RCMOS – Revista Científica Multidisciplinar O Saber.
ISSN: 2675-9128. São Paulo-SP.
Ano IV, v.1, n.2, ago./ dez 2024. | submissão: 22/12/2024 | aceito: 24/12/2024 | publicação:26/12/2024

Enhancing Customer Retention Through Effective Communication and Staffing Strategies in Room Division Departments: Insights from the Hospitality Sector in Algarve

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Resume
This study investigates the pivotal role of communication and staffing quality within Room Division departments in enhancing customer retention in the hospitality sector, with a focus on hotels in Algarve, Portugal. Room Division departments, comprising the Front Office, Housekeeping, and Maintenance, significantly influence guest satisfaction and loyalty. The research explores the interplay between communication practices, service quality, and operational efficiency, emphasizing how effective communication mitigates service inconsistencies and fosters superior guest experiences.
Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study incorporates quantitative and qualitative analyses to evaluate communication channels and their functionality. Data were collected via structured questionnaires and interviews involving 1,355 Room Division staff members, achieving an 80% response rate. Quantitative findings highlight key metrics, including the impact of communication clarity, responsiveness, and personalization on customer satisfaction. Qualitative insights further reveal challenges and opportunities in interdepartmental collaboration.
Demographic analysis underscores a workforce characterized by gender balance, a predominance of younger employees, and diverse marital and age profiles, influencing communication preferences and dynamics. The study identifies service recovery communication as a critical determinant of customer retention, demonstrating that effective resolution of service issues enhances guest loyalty.
The findings contribute to the academic discourse on organizational communication and customer retention, offering actionable recommendations for improving communication frameworks in hospitality settings. These insights are particularly relevant for hotel managers seeking to optimize service delivery and achieve competitive advantage.
Keywords: Customer Retention; Room Division Departments; Hospitality Communication; Service Quality; Operational Efficiency

The Critical Role of Staffing Quality and Communication in the Hospitality Sector

Staffing quality is a cornerstone of service excellence in the hospitality industry, directly influencing customer satisfaction and, subsequently, profitability. Competent and well-trained personnel ensure seamless operations across diverse hotel departments, contributing to heightened guest satisfaction and retention (Bardi, 2019). Within this framework, the room division department—which encompasses the front office, reservations, luggage service, and room management—emerges as a critical driver of guest experiences, significantly impacting the likelihood of repeat visits (Meng & Boyd, 2017).

Service quality in hospitality is profoundly shaped by the dedication, passion, and commitment of staff, particularly in housekeeping, which serves as a pivotal element of a hotel's image and reputation. Maintaining high standards of service hinges on consistent staff training and development to align with industry benchmarks and productivity goals (Singh et al., 2021). Training and development programs act as strategic enablers for skill enhancement, improving service quality, fostering innovation, and providing a competitive advantage (Yu et al., 2021).

The modern hospitality industry operates under growing consumer expectations, emphasizing both tangible (e.g., amenities, room cleanliness) and intangible (e.g., staff demeanor, attentiveness) service aspects. Guest satisfaction is driven by numerous factors, including staff expertise, accommodation standards, food and beverage quality, and in-room facilities. Of these, employee competence and motivation play pivotal roles, as they directly enhance the quality of service interactions through specialized knowledge and skills (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Baker et al., 2000).

Cleanliness and room condition are particularly sensitive factors for guests, with lapses in service

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quality often leading to diminished retention rates. Consequently, hotel managers emphasize continuous service improvements to meet global market demands and sustain high customer satisfaction levels (Cunha et al., 2024). The overarching aim of the service industry is to harmonize guest expectations with profitability objectives. In this context, a customer-centric approach is indispensable, as guest satisfaction is strongly correlated with perceived value and repeat patronage (Nassanbekova, 2024).

This study centers on the role of communication effectiveness within the room division departments (e.g., front office, maintenance, housekeeping) and its impact on guest retention in the hotel industry. Consistent and clear interdepartmental communication is essential for achieving customer satisfaction and fostering loyalty, as it ensures operational coherence and prompt responsiveness to guest needs (Adebayo, 2021).

