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# **From whom to why, understanding customer's intention with the use of persona.**

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to propose an alternative solution to the who segmentation. By using the persona tool, it has been possible to develop a why segmentation based on customers' intention(s) – motivation(s). Following qualitative interviews, three personas have been created: the first persona is firstly interested by the hotel's characteristics and services, the second persona is attracted firstly by the place where the hotel is located, and finally, the third persona is looking for both elements. To conclude the paper suggests implications for hotel's managers and proposes a model regarding the quality of the hotel's experience.

**Keywords:** Customer Experience; Customer's intention; Persona; Tourism Industry

## **Introduction:**

Customers are increasingly demanding with the consuming experience they live; they look for service excellence (Dickinger and Leung 2017). With the emergence of Internet, and in particular websites, blogs, social media where customers can share their feelings about an experience they lived, managers have understood the importance of designing an experience that fit customers' expectations (O'Connor 2010). It is relatively true in the tourism industry as it is described as the biggest producer of experience (Tussyadiah 2014). Also, being innovative in the service experience provided, is nowadays, in the tourism industry, a competitive advantage (Volo 2006). Designing a service experience has been demonstrated by Tussyadiah

(2014) to be important in the tourism industry, who added that one of the three fundamentals of the service experience design is the human centric strategy where service providers take into account customer's opinion(s) in a way to design a memorable service experience.

Today, in terms of customer centric approach, French hotels – and other over the world, as described by Buhalis (2000) – use mainly a who-segmentation, based on the two major profiles – Professional and Leisure customers – in order to create “personalised” customer experience strategies. Dolnicar (2008) added that tourism destinations in general usually use country of origin as a criterion on segmentation. She also mentioned that even every tourist is different, they have similarities. In this paper, similarities are not only seen as personal characteristics – sex, age, nationality, income, ... – but also as consuming intention or motivation. In fact, it is important for managers to consider this last element because it – motivation – is directly associated with the consumer behaviour and the decision of action (Bayton 1958). Planned or not planned the decision-taking is always related to a motivation – some time helped by impulse buying (Hausman 2000).

Based on these remarks, the purpose of the study is to propose an alternative solution to the who-segmentation, which focus on the understanding of hotels' customers' uses' intentions. The customer is a person with life issues. Hotel strategists and globally, marketing teams have to take care of this distinction. By looking on why customers are going to the hotel – customers' intention –, it will be

possible to focus on the use of the hotel. Thereby, hotels will be able to offer a better customer experience which will probably improve customer's satisfaction.

## **Literature Review:**

According to Helkkula (2011) a service experience can be characterised by three main components : the phenomenological characteristic, the process-based characteristic and the outcome-based characteristic. This last component is interesting because it is related to the measure and the focus on the immediate result of an experience which can have a fundamental role in the way companies manage their service experience. In fact, these measures can be analysed and used as key information in the design process of a service experience (Tussyadiah 2014). As mentioned by Klaus (2013), customer experience is "everywhere" and widely considered as "the next competitive battleground". Frow and Payne (2007) added that the understanding of the customer experience will allow companies to deliver an outstanding or perfect customer experience. The necessity to measure this experience has become a focus topic not only for the companies but also for the scientific community.

Dickinger and Leung (2017) brought to light that a "poor service design is the origin of service failure" and indicated that in order to improve the experience and reduce failures, companies should focus on the conception of the service experience and in particular on the "service encounters and interactions". They developed that companies must be proactive in their service experience strategy in order to avoid these failures and proposed five diagnostic tools: "service flowcharts, service blueprints, service maps, service failure proofing and the fishbone diagram". These

tools are mainly focusing on the experience living process such as touch points – or fail points – and moment of interactions also called the moment of truth (Bitran and Lojo 1993). Even so, Carteron (2013) stated that a service experience is composed of three main elements: the customer, the firm and their interaction. In terms of measuring tools, the customer and the firm are more neglected in the tourism literature than the third element of Carteron's definition. Nevertheless, the customer doesn't have to be forgotten. As mentioned by Klaus (2013): "the age of the customer has finally arrived".

What if the moment of truth was not the interaction itself but a global understanding of the customer's needs which will facilitate the customer's satisfaction of the interaction?

