

Analysis the Influence of Marketing Strategy on Customer Satisfaction: A Case Study of Luxury Hotels in China

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Abstract: This study aimed to analyze the marketing strategies that influence consumer satisfaction during the pandemic. Refer to the literature related to consumer satisfaction, consumer loyalty and 4p theory. This paper used the SWOT analysis method to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of Chinese luxury hotels in detail. This study object is luxury hotels in China, which fill the gap in related fields. Combined with the market situation of Chinese hotel industry environment, this paper analyzed the opportunities and challenges of the Chinese hotel industry after the pandemic. This analysis showed that in some special periods, it is beneficial to improve customer satisfaction when Chinese luxury hotels appropriately reduce their product prices. Hotels can also carry out strategic cooperation with other industries to maintain competitiveness. In this study, the 4p theory was used to verify the conjecture, and suggestions to improve customer satisfaction were given according to the analysis.

Keywords: Chinese Luxury Hotel; Customer Satisfaction; Customer Loyalty; SWOT Analyses; 4PS; Marketing Strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Since 2019, the pandemic has swept the world, and the economic activities of the tourism and hotel industries have slowed down. Travel restriction is one of the measures to deal with COVID-19. Many countries around the world have implemented part or all border closures, and the tourism ban has restricted the travel needs of many people [1]. Hotel manufacturing was first influenced by COVID-19, and it could not recover quickly [2]. At present, the proportion of luxury, upscale and economical hotels in China is about 8%, 27% and 65%, economical hotels are the main part of the Chinese hotel market [3]. Affected by the domestic pandemic, luxury hotels' consumption demand is shrinking rapidly.

In the past ten years, more and more Chinese consumers have been tired of going to chain brand hotels whose core is quantity and discount [4]. Since the 1980s, China has developed amount of luxury hotels to provide better service [5]. The development of luxury hotels in China has benefited from the rapid development of the domestic economy and disposable personal income increased. It has been two years since the outbreak of COVID-19, and the hotel business shows signs of a return to normal and improvement. Some hotel practitioners have begun to think about new marketing methods to create competitiveness. Although many domestic luxury hotels are constantly changing their marketing strategies to reduce loss and maintenance costs during the pandemic, how to improve customer loyalty and satisfaction through marketing is the problem that Chinese luxury hotels should consider. If hotels only attract customers but don't keep them, it will also cause the loss of the hotel's interests.

1.2 Research Gap

During this period, the stakeholders in the hotel industry are trying to find out the implementation strategies of crisis organization methods for COVID-1 [6]. Although few reports directly link

marketing methods and loyalty in a pandemic period. However, there is much research on hotel marketing methods and customer loyalty during the pandemic.

To save labour costs, some hotels no longer employ employees but choose robots to serve customers. Huang and Rust 2018 said that artificial intelligence and robot technology can better serve and please guests, and bring completely different experiences to guests [7]. In addition, because COVID-19 spreads by contact, using robots to provide contactless services can reduce the risk of infection. In 2020, Jiang and Wen proposed that hotels can use scientific and technological means to maintain hotel hygiene, to improve customer satisfaction [8]. Because of the pandemic, people pay more attention to the hygiene of public spaces. Some studies regard hotel hygiene and cleanliness as the main reasons why travelers choose hotels. Hygiene may affect guest satisfaction and customer loyalty [9,10].

The research on hotel marketing methods and customer loyalty are limited and most of the studies on marketing and loyalty in the hospitality industry were conducted in the West [11]. Lack of research on luxury hotels in China. A limited number of articles show the effect of the hotel's change of promotion strategy on customer satisfaction during the pandemic. So, this study is intended to address these research gaps. This report is to study the influence of different marketing methods on customer loyalty of Chinese luxury hotels.

1.3 Structure of the Paper

To fill research gaps and give some suggestions for customer loyalty to Chinese luxury hotels. The article will analyze some scholars' predictions on the development of the hotel manufacturing during COVID-19. And introduces the marketing strategies adjustments and customer loyalty programs during the pandemic. Using marketing Mix theory to analyze hotel marketing strategy and using customer satisfaction and customer loyalty theories to analyze loyalty programs. The authors chose the qualitative research method (SWOT) to analyze the feasibility of hotel marketing strategy. This method can clearly show the advantages and disadvantages of, the internal environment and external environment of the hotel. Authors believe that appropriate adjustment of marketing methods may have an optimistic impact on customer loyalty and gratification when faced with special crises. Finally, the article will summarize the research results, and verify the authors' conjecture.

