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## **BACHELOR'S THESIS**

# **TOURISM CUSTOMER SERVICE THEORY VS. PRACTICE**

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**Degree in Tourism**

**Faculty of Tourism**

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## ABSTRACT

Every company faces problematic situations, and hotels are not an exception. Telling bad news to the customers, managing them when they are angry... Having a clear image on how to deal with these problems is vital to any good management. Such is the purpose of this thesis: to locate, analyze and understand the strategies of customer service used by receptionists to then compare them with the theory of behavioral science; do they work similar? What do they differ in?

After conducting interviews with different reception staff and researching behavioral science concepts like “the two selves”, “WYSIATI”, “the anchoring effect” among others, it appears that they subconsciously adapted some of the theory without ever studying it.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

I have been a receptionist for 3 years and if there is something a job like this can give you is perspective. One perspective a receptionist will always have to face is the one of an angry customer. They will complain and plead they might scream or even cry. And our job is supposed to be helping them to overcome any problems they might have or even feel that they are having. Therefore, it is hard to measure the frustration one feels when you want to help but you do not know how.

In this essay I will interview receptionist staff to get a view of some of their strategies for a better customer service. Because one of the most important jobs of customer service is to make the guest enjoy their stay as much as possible, especially when times are difficult for tourism.

Facing a global pandemic, tourism has decayed. According to the Spanish newspaper “El País” tourism income has decayed a total of 75% for the year 2020<sup>1</sup>. The problem with tourism is not only about restrictions but about expectations. Customers who have not had a proper vacation in more than a year will come and be forced to wear facemasks, respect social distances, extreme hygiene, tension will flourish. Again, confused receptionist will face angry customers who might not even know why they are angry. They only know that their vacation is not going how it is supposed to go. This essay intends to dig through receptionist strategies and compare them to behavioral science concepts. Help to understand how people make judgements about experiences and give ideas on how to better customer service.

## 2. CONTEXTUALIZATION AND OBJECTIVE

As said before, the main objective of this thesis is to understand the differences between theory and practice in the customer service of hotel reception. Therefore, I use concepts of behavioral science to understand the actions of a reception staff. Behavioral science explores the cognitive processes and interactions of humans. It analyzes behavior through observation and experiments. Examples of behavioral sciences include anthropology, psychology, cognitive science and more. The term behavioral science appeared in the 1950s in the united states it suggests a more experimental approach than the older term social sciences which is normally uses synonymously.

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<sup>1</sup> Gutiérrez, H. (28th Diciembre 2020) El turismo cierra su peor año en medio siglo por la pandemia. El País

The concepts chosen for this thesis are from Kahneman's research. There is lots of information on behavioral science compared to customer service and to tourism even, but for the sake of this thesis I will focus only on concepts from the book "Thinking fast and slow" by Kahneman.

Since behavioral science is a broad term, it can relate to many aspects of human behavior. In this case talking about tourism and customer service. How does it relate?

The tourism sector is huge, according to the Balearic government in the year 2019 the total amount of money spent by tourists was 1.6510 billion euros, 1,4% more than in 2018, making it an historical record<sup>2</sup>.

Tourism is everywhere and there are lots of people benefitting from it. Through behavioral science we can know our customers and make a better experience for them, to create loyal customers, to better the satisfaction and to increase the price of the experience. Knowing what people want or need in their vacation can help provide a good experience and benefit from it for longer periods of time. A good hotel customer service improves the well-being of the hotel's guests which makes it a better-quality hotel. Their customers are happy so they recommend it to others, they can create loyalty and or generate new clientele. Knowing what people want and giving it to the guests is the key for good customer service.

The reception plays a big part that, it is a part of a hotel where each guest has to interact with, at least two times per visit (check-in and check-out). The reception acts as the brain of the hotel, they can communicate with all the other departments to make sure that the guests are having a good stay, considering therefore customer service is very important. They can make sure that the guest gets anything they ask for (being that always in the capacity of the hotel's resources). This ensures a happy guest and tries to get them to come back (accomplishing loyalty).

Kahneman's book explains the numerous ways people make judgments and choices when in certain situations. Which can be related to customer service and how receptionists act to please the guests of the hotel.