Internet has allowed the massive development of digital word-of-mouth, also called eWOM, where people could share or post comments, opinions, and personal experiences, which then serve as information for others (Xiang and Gretzel 2010). Numerous research works in the last decade have proven the importance of eWOM in the success of a service experience (Chen, Wu, and Yoon 2004; Ho-Dac, Carson, and Moore 2013; Lee, Park, and Han 2008) and particularly in the tourism industry (Cheung, Lee, and Rabjohn 2008; Crotts, Mason, and Davis 2009; Melian-Gonzalez, Bulchand-Gidumal, and Gonzalez Lopez-Valcarcel 2013; O'Connor 2010; Smyth, Wu, and Greene 2010; Ye, Law, and Gu 2009). To take into account this new paradigm and to be competitive, companies have to focus on elements that will improve the value of the service (Holbrook 2006; Lusch, Vargo, and Tanniru 2010).

Segmentation is one of these elements (Kotler 1973; Gallarza et al., 2012). The value is a complex notion (Sanchez-Fernandez and Iniesta-Bonillo 2007; Basole and Rouse 2008), where customer is playing a central role (Woodruff and Gardial 1996; Tam 2004; Gil, Berenguer, and Cervera 2008) by comparing expected experience with the experience they live (Mattsson 1992; Woodruff 1997). TripAdvisor, for example, one of the biggest website that generates comments from tourism experience users (O'Connor 2008), segments the experience in five categories – Business trip, Couple trip, Family trip, Friends trip and trip alone – without taking into account why they decided to choose this hotel in particular. Oliver (1999) described the behavioural intention as the “conative stage” which influences the consuming act. Woodruff (1997) suggested for new methods tools in order to deal with particular customer value learning issues. This work proposes to answer his request by using the Persona tool. Cooper (1999) introduced the concept of persona as being a real description of a service user – or customer – that helps service designers to understand who the service users are. Based on the use and the use’s intention – psychological evidence –, personas help marketing teams to map and create the experience customers are expecting for (Pruitt and Adlin 2006).

What if the use of the persona tool based on customer intention – why they experience this service – could be used as a new segmentation description in the tourism industry?

## **Methodology:**

The study was conducted as semi-structured qualitative interviews (Edwards and Holland 2013) with current – interviews were made directly at the hotel – or past hotel customers – customers should have spent an experience within a maximum delay of a month. The maximum delay was used to reinforce the memorability data of the experience.

The main questions asked were related to: Their habits, their intentions and they were asked to relate their experience regarding the 5 major hotel steps:

Reservation, Check-in, Room, Breakfast and Checkout. 37 interviews have been conducted based on the tourism industry who-segmentation (Buhalis 2000). 20 Professionals and 19 Leisure customers accepted to participate in the study. The sample was composed of women and men from 20 to 75 years old. The hotels destinations varied from sea side to countryside or to cities. All interviews were then recorded and faithfully transposed. Personas for each typology of customers have been created and then compared to see if there were similarities.

## **Results:**

The interviews' analysis allowed to create 6 personas: 3 representing the Professional customers' uses and 3 others representing the Leisure customers' uses. By comparing these personas, it had been possible to find similarities in the intention

and the use of the hotel. Finally, after compiling the similar data, 3 “macro” personas based on hotel use’s intention had been created.

- The first persona is coming to the hotel because it will give him/her all services – sources of satisfactions – that answer to his/her expectations linking with his/her intention. The persona is looking for a large room where he/she could work or spend time. This persona wants to be like home and to be treated as a member of the hotel family. This persona is also looking for services which will make him/her appreciated the time – generally a long time – he/she will stay there – for example: restaurant, meeting room, pool... This persona can develop a loyal behaviour regarding the hotel’s experience.

|                 | LEISURE TOURISTS  | PROFESSIONAL TOURISTS  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| P1: Hotel focus | <p>“We are loyal to this hotel for ten years. We are known by the staff.”</p> <p>“This hotel is comfortable. I like the sauna, the massages and the Spa area.”</p> <p>“I’m not so much interested in hotel room, I prefer apartment Hotel where the space is bigger and I can have a peaceful breakfast.”</p> | <p>“If there is a swimming pool, and the reservation fee isn’t too expensive, I’ll prefer to choose this hotel.”</p> <p>“I want to be like home. I want a calm atmosphere with a pool.”</p> <p>“I want the place to be clean with Wi-Fi and a TV. I want the staff to be pleased and welcoming. And the hotel has to be open 24/24.”</p> <p>“I always choose an hotel where I feel comfortable, where I know the staff, where we got a personalized warm welcome.”</p> <p>“I needed a desk with Wi-Fi and outlets in my room in order to work. There was a meeting</p> |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | <p>room in the hotel with video projector, tables, pens, paperboards..."</p> <p>"When I can't go home, I want to be in a peaceful hotel. I like when the staff know me as a client. I always go to the same hotels, because I have some habits."</p> |
|--|--|--|

