Accumulated Relative Frequency
Get to know the services to compare them	13	23.6	23.6	23.6
Do not want to know because you are happy with the accommodation establishment	42	76.4	76.4	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

Table 11

Relationship between the classification of the relationship with the customer of Casa Maria Victória and the seeking to know other accommodation establishments

Classification of Casa Maria Victória's customer relationship	Knowledge of other accommodation establishments		Total
	Looking to know the services to compare them	Do not want to know because you are happy with your accommodation establishment	
Great	9th	33	42
Good	2	6th	8
Regular	2	3	5
Total	13	42	55

Source: Author

Table 12

Indicators that you consider crucial to maintain a lasting relationship, selected by the respondents

	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency	Valid Relative Frequency	Accumulated Relative Frequency
Interpersonal communication skills	31	56.4	56.4	56.4
Transparency and trust in service	14	25.5	25.5	81.8
Agility in decision making	10	18.2	18.2	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

Table 13

Relationship between the indicators that you consider determinant to maintain a lasting relationship and the age group of the respondents

		Age Range					Total
		18-25 years	26-40 years	41-50 years	51-64 years	> 65 years	
Determining indicators to maintain a lasting relationship	Good interpersonal communication skills	7	7	13	4	0	31
	Transparency and trust in service	2	5	4	2	1	14
	Agility in decision making	0	2	3	5	0	10
Total		9th	14	20	11	1	55

Source: Author

Table 14

Relationship between the indicators that you consider determinant to maintain a lasting relationship and the educational qualifications of the respondents

		Literary abilities					Total
		1st cycle	2nd cycle	3rd cycle	High school	University education	
Determining indicators to maintain a lasting relationship	Good interpersonal communication skills	0	7	4	5	15	31
	Transparency and trust in service	0	4	1	0	9th	14
	Agility in decision making	4	4	0	0	2	10
Total		4	15	5	5	26	55

Source: Author