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<sup>2</sup> GOIB. (n.d.). *Baleares cerró 2019 con 16,45 millones de turistas y un récord histórico en gasto, facturación y rentabilidad turística*. Govern Illes Balears.  
<http://www.caib.es/govern/sac/fitxa.do?codi=4086088&coduo=1&lang=es#:~:text=El%20gasto%20de%20todos%20los,2018%20y%20un%20r%C3%A9cord%20hist%C3%B3rico.>

### 3. METHODOLOGY

For this present thesis it was important to prepare the questions for the interviews. For that, I had written down the major questions and outlined the broad areas of knowledge that are relevant to answering. These areas were:

1. Working and employees (customer service).
2. Customer awareness.
3. Strategies used in the sector, what not to do.

For the first set of questions the goal was to know if the hotel in question was interested in the **customer service** and if they thought it was important. Questions like "How much does your hotel care about the satisfaction of the customers?" allude not only to the customer satisfaction but also to the customer service.

Other questions were set to identify the kind of relationship they have with the customers. It is important to know how the hotel retrieves data to better their customer service or installations for that matter. Some have questionnaires or a document where they archive complaints, but they all have some kind of data recollection to have in case they might need such information later on. This part also contains questions about their employees and their motivations.

The second part of the questions is about the **awareness of the customers** feelings and thoughts. What the staff thinks that customers are like. How they prepare for the customers. Questions like "How do you manage expectations from customers?" are to see what the staff must beware of when the guests come to the hotel. Another important question that helps see how the staff relates to the customers is "What is the most important part of a customer's trip?". This shows the awareness that the staff has about the customers perceptions.

The third and last part of the questions revolve around **strategies** and the ones that the staff most uses for customer satisfaction. I also asked questions on what not to do so as to get more information on the matter. When asking what they normally do, sometimes the answer is short because it is difficult to recall all the most used strategies. And when you ask what not to do, they can probably think of a couple more strategies.

Therefore, it was a slow and comfortable start to warm up the interviewed people, to then move on to more interesting questions and finally end with the most difficult questions about strategies.

The sequence of the questions asked is important, starting with questions that are more open, and that going on to the more specific and detailed ones. All questions

are formulated in a way that can get the most information out of the interview. Starting questions with "how" and "why" which provide more detailed answers instead of questions which can be answered with a simple "yes " or "no". (The whole set of questions can be found in the appendix.)

Other things I took into account for the interviews apart from asking <sup>3</sup>questions so that the answers are long and detailed was to wait enough time for the interviewed to answer properly, to be careful and always ask neutral questions and to explain the thesis and how the interview is going to go when asking people to be interviewed. These are all precautions and measures I took to get the best possible answers which I found in articles that are listed in the biography.

Because of the limitations that covid-19 has brought us, it was very difficult to ensure interviews with hotel receptionists since they were not easy to reach or come into contact with. I contacted several hotels during the first months and got very few responses most of them denying the interview. The goal was to get as many interviews as I could to ensure more accurate results but given the circumstances I finally resorted to personal contacts from my job and colleagues.

Therefore, I have interviewed ten receptionists, all in the span of 4 weeks (February and March). The interviews were through phone calls and lasted about thirty minutes each and I recorded them to have a better transcript at the end. These ten receptionists work at 4 different hotels in Mallorca. The hotels are all four-star hotels and above. One hotel is a family resort, two of them are adults only and one is a small hotel in the city center.

After all the interviews were done, I read the book "thinking fast and slow" <sup>4</sup>by Daniel Kahneman. I read the book after the interviews so as not to be influenced in the process of questioning for strategies. After reading the book I compared some of the concepts that apply in the context of tourism receptionist strategies. The book mentions other studies and books as well and I have read and used information from those that are relevant to the topic. Given the limited space in this paper I have shortened the amount of concepts that I will be referring to, these will be explained thoroughly and compared with the results of the interviews. There are a lot of papers and books about the topics chosen so I have narrowed it down to some concepts found in Daniel Kahneman's book "thinking fast and

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<sup>3</sup> Harvard. (n.d.). *Strategies for Qualitative Interviews*. [https://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/files/interview\\_strategies.pdf](https://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/files/interview_strategies.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux..



slow” with some other studies that it references. The concepts chosen are the most relevant to the topic at hand.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Interviews

The results of the interviews were very similar: all 10 receptionists said that customer service is one of the most important parts for a guest to feel welcome.

