

Book review

M. Firth, *Service Encounters in Tourism, Events and Hospitality: Staff Perspectives* (Channel View Publications, Bristol, UK 2020)
208 pp.

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Services are considered an essential constituent for any tourism, events, and hospitality organisation. The success or failure of any such organisation is largely determined by the quality and efficiency of services the staff members can deliver (Dixit 2017). There is an abundance of literature discussing service quality and encounters from the customers' perspective (Dixit 2013). On the other hand, research from the service staff's perspective remains scarce. This book serves as a timely collective resource deliberating on this slightly neglected arena of service encounters from the delivery personnel's perspective. In the title, the author has contextualised service encounters in two perspectives: relating firstly to the absorbed culture and, secondly, to individual experiences to meet customer requirements. The volume is divided into ten chapters dealing with different service encounter domains besides the author's introductory and concluding chapters. It is particularly interesting to see that all the chapters are organised to follow a specific structure, comprising learning objectives, theoretical review, critical incidents, chapter summary, and annotated bibliography; a single list of references at the end of the book also enables readers to comprehend the operational context of the chapter contents.

Chapter 1 identifies the definitions of customer service encounters and intercultural service encounters through an in-depth review of the relevant literature. Customer service encounters are characterised as person-to-person (or buyer-to-delivery staff) delivery of products and services. As evident from the available literature, customer service encounters is an area widely discussed, whereas staff perspectives in service encounters are largely overlooked. The chapter identifies the staff components to understand service encounters in tourism, events, and hospitality. Chapter 2 emphasises the need for collaboration between staff members in performing their duties. In this context, the chapter presents three possible scenarios of service encounters in organisations: staff-to-staff, staff-to-management, and staff-to-supplier encounters. All three scenarios are explained through the use of appropriate examples taken from the tourism, events, and hospitality industry.

Chapter 3 of the book exemplifies the role of soft skills, professionalisation, and communication methods for service encounters in tourism, events, and hospitality. The chapter further presents storied incidents from the industry to develop an in-depth understanding of soft skills and communication in service encounters. Chapter 4 focuses on the different emotional labour constructs for satisfactory service encounters in tourism, events, and hospitality. These constructs include the soft skills, identity, and emotions of staff in performing services. It is imperative for staff members to maintain control of their emotions during encounters to offer guests a

pleasant service. Furthermore, management needs to be sensitive about their staff's emotional status and support staff in rendering efficient service encounters.

Chapter 5 elaborates on staff's 'aesthetic' and 'sexualised' labour perspectives. Both terms have emerged from emotional labour and play important roles in effective service encounters. Aesthetic labour encompasses staff appearance, attire, and confidence in rendering services, whereas sexualised labour emphasises the gender appeal of the staff to increase customer satisfaction levels during service encounters. Chapter 6 gives readers an idea of intercultural communication, competence, and sensitivity in service encounters. The chapter also presents critical incidents to explain further the intercultural service encounter theory. Such theory and incidents emerge as essential for staff in completing customer service encounters. The reason lies in consumers nowadays wishing to immerse themselves and participate in services in order to be satisfied, rather than seeking to simply consume products and services. Chapter 7 focuses on the terms 'co-creation' and 'co-production', considered vital in contemporary business environments. Therefore, staff members should be able to perceive customer requirements to ensure satisfactory service encounters.

Chapter 8 elaborates on issues relevant to employment contracts, staff absence, staff personal and sensitive issues, and health and safety regulations. It therefore throws light on types of employment terms, staff sickness and absence laws, staff protection measures, and sensitive laws applicable not only in the UK but overall in America, Asia, Australia, and Europe. Chapter 9 details the common frameworks of humour theory and its relation to service encounter production. The chapter also presents positive and negative examples of humour during service encounters by highlighting critical incidents from the industry. Before the conclusion, Chapter 10 sums up the demands placed on staff by their peers, management, suppliers, and customers during service encounters. This enables staff to groom themselves as per expectations, and to appreciate accurately the skills and knowledge needed for consistent and efficient service encounters.

In sum, *Service Encounters in Tourism, Events and Hospitality: Staff Perspectives* critically explores the largely unmapped staff dimension of customer service encounters in tourism, events, and hospitality organisations. Employing data from her research, the author co-creates the industrial representation to extend theoretical reflections to readers. The book is certainly the first step to digging into more profound methodological developments for this under-investigated field.

REFERENCES

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