2. Literature Review

Over the past decade, most research in consumer satisfaction has paid particular attention to marketing. In 1953, Neil Borden coined the term Marketing mix and introduced twelve elements [12]. A few years later, Jerome McCarthy summarized these elements into four categories: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion, the famous 4Ps [13]. In 1967, as the concept of marketing continued to broaden, Philip Kotler define Customer Satisfaction [14].

2.1 Definition of Marketing Mix theory

The mix theory of marketing blend refers to the most fulfilling aggregate and use of things below the company's manipulate withinside the decided-on goal marketplace, considering the environment, capabilities, and aggressive conditions, to performing the cause and undertaking of the company [12].

The advertising and marketing blend proposed by Neil Borden initially consisted of 12 factors, and Jerome McCarthy, in 1960, summarized those factors typically into four categories: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion, or the well-known 4Ps [12,13]. In 1967, Philip Kotler similarly showed the advertising and marketing blend technique with the 4Ps because the core, namely:

Product: Focus on the improvement function, requiring the product to have a unique promoting point, placing the product's helpful enchantment withinside the first place [14].

Price: According to distinct marketplace positioning and increased distinct rate strategies, product pricing is primarily based totally on the company's emblem strategy, focusing on the gold content material of the emblem [14].

Place: Companies now no longer immediately face clients; however, recognition at the cultivation of vendors and setting up an income network. The touch among organizations and clients is thru vendors to hold out [14].

Promotion: Company's recognition of income conducts alternates to stimulate clients with short-time period conduct to make contributions to intake growth, entice clients of different manufacturers, or cause early intake to sell income growth [14].

In 1986, Kotler added public relationship and Power, known as the 6P theory, also known as Mega Marketing. A few months later, he added Prude, Partition, Proration, Position, and People, becoming the 11Ps marketing theory. Although the 4Ps theory is classic, it is a seller-centered marketing model. In today's business development so rapidly, the centrality of consumers is gradually revealed. In this context, Robert Lauterborn proposed the 4Cs marketing theory in 1990, which corresponds to the 4Ps of traditional marketing [15]. Compared with the market-oriented 4Ps, the 4Cs marketing theory, oriented to consumers' needs, has made significant progress and development. However, it also has many shortcomings, such as focusing too much on consumers and ignoring the competition. The production cycle of companies can hardly catch up with the rapidly changing consumer preferences.

2.2 Definition of Consumer Satisfaction

The degree of purchaser pleasure is a feature of the distinction among perceivable outcomes and expectancies. If the impact is decreased than predicted, the purchaser is dissatisfied; if the perceivable impact suits the expectation, the purchaser is satisfied; if the perceivable impact exceeds the expectation, the purchaser is delighted.

In 1981, Oliver & Linda considered purchasing pleasure a mental country [16]. A country of thoughts arises while the purchaser's expectancies based totally on intake enjoy are constant with the intake enjoy. In 1983, Westbrook & Reilly considered purchasing pleasure an emotional reaction [17]. This emotional reaction is observed through or at some stage in the acquisition manner of the product. This emotional reaction is observed through the mental effect of the improvement and the general purchasing surroundings of the consumer. In 1988, Tse & Wilton considered that purchaser pleasure evaluates the distinction between the predicted pleasant of the product fashioned through the purchaser earlier than the acquisition happens and the perceived pleasant after intake [18]. In 2006, According to Henry Assale, When the real intake impact of the product meets the consumer's expectancies [19]. It will result in purchaser pleasure. Otherwise, it will result in purchaser dissatisfaction., thrilled or pleasure. In 2016, Philip Kotler defined it as the sensation of pride or unhappiness that someone develops by evaluating their expectancies' perceivable impact [20].

2.3 Important Results

Marketing Mix principal factors out that marketplace call for is more significant or much less concern to twelve advertising factors. Businesses should make a potent mixture of those factors to fulfill the marketplace's wishes and attain better profits by seeking a particular marketplace response.

In the case of Products, studies have validated the elements that could assist businesses in constructing aggressive sustainable benefits with the aid of using growing consumer pride and, ultimately, consumer loyalty [11]. Product quality, carrier quality, rate, and consumer pride correlate with consumer loyalty [22].