Through the interviews we find out that all four hotels have various methods to keep in contact with the guests. They all keep a registry for complaints that guests have made and the state they are in, whether they are resolved or in the process of resolving and/or if they had any further problems. They each have a questionnaire they send to every guest after the stay. These are the standard procedures in almost every hotel. In addition, they all look at the comments on webpages like TripAdvisor, booking, Expedia or their own web page to see what the customers write after their stay, as they know how important it is to know the customers opinion from an outside source.

Two of the hotels from where I interviewed the reception staff also have an extra check point where they call the guest one day after their arrival to see if everything is to their liking. When they have a request or a problem, they fix it and then call back the next day to confirm everything to the guests liking, trying to make sure the guests have the most pleasant experience possible, and that the service meets their standards.

To maintain the staff motivated the hotels put a score based on the questionnaire scores we previously talked about, that they need to reach for that season or year. Since the grade is based on that questionnaire, most staff members feel encouraged to reach higher grades and want to be helpful so that the guests give them a good grade at the end. This creates a structural system in which employees are rewarded not by just doing their job, but doing it the best they possibly can to make guests happy.

To answer the question on how to manage the guest’s expectation, the most common answer was that it is something they still need to work on because the information gets lost in translation and some travel agencies give false information unknowingly: when the guests arrive to the hotel, they are surprised by some of the regulations, norms, prices, and infrastructures. The staff at the only adult’s hotel on the other hand is certain that they manage expectations just fine, their web page is clear and not many guests complain.

As to the most important part of a guest vacation, most responded that the first encounter is crucial, needing to make an impression on how the reception

receives the guests, how they find the hotel's installations and the room. But all have a clear opinion on how if at first, they get a bad start, they can always recover and end up with a nice memory. (unless they had some very problematic vacation) One of the interviewees said, "one should never give up on a guest, always trying to make the best of their vacation regardless of anything that could have happened."

One important question was "what not to do" since this question gives more insight on the employee's strategies. The most common answer was not to lie or make the guests feel as if you do not care about their issues, which is related with everything they said before.

"A very important part of working as a receptionist is to empathize with the guests and make them feel heard". All interviewed receptionists agreed that one should never forget to make the guest feel heard and understood when they complain about something, and therefore it is very important to take them seriously. Being transparent with the guest is a way to make them trust the receptionists. Any problem they may have must be fixed as quickly as possible and those problems ought to be minimized in the first place.

Another common opinion was that the standard way of greeting the guests is by smiling and being very welcoming. Being nice and asking them questions about the trip and themselves is also a must.

"To maximize the guest's wellbeing is to give them anything the hotel has to offer that does not involve more cost, being always better to give more than the guest expect, than give any less." In extreme cases, compensation can be given, but that is in case of the hotel doing something wrong and wanting to repair their mistake. According to one receptionist the hotel is a business, but it needs to show that the happiness of the guest is much more important than profit.

The reception staff should be very good at analyzing people, they always must be aware of the surroundings and how the guests arrive. They observe the guests, how they act, if they have kids, if they are alone, a couple and then act accordingly to the guest mood and to anticipate their issues, to solve them before they even become such. Being proactive is a part of a receptionist's work, and this analyzing helps on a fundamental level to act according to all previous points.

Over all the interviewees had very similar opinions about the strategies and knowledge about the guests. The only case where they disagreed is when talking about the guest's expectation from the information given to them before the arrival.

## 4.2 Book Concepts

### Dual system.

The book starts by explaining a dual system of reasoning that has been studied by many. This model attributes how we make judgments into two ways: the automatic responses of **system 1** set up unreliable intuition, which the controlled operations of **system 2** fail to identify correctly. System 1 is identified with the automatic response without ongoing operations, just associative memory, also known as the fast system. Associative memory is the ability to remember and learn the relationships of unrelated items. “It works automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control”. **(Kahneman, 2011: 18)**

The defining characteristics of system 1 are that its unconscious, automatic, and effortless and its without self-awareness or control. The role that it plays is that it assesses the situation very fast and delivers updates to the second system to analyze further if needed. All in all, it takes most of the thinking we do in the day.