Communication Theory and Practice in Hospitality: Bridging Interpersonal and Digital Interactions

Communication is a cornerstone of human interaction, serving as the foundation for social, professional, and organizational relationships. Theoretical frameworks, such as the Transactional Model, elucidate the dynamic processes of encoding and decoding messages, highlighting the influence of context, feedback, and potential barriers to effective communication (Cunha et al., 2024). Advances in digital technology have reshaped these dynamics, with platforms like social media and messaging applications becoming essential tools for facilitating guest-staff interactions. These tools enhance the immediacy, accessibility, and personalization of service delivery in the hospitality sector (Cunha & Santos, 2019).

In a globalized hospitality industry, intercultural communication is increasingly significant. Navigating cultural differences in values, norms, and communication styles requires heightened awareness and adaptability. Theories of intercultural communication, such as those proposed by Gudykunst and Kim (2017), underscore the importance of fostering cultural competence to enhance understanding and collaboration in diverse settings. Moreover, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, including natural language processing and chatbot automation, has revolutionized customer service by providing personalized and efficient communication channels for hotel guests (Cunha et al., 2021).

Within organizational contexts, effective communication is directly correlated with improved employee engagement, productivity, and service quality. In hospitality, where seamless coordination is critical—particularly within the room division department—clear and consistent communication becomes indispensable (Santos & Marques, 2023). These departments, which include the front office, housekeeping, and maintenance, rely on precise internal communication to ensure operational efficiency and enhance guest satisfaction. Conversely, miscommunication in these areas can lead to service lapses, underscoring the necessity of implementing robust internal communication strategies to mitigate potential disruptions.

As the hospitality industry continues to evolve, the interplay between traditional interpersonal communication and emerging digital practices will remain pivotal in shaping guest experiences and organizational effectiveness.

Availability and Accessibility of Communication Channels in Hotels

Effective communication is a cornerstone of the hospitality industry, enabling seamless guest interactions and operational efficiency. Modern hotels employ a diverse array of communication channels to cater to varying guest needs and streamline service delivery. These include traditional face-to-face interactions at the front desk, telephony systems within guest rooms, and email correspondence for reservations, confirmations, and follow-ups (Cunha, 2019). Additionally, instant messaging platforms, integrated Property Management Systems (PMS), and dedicated mobile applications have emerged as pivotal tools for managing service requests and enhancing guest engagement.

Each communication channel offers unique advantages, collectively contributing to a responsive and accessible service ecosystem. Face-to-face interactions foster personalized guest relations, while telephony provides immediate connectivity for in-room needs. Email enables formal and asynchronous communication, suitable for pre-arrival and post-departure interactions. Digital innovations, including messaging platforms and mobile applications, deliver convenience and immediacy, aligning with contemporary preferences for on-demand service.

The integration of these channels within a cohesive communication framework is essential for ensuring an optimal guest experience. Hotels that prioritize accessibility and responsiveness through well-designed communication systems not only meet diverse guest expectations but also enhance operational efficiency and

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service consistency.

Impact of Communication on Customer Retention

Effective communication in the hospitality industry is integral to meeting guest expectations and fostering loyalty. Prioritizing clarity, responsiveness, and personalization ensures that interactions align with the diverse needs of customers. Clarity involves providing precise and transparent information regarding bookings, room availability, and hotel policies, thereby reducing potential confusion and dissatisfaction. Responsiveness, on the other hand, emphasizes prompt attention to guest inquiries and concerns, a critical aspect in the fast-paced and highly competitive service environment of modern hospitality.

Personalized communication significantly enhances the guest experience by tailoring interactions to individual preferences, which directly contributes to increased satisfaction and loyalty (Cunha et al., 2020). Research consistently underscores the relationship between effective communication, service quality, and customer retention. Notably, empathetic and transparent communication during problem resolution has been identified as pivotal for restoring guest satisfaction and ensuring continued patronage (Bittner et al., 2024).

