

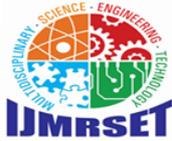
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Sustainable Tourism & Eco-Hospitality Management

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ABSTRACT: The hotel and tourism industry is undergoing dynamic changes because of technological advancements, increased competition, and changing consumer behavior. It is essential for the industry to apply successful leadership approaches, foster collaboration among stakeholders, and adapt to digital consumer behavior. This research paper examines four major topics that shape contemporary hotel management practices: electronic word-of-mouth communication, empowering leadership, tourism networks, and service leadership competencies. The results indicate that digital communication has a significant impact on consumer behavior, leadership approaches enhance employee performance, and collaborative networks enhance the competitiveness of destinations. Nevertheless, most research studies indicate the absence of concrete empirical support for certain theoretical assertions, which is an indication that more research is required. This paper combines the above topics to explain their significance in hotel success and provides recommendations.

KEYWORDS: hospitality management, empowering leadership, tourism networks, service leadership, electronic word-of-mouth

I. INTRODUCTION

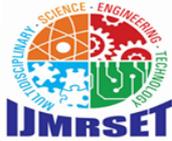
The hospitality and tourism industry is a major catalyst for economic development worldwide. It is, however, one of the sectors that is most vulnerable to external changes, such as economic trends, pandemics, and technological changes. As we move further into the 21st century, the conventional top-down management approach is no longer effective for an industry that is so dependent on human interaction and real-time problem-solving. In such a challenging environment, employees are often subjected to high levels of emotional labor, irregular working hours, and stressful conditions. These conditions are responsible for the high employee turnover rates that are characteristic of this industry. To mitigate this challenge, modern management approaches have adopted a leadership empowerment approach. By empowering frontline employees to make decisions, organizations can increase employee morale and the speed of service recovery. Furthermore, the industry is no longer composed of stand-alone businesses. A tourist's satisfaction is no longer dependent on the hotel alone; rather, it is dependent on the airport, public transportation, restaurants, and security. This connectivity requires the analysis of tourism networks, where collaboration replaces competition to enhance the "destination brand." Finally, the digital environment has completely altered the balance of power between brands and consumers. Electronic word-of-mouth

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

The rise of social media sites and review platforms such as TripAdvisor, Yelp, and Booking.com has made every traveler a critic. eWOM is defined as any kind of favorable or unfavorable statement made by potential, actual, or former consumers about products or organizations, communicated to numerous people and organizations through the internet. Unlike traditional marketing, eWOM is considered extremely credible because it is generated by others, not by the company itself. In the case of hospitality products, which are experience goods and cannot be sampled prior to purchase, eWOM acts as an important risk-reduction mechanism. The literature identifies three important characteristics of eWOM:

1. Valence: The nature of the review, whether it is positive or negative.
2. Volume: The overall number of reviews, which is an indicator of popularity.
3. Source Credibility: The expertise and credibility of the source.



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2.2 Empowering Leadership

Empowering leadership (EL) is defined as the process of giving power from the manager to the subordinate. It involves four key behaviors: increasing the meaningfulness of work, involving in decision-making, expressing confidence in high performance, and giving freedom from bureaucratic constraints. In the hospitality industry, EL is very effective. When a waiter or front desk employee feels empowered, he or she is likely to exhibit "prosocial service behavior," which means that he or she will go out of his or her way to satisfy a customer. However, studies have shown that EL is not always effective for all employees.

2.3 Tourism Networks

A tourism network refers to a set of stakeholders who collaborate in order to offer a holistic tourism experience. Destination management organizations are responsible for managing tourism networks. The justification for the existence of tourism networks is that no single organization has the capacity to offer all the services that a tourist needs. Successful tourism networks result in the following:-

1. Innovation through Knowledge Sharing: When hotels and tour companies share information, they are able to develop new travel packages.
2. Economic Power: When a group of stakeholders markets their services, it is possible for a destination to remain afloat during the off-season.
3. Sustainability: When stakeholders agree on how to manage resources, it is possible to sustain the environmental resources of a destination.

2.4 Service-Leadership Competencies

Service leadership is distinct from general leadership in that it focuses on the service profit chain, which is the connection between service quality and customer satisfaction. The "Savvy" model (Business, People, and Self) provides a comprehensive approach. A leader who is "People Savvy" but not "Business Savvy" may have happy employees but a failing bottom line. A leader who is only "Business Savvy" may have high employee turnover and low morale. The key to being a good hospitality leader and not just an average one is to strike a balance between the three.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research paper employs a meta-synthesis methodology that combines results from diverse sources of knowledge, such as:

- Empirical Studies: Research based on data from employee performance and eWOM.
- Conceptual Frameworks: Theories of leadership and network theory.
- Industry Reports: Trends and consumer behavior in the post-2024 era.
- The combination of these diverse sources of knowledge enables a holistic understanding of the hospitality industry.

IV. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19: A PARADIGM SHIFT

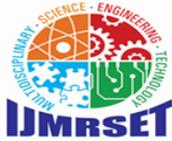
Paradigm Shift The COVID-19 pandemic served as an unprecedented stress test for the hospitality industry, leading to a paradigm shift in leadership priorities and interactions with consumers.