System 2 however, is effortful and requires mental concentration. It often is associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration and is also known as the slow system. It believes itself to be where the action is but system 1 is the most important. Because system 1 generates complex patterns and ideas at a very fast rate, and system 2 is the one to form complex thoughts in a series of steps which system 1 skips. The defining characteristics of system 2 are that they are deliberate and conscious, effortful controlled mental processes and rational thinking with self-awareness, and it is logical and skeptical. It takes up a very small portion of thinking throughout the day.

This is also explained by Jonathan St. B.T Evans in a paper written about the dual- processing. Many others have this idea of a double consciousness and therefore these two systems have other names as well. For instance, the heuristic and systematic parts (system 1 and 2 respectively) and the reflexive and reflective parts from Liberman (2003).

“System 2 is a form of thinking under intentional level control, supported by unconscious processes in System 1 that deliver perceptions, memories, and so on.”<sup>5</sup>

The simplest example that there is to explain the difference between system 1 and 2 is the question of how much is  $2 \times 2$ , we automatically know that it is 4 and that is our system. When asked how much is  $17 \times 24$  we pause and need to do the

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<sup>5</sup> Evans, J. S. (2008). Dual-Processing Accounts of Reasoning, Judgment, and Social Cognition. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 59(1), 255–278. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.59.103006.093629>

math and that would be our system 2. Only after we have done the mental work, we know the answer to that math problem. **(Kahneman, 2011: 17-22)**

Every day we all have a lot of small decisions to make, whether it is to turn left or right, or if it's between taking the stairs or elevator but there are so many choices that if we would have to process them all through our system 2, we would crash and have an overload of processing. So, it is important to prioritize and take shortcuts to navigate better through life. Most of our decisions are based on shortcuts and are not based on rational information. Those short cuts are made by the system 1.

There is a problem with this, and it is that sometimes these intuitions from system 1 are wrong, that can happen when you focus on only one part of a complex problem and ignore the others. Thus, affecting our decision-making and later our customer behavior.

#### What you see is all there is. WYSIATI

Availability heuristic also known as what you see is all there is. It is a cognitive bias, essentially this means that we jump to conclusions based on limited information. We use the information we already have, to make judgements and create impressions.

When making decisions, our mind only takes into account the things it already knows, no matter the quality or quantity. The only thing it does is connect the information into a story that makes sense. It does not matter if it is not accurate, complete, or reliable, it only needs to be consistent. Making decisions this way is easy, intuitive, comfortable and it usually makes us feel confident. It rarely considers the unknown facts that could be relevant to that decision making but it does not have information about. Although it does not consider all possibilities sometimes for small decisions it is helpful so as not to spend too much time deciding between small things. It rarely considers the unknown facts that could be relevant to that decision making but it does not have information about.

**"WYSIATI"** facilitates the achievement of coherence and of the cognitive ease that causes us to accept a statement as true. It explains why we can think fast, and how we are able to make sense of partial information in a complex world." **(Kahneman, 2011: 72)**

This behavior is not easy to avoid since it is engraved in our brain. This has to do with our system 1 as before explained. One thing to do in these situations is to recognize the importance of the decisions about to be taken and engage the system 2 to think more slowly and build a better opinion, to inform ourselves, and therefore make a thought through decision.

Something related to this phenomenon is the focusing illusion, which Kahneman also explains in his book. **Focusing illusions**, “Nothing in life is as important as you think it is when you are thinking about it.” (Kahneman, 2011: 326)

The **focusing illusion** happens often and it is when something becomes important just because of your heightened attention on it. It is much easier to remember things that have happened recently and give them a greater importance, but with time they lose that importance as the memory fades into the background.

In a study by Andrew Clark, Ed Diener, and Yannis Georgellis of the German Socio-Economic Panel <sup>6</sup>where they asked the same respondents every year about their satisfaction with their life, they discovered that happiness was related to how near the people were from a big event that is supposed to better their life, in this case marriage. When approaching marriage their happiness increases and after marriage the happiness declines the further away it gets. This is what the focusing illusion is, we automatically assign greater importance to those things we focus on.

#### Anchoring effect

The anchoring effect describes a bias in which a person’s decisions are influenced by a particular reference point or anchor. Once exposed to a number, any guess, estimate or answer may change from what they would have thought without the anchor. This can also happen if the quantity is not related to the quantity to be estimated.