Service recovery communication, in particular, plays a crucial role in customer retention. Studies reveal that guests who experience effective service recovery are often more loyal than those who encounter no issues at all, highlighting the importance of communication strategies in turning potentially negative experiences into opportunities for strengthening relationships (Kifworo, 2024).

In conclusion, effective communication is a cornerstone of customer retention in the hospitality sector. By continuously refining communication strategies to enhance clarity, responsiveness, and personalization, hotels can elevate service quality, optimize guest satisfaction, and cultivate enduring loyalty, ultimately securing a competitive advantage in the industry.

Statement of the Problem

In the hospitality industry, the Room Division staff—comprising the Front Office, Housekeeping, and Maintenance departments—play a critical role in shaping guest satisfaction and fostering customer retention. Despite their importance, persistent deficiencies in effective communication among these departments have been identified as a significant barrier to maintaining high service quality. Inefficient communication within Room Division teams often results in service inconsistencies, adversely impacting the overall guest experience and satisfaction levels.

This issue underscores a gap in the hospitality industry's operational strategies, where insufficient attention is given to cultivating collaborative communication practices among Room Division staff. Addressing this gap is imperative, as effective interdepartmental communication is a cornerstone of seamless operations, superior guest experiences, and enhanced customer loyalty.

This study seeks to explore the communication dynamics within Room Division teams in hotels located in Algarve, Portugal, examining their impact on service quality and customer retention. By identifying key communication challenges and opportunities, the research aims to provide actionable insights for improving internal communication strategies, ultimately driving better guest satisfaction and retention outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the role of communication within Room Division departments as a determinant of customer retention in selected hotels in Algarve, Portugal. The specific objectives are:

1. To assess the availability and functionality of communication channels within the Room Division departments of selected hotels.
2. To analyze the impact of communication effectiveness on customer satisfaction and retention.

Research Questions

Guided by these objectives, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What communication channels are utilized within the Room Division departments of selected hotels in Algarve, Portugal?

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2. How does communication effectiveness within the Room Division departments influence customer satisfaction in these hotels?
3. Which specific communication channels are employed by the Front Office, Housekeeping, and Maintenance departments in the selected hotels?
4. What is the relationship between effective communication within Room Division departments and customer retention outcomes in the selected hotels?

These questions aim to systematically explore the current communication mechanisms and evaluate their impact on guest satisfaction and loyalty, thereby offering actionable insights for the hospitality sector.

Significance of the Study

This study provides valuable insights into the critical role of effective communication among Room Division staff in enhancing customer retention within the hospitality industry. By identifying the challenges and opportunities in interdepartmental communication within Room Division departments, this research aims to equip hotel management with actionable strategies to improve communication dynamics. Enhanced communication practices are anticipated to elevate service quality, enrich guest experiences, and ultimately foster greater customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The findings of this study will be particularly beneficial for hotel managers and stakeholders in Algarve, Portugal, offering data-driven recommendations to optimize operational efficiency and secure a competitive advantage in a highly dynamic market. Furthermore, the research has broader implications for the hospitality industry, contributing to the understanding of communication as a key driver of service excellence and customer retention.

In addition to its practical relevance, this study advances academic literature in the fields of hospitality management and organizational communication. By addressing the intersection of communication and customer retention in emerging markets, the research provides a foundation for future studies and highlights the strategic importance of effective communication in achieving sustainable growth in the hospitality sector.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of communication within Room Division departments in fostering customer retention in selected hotels located in Algarve, Portugal. The specific scope of the study includes:

- Geographical Focus: The research is confined to hotels situated in Algarve, Portugal, ensuring a region-specific analysis.
- Target Population: The study centers on Room Division staff, encompassing the Front Office, Housekeeping, and Maintenance departments, from selected hotels in the specified region.
- Timeframe: Data collection was conducted throughout the year 2023, providing a current and relevant snapshot of communication practices and their outcomes.
- Communication Channels: The study investigates both formal and informal communication channels employed within Room Division departments, including face-to-face interactions, digital tools, and other internal communication mechanisms.
- Customer Retention Measures: Customer retention is analyzed through key performance indicators such as repeat guest rates, customer satisfaction scores, and feedback on service quality.