- The second persona is firstly attracted to the area where the hotel is located, and only want to enjoy the life outside the hotel. The hotel is only used as an "infrastructure" to sleep. This second persona can't go back home to sleep, so the hotel is only here to accomplish this function. This persona is only looking for a clean room and comfortable bed and most important, the hotel has to be close to place where the customer is going to.

|                | LEISURE TOURISTS  | PROFESSIONAL TOURISTS   |
|----------------|---|---|
| P2: Area Focus | <p>"For a night, I prefer to have comfort more than services. Services don't matter."</p> <p>"We need to find an hotel as close as possible to our destination."</p> <p>"We didn't want to go back home late in the night. So, we book a night at the hotel."</p> <p>"We choose the hotel regarding the activity we plan."</p> <p>"We choose the destination, and as we are not complicated persons, we only need a good bed, a shower and toilet in the room."</p> | <p>"I booked the cheapest hotel I've found in the area. I need the room to be clean and prepared when I arrive."</p> <p>"I need the hotel to be close to the train station. I don't care about the atmosphere, I need the room to be clean."</p> <p>"I come to this hotel because it is on my way to my workplace. I am in the obligation to stay there."</p> <p>"I have to go to Paris each week, I need the hotel to be useful, clean and comfortable."</p> <p>"When I'm on leave, the idea isn't to stay at the hotel. It is just a place to sleep."</p> <p>"Hotel is a place to sleep, no to live."</p> <p>"I need to be close to the place I'm interested in."</p> <p>"I don't stay at the hotel, I prefer spend time to walk in Paris."</p> |

- The last persona, is both interested by the area and the hotel. This third persona is a mix of the two first personas. This persona has an interest (personal or professional) for the place he/she is going to and in a same time he/she choose an hotel where he/she could benefit from the services that the hotel offer.

|                          | LEISURE TOURISTS  | PROFESSIONAL TOURISTS  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| P3:<br>« Both »<br>focus | <p>« We were looking for a budget hotel that would provide breakfast and a comfortable place to sleep between our holiday villa [in the south of France] and our home in Middlesbrough, UK. »</p> <p>“Every 3-4 months we come to Paris to visit museum. We always book in the same hotel because it is easy for us to park our car and take the metro.”</p> <p>“It is the 10th time we come to Paris, we always choose this hotel. We enjoy it.”</p> <p>“We are looking for cocoon atmosphere when we plan a tourism journey. We often choose the half-board option in order not to go outside the hotel for dinner.”</p> <p>“After an 800km-road-trip, we would like a comfortable hotel to have a rest. We choose one with a swimming pool, it was a priority.”</p> <p>“We enjoy visiting new cities. We also take time to choose an hotel with a Spa and a restaurant. We are looking for good deal.”</p> <p>“We often have the opportunity to go abroad with my wife. I always look for three stars’ hotel as a minimum quality, and four stars, if there is a good deal. And we appreciate Spa hotels, because they propose qualitative services, which are comfortable.”</p> | <p>“I go twice month in the same hotel for business. I’m always warm welcomed. The hotel is located next to the factory I visit, it is useful.”</p> <p>“I’m going to the hotel every week for professional reasons. The relationship with the staff is important. We feel like we are part of their family. I also appreciate having the same room.”</p> <p>“I need the reception to be welcoming and friendly. As I’m going to the hotel for a long period, I need hangers in the cupboard in order my shirts to be wearable. For breakfast, I like fresh orange juice.”</p> <p>“When I go to Shanghai for business, I always book an hotel with a conference room and all surrounding services. We are there to work, but I also enjoy the city.”</p> <p>“As I’m going abroad for business, I often go to city I don’t know. In this case, I always look carefully at the location of the hotel in order to well manage free time to visit the city.”</p> <p>“When I visit a service provider, I have budget issues, from my company, in order to book an hotel. So, I have to manage hotel’s costs and proximity with the place I go.”</p> <p>“I prefer to be at home, so when I have to stay at the hotel because of my work, I often choose a good place. Seaside for example.”</p> |

## **Conclusions:**

The study suggests that taking into account intentions through personas can provide insightful information to deliver outstanding experiences to customers. The who-segmentation used nowadays is limited, in the sense that it relies solely on the binary purpose of their stay, i.e; leisure or professional. The latter knowledge provides little means to frame personalised services, thus the impact on customers' level of satisfaction. In terms of practice, hotel strategists may benefit from the why-segmentation based on customers' intentions to enhance their experiences. Building useful and insightful personas necessitates time and field research. It should be considered as an investment and tool that will help to enhance customer experience, thus satisfaction. Also, taking time to talk with customers to better understand their expectations, in link with their intention(s), can impulse a cocreation strategy that will increase customers' involvement with the service and will improve service satisfaction (Habel et al. 2016).