“If you are asked whether Gandhi was more than 114 years old when he died you will end up with a much higher estimate of his age at death than you would if the anchoring question referred to death at 35” (Kahneman, 2011: 98)

These are examples that Kahneman shows of the anchoring effect that happen without us noticing. The effect does not happen only in situations that require quantitative answers or decisions but also in situations that have nothing to do with numbers. For instance, setting a time to meet with people or when asking about geographical locations.

“Two different mechanisms produce anchoring effects—one for each system. There is a form of anchoring that occurs in a deliberate process of adjustment, an

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<sup>6</sup> Clark, A. E., Diener, E., Georgellis, Y., & Lucas, R. E. (2008). Lags and Leads in Life Satisfaction: A Test of the Baseline Hypothesis. *The Economic Journal*, 118(529). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2008.02150.x>

operation of System 2. And there is anchoring that occurs by a priming effect, an automatic manifestation of System 1.” (Kahneman, 2011: 99)

There are two ways for the anchoring effect to happen, one is in system 1 which happens through the priming effect and the other is through system 2 where it is a process of operations run by system 2 which tries to internalize and search for information.

### Peak-end rule

This peak-end rule describes a common situation where people judge an experience based on the most intense point and the end, instead of the overall sum or average of every moment of set experience. This effect happens regardless of the experience being pleasant or unpleasant. It changes the way we recall past events. People remember a memory or judge an experience based on how they felt at the peak movements as well as how they felt at the end.

Other information about the experience is not forgotten but it is just not used, this includes the total pleasantness or unpleasantness and even how long the experience was. This is thereby a global concept which includes duration neglect. The duration neglect refers to how people’s judgments of experiences depend very little on the duration of those. Researchers have found that the judgements we make will be influenced by the peak of the experience that being a pleasant or unpleasant experience and how quickly this feeling diminishes.

One example of these concepts explained by Don Redelmeier and Kahneman in an experiment where two sets of participants had a colonoscopy, patients A had the colonoscopy with a duration of 8 minutes and B’s was 24 minutes. Both participants showed their level of pain throughout the procedure. Patient B had a better ending to the procedure and patient A had a hurtful ending. Patients were asked to rate the total amount of pain they had experienced during the procedure. This revealed two findings, the peak-end rule where the global retrospective rating was well perceived by the average of the level of pain reported at the worst moment and at the end. And that the duration of the procedure had no effect to the ratings of the total pain, the duration neglect effect.

### Two selves (experience and memory)

Explained in the fifth part of the book, it describes the evidence which introduces a distinction between two selves, the “experiencing self” and “remembering self”. The experiencing self is a fast, intuitive, unconscious mode of thinking that works in the present moment, concentrating on our experience in

live itself: Living in the present moment instead of thinking about it. The remembering self is the slow, rational, and conscious way of thinking that tells us about our experience and how we think and feel about it. These two concepts describe how we judge experiences once right when in is happening (experiencing self) and one when it is over, when we remember it (remembering self). These judgements might not coincide since you are not the exact same person when it happened than when you remember it. Some experiences might seem bad in the heat of the moment but could be later on remembered as good ones.

What we remember with our remembering self are intense or significant moments in each experience and the ending. In a sense we remember each experience according to how our experience ended.

One example of this in the book is when listening to a symphony. No matter how beautiful it sounds or how enjoyable it is, if at the end there is something that disrupts the experience such as a loud shocking sound, the memory of that experience is bound to be ruined. You can listen for 40 minutes of brilliant music and it counts for nothing just because of a short and bad ending.

“He told of listening raptly to a long symphony on a disc that was scratched near the end, producing a shocking sound, and he reported that the bad ending “ruined the whole experience.” But the experience was not actually ruined, only the memory of it.” **(Kahneman, 2011: 371)**

This concept is interesting when making decisions based on memory, the remembering self rather than the experiencing self. In another experiment, participants were exposed to two separate experiences where there was pain involved. One episode consisted of sixty seconds of pain that was not intolerable. The second time they were exposed to the same level of pain for ninety second with the slight change that the last thirty seconds they experienced a slight decrease of pain. When asked to repeat one of the two, most participants said that they would prefer to experience the longer exposure to pain. This is experiment is seen in a paper written by Daniel Kahneman, Barbara L. Fredrickson, Charles A. Schreiber, and Donald A. Redelmeier called “when more pain is preferred to less: Adding a Better ending”.<sup>7</sup>