In addition to product quality, the rate has been proven to affect consumer pride and consumer loyalty to a few extents. Biyalogorsky et al. take a look at investigating. At the same time, referral rewards have to be presented to inspire referrals and derive the most acceptable mixture of praise and rate to result in the maximum worthwhile referrals [23]. In 2015, Nadarajah et al. dynamic pricing hassle confronted with using a lodge maximized anticipated sales from a single type of room [24]. It was confirmed that revenue maximization through price strategy in 4p is feasible in the hospitality industry.

In terms of place, its definition is no longer limited to a geographical location but is combined with Promotion to specify the positioning of the market. In 2007, their evaluation confirmed that the tourist

shopper segment is more attractive to shopping centers [25]. A study by Parmenas et al. 2021 confirms the favorable impact of the right marketing strategy on increasing airline and hotel sales through a bundling system as an example [26]. A study by Silalahi et al., 2015 proves that marketing strategies play a role in increasing occupancy [27].

2.4 Summary

The 4Ps theory, which is generalized from the marketing mix theory, has become the short name of marketing strategy mix, establishing the critical position of marketing strategy mix in marketing theory. It has provided the solution of marketing tools for countless enterprises. In addition to the business value, there is also a very long-term academic value; later, scholars, based on these two theories, continue to deepen research and broaden the boundaries.

Marketing mix and 4ps theory both provide theoretical academic support for marketing research. Other ideas developed on this basis have gradually adapted to the changing times and are widely used.

In general, these studies outline the definition of customer satisfaction and express its essential role in providing direction for the development of marketing strategies and improving the quality of products and services, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and driving consumption and profits.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This paper adopts a qualitative research method. SWOT theory is used to further analyze the strengths, weaknesses, potential threats and opportunities of luxury hotels in China. The SWOT method will be combined with the 4p method in Marketing Mix Theory to further study the ways that can help hotels improve customer satisfaction. Analyze which product, place, promotion and price will have an impact on the customer satisfaction of luxury hotels in China.

3.2 Chinese Luxury Hotel Introduction

In 1998, China National Tourism Administration established and issued the hotel star rating system [28]. This system makes clear the differences in facilities quality, service quality of hotels. In China, hotel ratings range from 1 to 5 stars. Four-and five-star hotels are called luxury hotels [29]. For each star rating system, more than 300 points are four stars and more than 400 points are five stars. Therefore, there are strict rules for the grading of hotels in China, and the quality of facilities and services are important standards for the grading. For a long time, Chinese luxury hotels are mainly distributed in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, which are economically developed cities. Many luxury hotels in China have cooperative relations with large local real estate developers [30]. Although the profit of the hotel itself will be reduced due to policy or high costs, the value of the land where the hotel is located may be increasing [30]. Many domestic and foreign practitioners value this situation, so they may increase their investment. In China, the development of luxury hotels is worth looking forward to.

3.3 SWOT Analysis

3.3.1 Strength

The product quality and service quality of luxury hotels are advantages of luxury hotels in China. Li et al. noticed in 2011 that hotel facilities, sanitation, security and quality of service are significant standards for Chinese visitors [31]. China's luxury hotels have performed well in the above aspects, which makes guests' satisfaction with China's luxury hotels higher than other hotels [31]. Besides, many luxury hotels now enhance their brand image and influence through online evaluation [32]. After knowing the customer feedback, hotels can improve the service and get customer satisfaction. High-quality customer service and product quality are the advantages of luxury hotels in China, and they are also a powerful guarantee to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

3.3.2 Weakness

With the development of China's hotel industry, guests not only have higher requirements for the hotel's hardware facilities but also feel more careful about the service [33]. Many customers want to get cultural knowledge or artistic experience in the process of consumption. At present, the main body of the domestic market is budget hotels, standardized and procedural products and services are difficult to meet the needs of current consumers. Therefore, unique design is needed in the positioning of hotel products' characteristics, and building characteristic luxury hotels is an effective way for differentiated development of products and an effective way for hotels to improve customer satisfaction.

3.3.3 Opportunity

During the COVID-19, the business restrictions of luxury hotels did not come from the pandemic itself but prevention policy [34]. However, with the gradual economic recovery, luxury hotels in China need to seize the opportunity to expand their brands or develop their technologies. Many hotels choose to use robots instead of employees during the pandemic [8]. Some hotels cooperate with technology companies to achieve win-win results. It is the hotel that broadens the market horizontally and enhances its competitiveness through cross-domain cooperation. Kim and Han proposed in 2020 that after the outbreak of the pandemic, hotels are more dependent on restoring customers' satisfaction with accommodation safety than ever before because customers are now more interested in hotel hygiene and safety [35].

