



Enlightening Tourism.

A Pathmaking Journal



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BOOK REVIEW:

Firth, M. (2020). Service Encounters in Tourism, Events and Hospitality – Staff Perspectives. Bristol: Channel View Publications. ISBN: 978-1-84541-727-7, 208 pp.

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The tourist-based businesses have traditionally been intensive in terms of human resources (Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal, 2020). The employees of the hospitality, tourism and events sector, particularly the frontline service staffs have longed played a crucial role in ensuring the quality of service on offer as well as offering an extraordinary experience (e.g. Baum, Krajl, Robinson and Solnet 2016; Goolaup and Mossberg 2017). While, considerable research has been conducted in terms of customers' perception of different service encounters and its impact on satisfaction (e.g. Zhang, Qiao, Yang and Zhang 2020), there is a lack of research considering the service staff perspective. Hence, the book by Miriam Firth, 'Service Encounters in Tourism, Events and Hospitality – Staff Perspectives' is a timely publication and makes a significant contribution to the limited literature available in that area.

In particular, the book pays special attention to staff perspectives and perceptions of service encounters and delivery. It looks at various kinds of encounters ranging from staff-to-staff, the co-production between customers and staff in creating service encounters, importance of soft skills, for e.g. emotional labour,

aesthetic and sexualised labour focusing on how they affect the performance of the staff in workplace, intercultural sensitivity and how legal frameworks affect customer service encounters. The book is both informative and engaging. Excluding the introduction and conclusion chapters, there are 10 other chapters. The different chapters are clearly linked with each other and are easy to follow. Miriam Firth has put much effort in ensuring that the different chapters are built upon each other. In short, the book provides a holistic perspective of the topic by probing into different encounters that affects the staff service delivery.

The book is useful for undergraduate, post-graduate students, research scholars as well as tourism and hospitality practitioners. Each chapters start with clear learning objectives and end with a chapter summary. Likewise, the content of each individual chapter is focused on introducing the core concepts, theoretical review of the concepts and a critical analysis of the topic. To engage the reader further, each chapters also bring forward critical incidents, a form of narrative research with stories from research participants. These critical incidents with key questions are useful in assisting students to gain additional knowledge and explore the selected theme further. It not only tests their understanding of the theme discussed but it also provides thought provoking scenarios that can be used for in-class discussions. At the end of each chapters, there are annotated bibliography that present an overview of some of the key articles that are discussed in connection to the chapter. In particular, this section presents an overview of some of the seminal articles that are discussed within the related chapters, hence allowing the reader to probe deeper into the subject.

A detailed overview of this book is presented as follows. The introduction chapter is mainly focused on arguing for the need of the book, presenting the structure used, definitions of some of the core concepts as well as a detailed description of the methodology used, i.e., narrative research approach. Chapter 1 is one of the most important chapter since it is specifically written to introduce the reader to how customer service encounter and inter-cultural service encounters are defined within the tourism, events and hospitality setting. It also introduces the five core components to deliver service encounters that are discussed further in the other chapters. Chapter 2 dives into the importance of staff-to-staff support of customer service encounters. In particular, it looks at how staff perception of their colleagues support play a crucial role in instilling confidence that eventually leads to customer

satisfaction. Chapter 3 provides a deep understanding of how soft skills and verbal communication of the staffs facilitate service encounters and delivery. Much attention is also placed in terms of how the concept is studied within the field of tourism, events and hospitality.

Chapter 4 and 5 look at the emotional labour and aesthetic and sexualized labour respectively. It is built on chapter 3 since these areas are considered as core soft skills that influence service perceptions and delivery. Chapter 4 provide an overview of different levels of emotions present as well as an assessment of how identity and emotion affect the performance of the emotional labour in the workplace. Chapter 5 extend the discussion further by focusing on the way that the service staff need to physically present themselves and the role it plays in customer service encounters. It digs deeper into the challenges that the female staffs faced as a result of being sexualized. Chapter 6 examines the intercultural sensitivity by probing deeper into the verbal and non-verbal communication and intercultural competence of the staff in service encounters and delivery.

Moreover, chapter 7 is focused on highlighting how co-production and co-creation requires customers and staff to work together in creating service encounters and how communication skills are useful in creating service encounters. Another important issue, which is highlighted by the author in chapter 8, is how legal framework such as employment contracts, health and safety legislation and absence law affects customer service encounters and delivery. Another emerging and a concept that has received less attention in the literature is the use of humour in the customer service encounter. Chapter 9 provides a very interesting and engaging insight in terms of how humour is perceived in tourism, events and hospitality settings. It also provides a discussion of the usefulness of humour at workplace. In contrast to the other chapters, the last chapter outlines the various demand that both customers and managers make on staffs and how it affects the service encounters and deliveries.

Even though the book has its merit, there are also certain limitations that have been observed. Foremost, it does not have a clear argumentation nor a definition of what is the author takes on customer service encounters from a staff perspective. Since customer service encounter is a complex concept that has been defined differently by multiple scholars a clear, definition would have helped the reader to understand the author perspective of the concept and how she conceptualized it. A

second limitation is the consideration that the tourism, events and hospitality sectors have similar characteristics and there are some overlapping definitions of the sectors. While I do agree that these different sectors tend to overlap from each other, it is important to recognize that they also have distinct characteristics. The argumentation presented on page 52 is not enough. The focus on the hospitality and tourism sector is a better fit since the data presented in the book are collected from employees working within the tourism and hospitality sector. Likewise, the book is also heavily focused on examples and presenting critical incidents and examples that are pertinent to the hospitality and tourism sector, while the event sector is highly ignored. Lastly, there are also some missing texts on page 75, the second paragraph. It is recommended that future edition of the book consider revising these.

However, these mistakes can be considered as minor since it does not change the core purpose and exciting contribution that it makes. Overall the book is highly enthralling, informative, valuable and a must read for tourism and hospitality scholars involved in human resources management research. This book is highly recommended since it equipped scholars, researchers and practitioners with a critical perspective regarding service staff perspectives and perceptions of service encounters and delivery.

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