When on vacation one of the most common things to do is taking pictures to later look at them and remember the time. But taking pictures is not the best way for the tourist to enjoy the vacation, to communicate with the experiencing self. The

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<sup>7</sup> Clark, A. E., Diener, E., Georgellis, Y., & Lucas, R. E. (2008). Lags and Leads in Life Satisfaction: A Test of the Baseline Hypothesis. *The Economic Journal*, 118(529). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2008.02150.x>

pictures taken on vacation are not looked at for very long nor as often as we think we will. In most of the cases we value touristic vacations by the story or the memories that we expect to achieve. We are looking for memorable experiences that will not be forgotten. “a self-conscious memorable experience gains weight and significance that it would not otherwise have.” It is remarkable how, even when the experiencing self is supposed to be the main player, we give more importance to the remembering self of the future.

We are our remembering selves, and our experiencing selves are like strangers. Because for most people memories are what they identify with themselves and their experiences shape them. But we need to consider both the experiencing and remembering self because they do not always coincide with their interests. The experiencing self can be more satisfied by things that the remembering self is not. For instance, the idea of relaxing on the couch or just doing things that make you happy. This may not be enjoyable for the remembering self because the remembering self only remembers wasting time and sees that they are not satisfied with life. That is the difference between emotional well-being and live satisfaction.

### 4.3 Comparison

Comparing the differences of theory and practice. Where they overlap and where they differ. Based on the interviews and the theory previously explained.

#### Frist impressions

As seen before in the interviews one popular response was that the first impression of the hotel reception is very important for the guests. When the guests arrive, they feel the general condition of the hotel and the surroundings. How they greet the guests as well as how easy and fast they can do the check-in is important. The first impression can be linked to the immediate response of system 1 and “What you see is all there is”.

System 1 plays the fast, easy, unconscious, and comfortable roll in our minds and therefore is impressionable on arrival. When arriving at the destination there are a lot of stimuli all at once and our system 1 filters many things so as to be able to keep moving forwards and completely settle in the hotel. Therefore, the way the receptionists welcome the guests is crucial, the way they greet them, how they treat them and even what room they give the guests.

While the first impression is important, the concept of the peak-end rule tells us that some major events and the end of an experience are the parts that really create the impression that will be remembered.



## Questionnaires

System 1 interferes in the perception of the hotel's service is when responding to the questionnaires that they send at the end of the stay. This system is the one that has the first impression but system 2 is the one that does the thinking to write the reviews.

The questionnaires are sent at the end of each stay because the guest will have completed all activities and experiences and therefore can review the entire hotel experience. The customer service is always very attentive to the check-out of every guest and ask each one how their stay went. Always making them feel heard, safe and being very caring. When the guests finally answer the questionnaire, their remembering self recalls the best parts of their stay but the last contact they had is very important to how the guest ends up feeling about the whole vacation.

## Experience or memory

According to the interviewees the customer service is there to make the guest have an enjoyable stay and to get any problem solved at the hotel. When taking into account the two selves and how they judge experiences the hotel reception staff is made to please the experiencing self more than the remembering self. They focus on the guests stay making them comfortable and taken care of. This way of treating the guest might work for the actual stay and make them feel great but after some time has passed and they remember the vacation that might change for the remembering self. The hotel management must decide which self to please to. In many hotels they have an entertainment event at the evening, this may create good memories for the remembering self later on, whilst the experiencing self is entertained. But as I have explained before the experiences that count are the most memorable and the end.

## Cognitive biases

Sometimes the guest biases are helpful to their own perception of the hotel and customer service. Cognitive biases like WYSIATI or the focusing illusion make it seem that the service and infrastructures are great. It is not always about what the hotel has to offer for each specific guest but how they make them feel when they are there on vacation.

The focusing illusion makes it all the more important for the customer service to care about the feelings of the guests. When complaining, guests need to feel heard and understood, because they are focusing on one specific issue. This makes their issue the most important one at that moment. If what they think is the most important thing for them at that time, making them feel heard is the best way to make them safe and it helps them calm down because the receptionists ensure them that a solution is coming.

#### 4.3.1 OVERLAP (THEORY AND PRACTICE)

Taking the theory into account here are some ideas to incorporate into the customer service from a hotel reception. To create a better service and improve the customers experience and their memory of it.