Based on the conclusions of this study, it is possible to suggest an expansion of the Quality Service Model of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985). In fact, this work shows that customers' needs are primarily linking to the use's intention described in the persona. By focusing on the "Personal Needs" notion of the Quality Service Model, it is possible to suggest a Quality Hotel Experience Model (see figure 1):

Starting from different Customer's Intentions, it is possible to create multiple Persona's descriptions – in this study three Persona have been created – which, then, will determinate specific Customer's Needs. These three elements are part of the Customer's Expected Experience evaluation proposed

by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry in their Quality Service Model (1985), and have to be clearly understood by the hotels. Finally, the Quality Hotel Experience Model suggests that if the hotels want their Customers to be satisfied, they have to propose to each persona's typology an experience that will fit their specific needs as much as possible. In this last situation, the hotels focus on the Customer's Perceived Experience described in the Quality Service Model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985).

Finally, this work focus mainly on French hotel users – only one interviewee came from UK. It would be interesting to replicate this study in different countries to confirm the results. It would also be interesting to confirm the qualitative findings through quantitative studies based on more customers. The personas created are "big picture" meaning that it will be certainly possible to refine them in more precise categories. Future researches should also focus on the impact of the persona's expectation(s) vs. the persona's perceived experience on the final satisfaction as described on the Hotel Experience Model. As mentioned, the tourism literature focus mainly on the interaction – moment of truth – analysis in terms of measure. It would be then interesting to try to create a measure for the firm, which is the third component of the service experience definition of Carteron (2013).

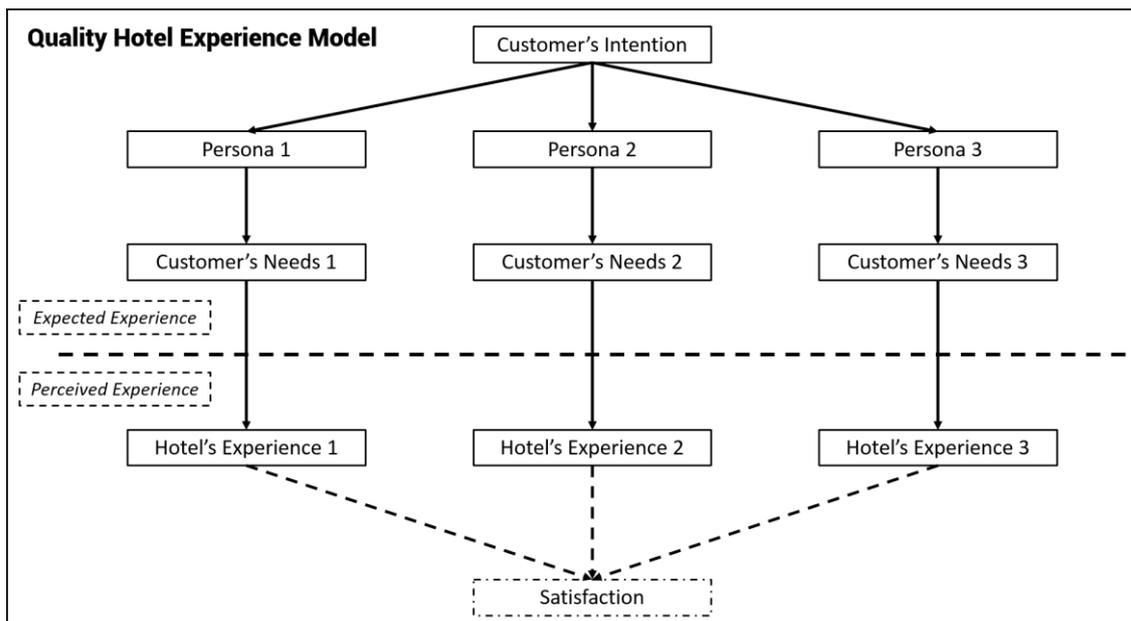


Figure 1: Quality Hotel Experience Model

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