3.3.4 Threaten

With the speedy growth of the Chinese hotel industry, more and more competitors enter the Chinese hotel market. Especially in the first-tier cities in China. High-star hotels are saturated, and every hotel is competing for guests from all over the country and even the world [36]. In addition, some luxury hotels only focus on brand building, not on efficiency, and the high investment leads to the hotel cost increasing gradually. At the same time, budget hotels may imitate the management mode or product marketing mode of luxury hotels. At this time, substitutes will appear, and the product sales of luxury hotels may decrease.

4. Result & Discussion

4.1 Result

High-quality customer service and product quality are the most competitive conditions for luxury hotels in China. Luxury hotels have enhanced their brand image and reputation through strong publicity ability. After the pandemic, hotels will face new opportunities, and cooperation with enterprises in other fields can effectively bring excess profits and increase customer satisfaction, which is also the way to expand the brand image. However, budget hotels account for the largest proportion in China, and long-term high-cost luxury hotels will have the risk of profit reduction. In addition, luxury hotels need to compete with other level hotels for customers, and hotels have to face the risk of substitutes.

4.2 Discussion

As far as the advantages of luxury hotels are concerned, place and product are worth being expanded. In terms of place, the advantage can be extended by employing promotion. They pinpoint the target groups in first-tier cities, such as foreign tourists and luxury hotel brand fans. Luxury hotels can strengthen their advantages as landmarks in first-tier cities for foreign tourists and first-time travelers. Cooperate with the local government to add hotel signage at nearby bus stops and subway exits so that tourists, especially first-time visitors, can feel the hotel's visibility. Secondly, the hotel's unique location, such as a busy shopping street in a first-tier city or a resort with spectacular scenery, can be associated with the hotel's social media accounts to place a promotional video of the area.

In terms of product, the service provided by luxury hotels has been affirmed by many consumers. However, service is an invisible product, and better promotion comes from the sharing of past customers. One suggestion was to invite KOLs to shoot an experienced video to visualize and promote the services of luxury hotels and motivate potential consumers who cannot physically access the product.

Besides service, the hotel's Food and Beverage department is responsible for most of the profit, especially in the plummeting occupancy rates under the epidemic. The promotion of restaurants should be restricted to the review criteria represented by Michelin stars and Forbes rankings. However, it should precisely target customer groups and introduce seasonally appropriate set menu offerings to stimulate consumption. For example, in the case of hotel dining in China, the consumers of Western restaurants are mostly dating couples, while Chinese restaurants are the choice for family gatherings. For couples, hotels should combine with rooms to offer all-inclusive hotel packages that combine room and dining at restaurants as a set product, providing customers with a perfect and straightforward dating experience.

On top of that, hotels can also work with suppliers to include products with a romantic atmosphere, such as champagne and pink wine, in the package to deepen the concept of a perfect date at a luxury hotel. For customers who want to come to the Chinese restaurant for a family gathering, one is to introduce a multi-person set menu with a more significant discount, and another is to enhance the cooperation between the chef and the restaurant by introducing a series of semi-finished food that can be cooked at home. For example, the hotel's limited-edition dumplings were introduced at the Dragon Boat Festival. A semi-finished cooking kit for family banquets allowed customers to taste the delicious flavours of star hotels at home and provided them with more opportunities to spend money.

In terms of promotion, luxury hotels have to do two things, increase revenue and reduce expenses, and changing the function of banquet halls is a means to do both. Most luxury hotels have ballrooms that can provide clients with locations and services to host celebrations. This business has primarily come to a halt in the epidemic-control environment, and many hotels have opted to save money by closing their ballrooms indefinitely. However, this only saves on utility costs; labour costs are unavoidable. The hotel can work with some cultural institutions, like changing the facilities' placement into the form of a gallery. This can strengthen the artistic meaning of the luxury hotel itself, reflecting the unique artistic taste. It is also good publicity for the hotel brand, and secondly, the visitors to the exhibition are also potential clients. Foreign tourists are likely to choose the hotel room while being attracted by the exhibition, while the hotel restaurant likely attracts local tourists.

4.3 The changing strengths and weaknesses of luxury hotels in the face of the epidemic

The travel and hospitality industry has suffered a significant blow due to the epidemic. The strengths of many traditional luxury hotels have changed.