##### Gift at the check-out

Based on the peak-end rule, giving the guests a little gift at the check-out will improve their memory of the overall experience at the hotel. As explained before this is because the peak-end rule states that the final moments of an experience are the most important ones, the ones that will impact the memory of the guests. Normally, at the check-out the reception staff will ask the guest how the stay went but it usually is a very neglected moment which they do not put any interest for the guest's opinion since it is one of the lasts interactions of the stay. The check-out is a good opportunity to make the last moments of a vacation matter and impact the rest. Giving the guests a little token is one way to remark their experience. The guests will feel special and important in that moment. In other situations, for instance in a cruise ship there are the captain dinners which are a special event at the end of the cruise that give the same result. Therefore, a possible equivalent would be a little token for each guest at the check-out to remark their importance at the hotel. This will make the memory of their experience a lot more positive.

##### Questionnaire question

The main idea is to incorporate into the questionnaire that the hotel sends out to every guest at the end of their stay an extra question where the guest has to answer with their most memorable experience at the hotel. A question like "what is your most memorable experience at our Hotel?". That will trigger the guest to think positively at the end of the stay and so have the good memories of the vacation influence the score they give the hotel more. The remembering self will be involved to answer this question and by doing so it will condition the guest to remember the good experiences better and even change the overall feeling of the vacation in a small but significant way.

##### Problem solving

According to the focusing illusion, nothing is as important as when you are thinking about it. In other words, if something is bothering a guest at the hotel the most important thing is to solve as quirkily as possible, so the guest does not think about it too much. But something to consider is the anchoring effect. When a guest comes to you angry and with a problem that might seem difficult, but you know how to fix, a good move would be to tell them how difficult it is and to give you half a day to solve it. This way you anchored the guest's reaction. By having a solution at the end of the day the guest will not remember the amount of time they had to wait for the problem to be fixed they will only

remember that they got it fixed. That is the duration neglect, although you remember waiting you forget how much time it was at the end.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, behavioral science is the study of how people behave when in certain situations. People do not need to know the full theory of behavioral science to use it. This is shown in the interviews, as the interviewees explain how they exploit some of the studied biases without showing any signs of knowing the underlying theory behind them.

They all agree that the first impression is the most important part of the stay, acknowledging the importance of how the first thing the customer see might condition the rest of the stay without even touching any behavioral science concept. That being said, this instinctive use of behavioral science can be a double edge sword. This reveals evident when we observe how all four hotels struggled in the same place; they all nailed the idea of creating a mental environment for future customers, but they lack the theory necessary to accurately manage the expectations they create and thus, create disappointment.

Having all hotel staff to be psychologists, would probably provide the perfect customer service but it would be called unrealistic at best. One cannot expect the hotel receptionists, the web page designer, or the waiter to study all the works of Kahneman and his colleagues. But we sure can implement some strategies like the ones mentioned before among other, simple techniques to ensure a better customer service. When the staff knows a little about the way people make judgements and how they react to certain experiences, they can help prevent them to be bad ones.

As show in the interviews staff members work with their instinct and thus, they are not always doing what is best for the guest's experience. One important insight are the two selves and how the experiencing self is so different from the remembering self. Does the hotel want guests to enjoy their stay as much as they can so that the experiencing self is satisfied or does the hotel want the remembering self to have the best memories? These are two completely different approaches. It is very hard to please both the experiencing and remembering self at the same time, to say the least. Hotels should at least, study and teach their employees enough behavioral science to make the approach they take consciously, and not instinctively.

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## 7. APENDIX

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **1. Workplace, and employees. Customer service**

- How much does the hotel care about the satisfaction of the customers?
- How good of a customer service would you say your hotel has to offer, compared to other hotels of the same class?
- Do you have a form to communicate with the customers? How?
- Do you take notes of customers complaints? How?
- Do you analyze the customers interactions with the company?
- Does your company set goals for the customer service? Which ones?

#### **2. Customer awareness, do they know what is on the customers mind?**

- How do you manage expectations form customers?
- What is the most important part of a customer's trip?
- What do you think is the most important part of a vacation for the customer to feel like they had a good time?
- Do you have any form of consistent feedback with each guest?

#### **3. What kind of strategies they use/know? What not to do?**

- What are some strategies the employees use to have satisfied customers?
- What should you never do when a customer is angry?
- What type of language do you use when talking to customers?
- When having bad news for a customer how and when do you tell them? And if having several?