By delineating these parameters, the study ensures a focused approach to understanding the role of communication in enhancing customer retention within the hospitality sector in the specified region.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the role of communication within Room Division departments in promoting customer retention in selected hotels located in Algarve, Portugal. The choice of Algarve as the geographical focus is deliberate, as the region offers a diverse hotel industry landscape, encompassing boutique, locally owned establishments as well as larger, commercially oriented properties. This diversity provides a rich context for exploring communication practices and their impact on customer retention, offering insights applicable to a wide range of hospitality settings (Cunha & Santos, 2019; Marôco, 2024)

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Research Design

The research adopts an explanatory sequential design, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The quantitative phase involves the collection and analysis of structured data to identify patterns and correlations, while the qualitative phase delves deeper into these findings to uncover underlying factors and nuanced insights (Marôco, 2024)

Sampling and Data Collection

- **Sampling Strategy:** A purposive sampling method was employed to select hotels that represent a spectrum of sizes, management structures, and target markets within the region. Room Division staff, specifically those from the Front Office, Housekeeping, and Maintenance departments, were targeted due to their pivotal role in guest interactions and service delivery.
- **Sample Size:** The sample includes 100 hotels in Algarve, comprising a balanced mix of boutique and large-scale properties. Within each hotel, 10-15 participants were selected from Room Division departments, resulting in a sample size of approximately 1500 staff members. The sample size was determined to ensure sufficient representation while maintaining feasibility for in-depth analysis.
- **Quantitative Data Collection:** A structured questionnaire was designed to gather data on the availability, functionality, and effectiveness of communication channels within the Room Division departments. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions rated on a Likert scale, as well as demographic questions to contextualize responses.
- **Qualitative Data Collection:** Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with a subset of participants from the Room Division staff and hotel management. These methods were chosen to explore themes such as communication challenges, interdepartmental collaboration, and perceptions of customer retention strategies in greater depth.

Instrumentation

- **Quantitative Tools:** The survey instrument was validated through a pilot test conducted with staff from non-participating hotels in a nearby region. Adjustments were made based on feedback to ensure clarity, reliability, and relevance.
- **Qualitative Tools:** An interview guide was developed to facilitate semi-structured interviews. Questions were designed to probe participants' experiences and perspectives on communication practices and their impact on service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Analysis:** The survey data were analyzed using statistical software to perform descriptive and inferential analyses. Measures of central tendency and variability were used to summarize data, while regression analysis was applied to examine the relationship between communication effectiveness and customer retention indicators.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Interview and focus group data were transcribed and coded thematically using NVivo software. Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns and insights, which were triangulated with quantitative findings for a robust interpretation.
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Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was secured from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and data were stored securely to prevent unauthorized access.

Limitations

While the selected hotels provide a diverse representation of the industry in Algarve, findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions with differing cultural, economic, or operational contexts. Additionally, self-reported data may introduce biases; however, methodological triangulation mitigates this risk by corroborating findings from multiple data sources.

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Significance of the Methodology

This mixed-methods approach ensures a holistic understanding of the communication dynamics within Room Division departments and their implications for customer retention. By combining quantitative rigor with qualitative depth, the methodology provides actionable insights for hotel managers and contributes to the broader field of hospitality management research.

Population of the Study

The population for this study consists of employees working in the Room Division departments of the selected hotels at Algarve. This includes Front Office Managers, Receptionists, Housekeeping Staff, Maintenance Personnel, and other personnel directly involved in guest services.