In terms of product, the service of luxury hotels was the signature attraction in the past. However, today, the operating costs of luxury hotels are much higher than those of ordinary hotels, which leads to luxury hotels controlling costs by having to carry out human resource measures such as salary reduction and vocational skills training to control costs. However, this leads to a psychological gap between the staff, directly affecting the service quality management.

In addition, luxury hotels cannot avoid the cost of raw materials used in the hotel. Many of the import and export goods caused by the epidemic were blocked, but hotels had to use the required brands and suppliers to reduce the sell-out and quality degradation. The preferential prices offered by suppliers are often accompanied by substantial purchase requirements, which are harmless when business is good. However, these invariably increase the hotel's operating costs in today's business conditions.

In terms of place, luxury hotels are often located in the commercial centres of first-tier cities and famous tourist attractions with high traffic flow. In the past, this was undoubtedly the perfect location, but with a pandemic, more foot traffic means stricter government control measures. This increases hotels' operating costs on the one hand and discourages tourists from travelling on the other.

In terms of price, academic research suggested that a lower price did not necessarily mean a more vital willingness to buy and that customers were more likely to buy the best value for money than the cheapest product. However, with today's booming online shopping platforms, luxury hotel shoppers can compare prices on many platforms and choose the one with the lowest price. In addition, the platforms of high-traffic travel websites have a high percentage of draws, while the booking platforms developed by the hotels themselves are left untouched. This makes the hotel sacrifice part of the benefits in exchange for more traffic, and less revenue brings less operational investment in a vicious circle.

In terms of promotion, past research has suggested that luxury hotels are often backed by extensive and powerful hotel groups and must be more comfortable with marketing. However, the reality is that a group back means a complicated approval process. With the rapid development of social media, older luxury hotels will inevitably have difficulty catching up with popular trends. For example, small and medium-sized brands can quickly enter into brand partnerships and launch co-branded models, a popular brand marketing trend nowadays. Nevertheless, this means a lengthy approval and brand selection process for luxury hotels.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to evaluate the marketing counter-attack of the hard-hit hotel industry in the aftermath of the epidemic using a SWOT analysis of luxury hotels in first-tier Chinese cities. The study identified changes in the external policy and social environment following the epidemic that led to changes in the strengths and weaknesses of luxury hotels. In past academic studies, Place and People have been competitive advantages of luxury hotels in first-tier cities. However, they have been gradually transformed into disadvantages by the epidemic and its knock-on effects. The rapid growth of e-commerce has stimulated hotel sales to some extent, but it is a fact that the traffic on its platforms is not as high as that of travel websites that require commission payments. The number of platforms available for consumers to compare prices increases and hotels' profits are being shrunk. International company hotels can drive hotel sales in other tourist cities through the brand effect before the epidemic. However, cross-border tourism is disrupted by the epidemic's impact, and hotels are bound to bear part of the loss of brand culture fans.

In response to the changing 4Ps, this study makes some recommendations. In the higher-margin Food and Beverage department, hotels can sell a combination of cuisine plus accommodation in bundled sales to drive up occupancy. This can be done by working with the local government to enhance the hotel's location advantage and attract out-of-town visitors. It can be done by cooperating with cultural organizations to hold art exhibitions to improve the utilization of banquet halls and reduce the waste of human resources. It can be done through brand co-branding to launch co-branded products to attract customers across fields, stimulate consumption and build a high-end brand image. KOLs can be invited to visit the hotel and use the rapid spread of social media to express and spread the thoughtful service of luxury hotels figuratively and enhance brand awareness. One suggestion was to invite KOLs to shoot an experienced video to visualize and promote the benefits of luxury hotels and motivate potential consumers who cannot physically access the product.

Overall, the value of this study is to explore the assessment of the hotel industry's attempts to recover now that the epidemic has repeatedly entered normalization. The strengths and weaknesses of the changes are identified, and recommendations are made for future development planning for luxury hotels.

The current study has its limitations because it comes at such a particular time of the pandemic and is influenced by dramatic changes in the internal and external environment. External factors strongly influenced the findings and conclusions of the study. The recommendations are not universally applicable to future luxury hotels in first-tier cities that have ended their pandemic era. Nonetheless, because the study was conducted on the Chinese hotel industry, which was the first to

be affected by the pandemic and began to recover, it is still informative for strategic planning in the future for the hotel industry and other industries in second-and third-tier cities.

More broadly speaking, future academic research should be more refined. More detailed research and analysis should be done for each of the 4Ps factors to make more precise and more practical directions for the future development of the hotel industry.

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