4.1 Digital Transformation Acceleration

Digital transformation was a slow process before the pandemic. However, the pandemic accelerated the need for a quick transformation where hotels had to adopt contactless operations (mobile check-in, QR code menus) and AI-powered guest communication overnight. This accelerated the need for Digital Transformational Leadership (DTL), where managers had to lead not only people but also complex technology systems.

4.2 From eWOM to "Health-eWOM"

There was a shift in consumer behavior towards "risk-aversion. Consumer reviews were no longer centered on food quality or room size but on cleanliness and safety standards. This new form of digital word-of-mouth, referred to as "Health-eWOM," demanded greater transparency and proactivity from managers in their online communication efforts to regain the trust of their guests.



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4.3 Stakeholder Resilience and Solidarity

The pandemic exposed the weakness of disconnected businesses. Tourism networks evolved from being marketing platforms to survival platforms. Hospitality destinations with existing robust stakeholder relationships could better influence governments and provide access to necessary resources (such as sanitizers) during lockdowns. This phase emphasized the importance of

V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

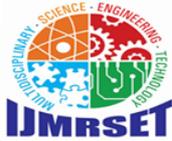
The following tables summarize the critical findings from the literature regarding the strengths and challenges of current hospitality management practices.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Key Research Themes

Research Area	Focus	Primary Advantage	Major Challenge
eWOM	Digital Reputation	Increases global visibility and trust.	Difficulty in managing fake or malicious reviews.
Empowering Leadership	Employee Autonomy	Boosts creativity and service recovery speed.	Can cause role ambiguity if training is insufficient.
Tourism Networks	Inter-firm Collaboration	Enhances destination brand and innovation.	Power imbalances between large and small firms.
Service Leadership	Managerial Competency	High-quality service culture and consistency.	Requires significant time for soft-skill development.

Table 2: Detailed Service-Leadership Competency Breakdown

Category	Specific Competency	Strategic Goal
Business Savvy	Strategic Planning	Aligning daily operations with long-term goals.
	Systems Thinking	Understanding how one department affects the guest experience.
People Savvy	Coaching & Mentoring	Developing the next generation of hospitality leaders.
	Conflict Resolution	Maintaining a harmonious work environment.



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Self Savvy	Emotional Intelligence	Managing personal stress and leading by example.
	Professionalism	Setting the ethical standard for the organization.

VI. DISCUSSION

6.1 The Intersection of Leadership and Digital Reputation

The connection between empowering leadership and eWOM is an important outcome of this literature review. When employees are empowered, they deliver quality service. Quality service translates to positive eWOM, which ultimately translates to increased occupancy and revenue. This "virtuous cycle" illustrates that digital marketing is not solely the concern of the social media manager but starts with the frontline leadership.

6.2 The Challenges of Collective Collaboration

Although tourism networks appear attractive in theory, the "Free Rider" issue is a challenge. Some stakeholders may gain from the collective marketing effort without paying a single cent. Additionally, the lack of concrete evidence of return on investment (ROI) for participation in the network makes some small businesses hesitant to participate.

6.3 Bridging the Theoretical-Practical Gap

There is a definite gap between theoretical recommendations (such as total empowerment) and what is practical in a high turnover setting. Managers are concerned that training and empowering employees will simply result in them being poached by a competitor. This indicates that service leadership needs to address retention as well.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR MANAGERS

To apply these results, the following steps can be taken by hospitality managers:

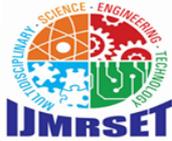
1. Digital Response Protocol: Not only read reviews but also respond to them. Research shows that responding to negative reviews can actually lead to an increase in future booking intentions.
2. Tiered Empowerment: Begin with giving employees autonomy over small guest recovery tasks (such as comping a drink) and gradually increase as they demonstrate competence.
3. Active Network Participation: Get involved in local tourism boards and associations to ensure that your business has a voice in destination-level decision-making.
4. Soft-Skill Training: Move training budgets away from technical skills and towards emotional intelligence and conflict resolution.

VIII. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

There is a need for more long-term research to validate the long-term economic value of tourism networks. Furthermore, the role of artificial intelligence in eWOM, including AI-based reviews and AI-powered chatbots, is an area that requires urgent attention from academics. Lastly, understanding the need for changes in leadership styles to accommodate the Gen Z workforce will be crucial for the future of hospitality management.

IX. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the success of a hospitality and tourism business does not depend on the quality of the physical infrastructure alone. Rather, it is founded on the principles of leadership, stakeholder networks, and a proactive approach to online influence. Empowering leadership builds the potential for excellence, while service leadership competencies ensure that executives are equipped to deal with the intricate human side of the business. On the outside, tourism networks offer the collective power needed to compete in the global arena, while eWOM offers the platform on which consumers authenticate the claims of an organization. By combining these four pillars, hospitality executives can succeed in a rapidly changing environment and be ready for the challenges of the future.



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