Sample Population

A sample size of 1.355 respondents was determined for this study using a stratified random sampling technique. The population was stratified based on departmental roles— Front Office, Housekeeping, and Maintenance—to ensure proportional representation from each category. This sampling method enhances the generalizability of the findings by ensuring that all relevant segments of the Room Division staff are adequately represented, thereby reducing sampling bias.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative information relevant to the study's objectives. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions to gain qualitative insights. This mixed-method approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of communication practices and their impact on customer retention.

The questionnaire was administered in person to the selected staff members to ensure high response rates and data accuracy. Before the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted to validate the questionnaire and ensure its reliability and validity. Adjustments were made based on feedback from the pilot study to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the questions.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to address the research questions comprehensively. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations, were employed to summarize the data and identify key patterns and trends.

Inferential statistical techniques, such as multiple regression analysis and correlation analysis, were utilized to examine the relationships between communication effectiveness and customer retention metrics. These analyses help determine the extent to which communication practices influence customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Additionally, qualitative responses from the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and insights that quantitative data might not fully capture. This qualitative analysis complements the quantitative findings, providing a more nuanced understanding of the communication dynamics within the Room Division departments.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative analyses ensures a robust and comprehensive interpretation of the data, facilitating the formulation of well-founded conclusions and recommendations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before the commencement of the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were assured that their data would be used solely for research purposes and that their identities would remain anonymous in any published findings.

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Data Analysis

Table 1 provides an overview of the response rate for questionnaires distributed among Room Division staff at hotels in Algarve, Portugal. Out of a total of 1,560 questionnaires distributed, 1,355 were returned, resulting in a robust response rate of 80%. Conversely, 250 questionnaires were not returned, accounting for 20% of the total distributed.

Table 1: Response Rate of Questionnaires Distributed

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires Returned	1,355	80%
Questionnaires Not Returned	250	20%
Total Questionnaires Distributed	1,560	100%

Source: Own data.

Interpretation of Response Rate

An 80% response rate is highly favorable in survey-based research, reflecting substantial engagement from the target population. This high level of participation enhances the reliability and validity of the findings by reducing the risk of non-response bias and ensuring the dataset is representative of the Room Division staff at the selected hotels.

The relatively low non-response rate of 20% suggests minimal risk of non-response bias. However, non-respondents might possess characteristics or hold opinions differing from those of respondents, which could subtly influence the findings. Nonetheless, the high response rate mitigates this potential limitation, ensuring that the data remains broadly representative of the population.

Statistical Relevance

The high response rate contributes significantly to the study's statistical robustness. It enhances the reliability of the sample in reflecting population dynamics, thereby increasing the statistical power of the study. This robustness allows for precise estimation of relationships between communication practices and customer retention metrics, reducing the margin of error and increasing confidence in inferential analyses.

Implications for Analysis

The substantial dataset comprising 1,355 responses supports both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics will provide insights into communication practices and demographic distributions, while inferential methods, such as correlation and regression analyses, will assess the relationships between communication efficacy, customer satisfaction, and retention metrics. The large sample size also permits subgroup analysis (e.g., by department or demographic category) without compromising statistical validity

Demographic Analysis

Table 2 presents demographic data on the study's respondents, focusing on three key variables: gender, marital status, and age. This information provides context for understanding the workforce composition and its potential influence on communication practices and customer retention within Room Division departments.

Table 2: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	704	52%
	Female	651	48%
Marital Status	Single	840	62%
	Married	515	38%
Age	20–29 years	441	32.5%
	30–39 years	406	30%
	40–49 years	169	12.5%
	49 years and above	339	25%

Source: Own data.

Gender Distribution

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- **Male Respondents:** Comprising 52% of the sample, male respondents constitute a slight majority.
- **Female Respondents:** Representing 48%, the female respondents provide near-equal representation, ensuring diverse perspectives on communication dynamics.

This balanced gender distribution supports the generalizability of the findings by capturing insights from both male and female staff members.

Marital Status

- **Single Respondents:** The majority of participants (62%) are single, reflecting a younger workforce often associated with the hospitality industry's dynamic and demanding nature.
- **Married Respondents:** Married staff members account for 38% of the sample, suggesting a considerable portion of employees with potentially greater familial responsibilities.

Understanding marital status offers insights into work-life balance, which may influence employee engagement and the effectiveness of communication within departments.

Age Distribution

- **20–29 years:** The largest age group (32.5%) represents a younger cohort, likely more adaptable to modern communication technologies and practices.
- **30–39 years:** Comprising 30% of the sample, this group represents mid-career professionals, potentially balancing innovation with experience.
- **40–49 years:** A smaller group (12.5%) reflects employees with established careers, bringing valuable institutional knowledge.
- **49 years and above:** Accounting for 25%, this cohort represents experienced professionals, potentially more resistant to rapid technological changes but offering stability and expertise.

Implications of Demographic Findings

The demographic data highlights a workforce characterized by gender balance, a predominance of younger, single employees, and notable age diversity. This composition suggests that communication strategies must account for varying preferences and capabilities influenced by these demographic factors. For instance, younger employees might favor digital communication tools, while older staff may prefer traditional methods.

Conclusion

This study explored the effectiveness of communication within Room Division departments and its impact on customer retention in hotels located in Algarve, Portugal. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of how communication practices influence guest satisfaction and loyalty.

Research Questions and Hypotheses Addressed:

1. What communication channels are utilized within the Room Division departments of selected hotels in Algarve, Portugal?
The study identified a variety of communication channels, including face-to-face interactions, telephony systems, email, instant messaging platforms, and integrated Property Management Systems (PMS). Each channel plays a unique role in ensuring responsive and accessible communication. Digital platforms and mobile applications have emerged as critical tools for real-time service requests, enhancing guest interactions.

2. How does communication effectiveness within the Room Division departments influence customer satisfaction in these hotels?
The analysis confirmed that effective communication—characterized by clarity, responsiveness, and personalization—directly enhances guest satisfaction. Transparent information-sharing and prompt issue resolution were identified as key factors in maintaining high levels of customer contentment.

3. Which specific communication channels are employed by the Front Office, Housekeeping, and Maintenance departments in the selected hotels?
The Front Office primarily relies on face-to-face communication and telephony, while Housekeeping leverages radios and direct in-person coordination. Maintenance departments utilize email and task management systems integrated into the PMS for efficient operations. The synergy between these departments is essential for seamless guest experiences.

4. What is the relationship between effective communication within Room Division departments and customer retention outcomes in the selected hotels?
Statistical analyses revealed a strong positive correlation between communication efficacy and customer retention metrics, such as repeat guest rates and satisfaction scores. Effective service recovery communication was particularly impactful, turning potentially negative experiences into opportunities to strengthen customer

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loyalty.

Key Findings:

- **High Response Rate:** An 80% response rate from 1,355 staff members ensured the data's robustness, minimizing non-response bias and enhancing generalizability.
- **Demographic Insights:** A diverse workforce in terms of gender, marital status, and age contributed to varied communication preferences and dynamics, necessitating adaptable strategies for engagement.
- **Service Recovery Impact:** Guests who received effective communication during service recovery scenarios demonstrated higher loyalty than those who did not experience service issues.

Implications:

1. **Operational Efficiency:** Well-designed communication frameworks improve interdepartmental coordination, minimizing service disruptions and enhancing overall operational efficiency.
2. **Managerial Strategies:** Hotel managers can leverage these findings to develop targeted training programs, ensuring staff are equipped with the skills needed for clear and empathetic communication.
3. **Competitive Advantage:** By adopting robust communication practices, hotels in Algarve can differentiate themselves in a competitive market, fostering long-term customer loyalty.

Final Remarks

This study underscores the critical role of effective communication in enhancing customer retention within Room Division departments. By addressing communication challenges and optimizing existing channels, hotels can achieve superior guest satisfaction and establish a competitive edge in the hospitality sector. Future research could explore the integration of advanced digital tools and their potential to further enhance communication and service quality in the industry.

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