

Understand Role of Emotional Intelligence in Customer Satisfaction in Hospitality Industry

Mrs. Priyanka Shetty*

Assistant Professor, Department of Hotel Management, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune,
Maharashtra, India

priynka.shetty@gmail.com

Abstract: This study investigates the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in enhancing customer satisfaction within the hospitality industry, utilizing the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (Mayer et al., 2016) framework. Drawing on a survey of 49 hospitality professionals, the research employs descriptive and inferential statistics to evaluate four branches of EI: perceiving, facilitating, understanding, and managing emotions. Demographic analysis revealed a predominantly young (65.31% aged 25-35) and full-time (83.67%) workforce. Descriptive results indicated that while employees scored highest in "Understanding Emotions" (M = 4.27), "Managing Emotions" (M = 4.21) exhibited the highest variability (SD = 0.64), suggesting a need for standardized training in emotional regulation. Hypothesis testing confirmed a significant relationship between an employee's ability to manage emotions and high customer satisfaction ($p < 0.05$), specifically identifying emotional recovery ($p = 0.002$) as the strongest predictor of service success. Conversely, de-escalation skills alone did not significantly impact satisfaction scores ($p = 0.366$), implying that guests view de-escalation as basic damage control rather than a value-added service. The findings suggest that hospitality organizations should prioritize training in emotional resilience and "proactive empathy" to improve service standards. Performance evaluations should incorporate EI metrics to foster a workforce capable of maintaining professional composure and rapid emotional recovery during high-stress interactions.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Customer Satisfaction, Hospitality Industry, MSCEIT Model, EQ

INTRODUCTION

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand ones and other emotions and manage them to communicate efficiently. The concept of emotional intelligence was first introduced by Daniel Goleman, who emphasized that key components of EI are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Salovey and Mayer (1990) states that EI is the ability to monitor understand and manage emotions and to use this emotional information to guide ones thinking and actions. In a leadership perspective, emotional intelligence means effectively managing complex human relationships to improve team performance. It means understanding that an employee's frustration might be a result of unclear expectations, excitement may indicate unused potential, or withdrawal might be a result of feeling

undervalued. As per many psychologists the theory of emotional intelligence lacks true descriptive power as it is difficult to measure via psychometric tests.

Importance of EI in Hospitality Industry

Hospitality Industry being primarily people centric emotional intelligence is considered to be very essential. Hospitality professionals with high emotional intelligence are most likely to provide tailored service, efficiently resolve conflicts, and create a warm and welcoming environment for guests. It is observed that technical skills and abilities are much easier to teach than to instill empathy in an employee to deal with a challenging guest; making emotional quotient more important than hard skills. Emotionally intelligent employees are able to deal with complex situations, identify mistakes, and learn from them. For managers, high EI is vital for building motivated teams, encouraging a culture of understanding, while improving staff retention and job performance. According to research there is a strong link between leaders' EI and employee retention, mediated by job satisfaction. Dr. Travis Bradberry says that emotional intelligence (EI) is the primary forecaster of employee performance leading to 58% of professional success. In hospitality industry emotional intelligence can be applied in proactive ways by anticipating guest needs or using empathy to de-escalate service failures. Additionally this sensitivity can also be applied to cultural awareness and taking personalized follow-up for turning complaints into brand loyalty. EI is often used internally as an essential leadership tool by helping supervisors maintain employee morale through the support of overwhelmed staff. It also mediates conflicts privately. Employee retention can be improved by mentoring skilled subordinates & managers. It will help them to build a capable leadership pipeline that ensures both guest satisfaction and a professional work environment.

Customer Satisfaction in Hospitality Industry

In the hospitality industry Customer satisfaction is a multi-faceted concept that shows how the guest's expectations meet or exceed their initial expectations. The industry consists of products and services that are largely intangible and perishable in nature, thus perceived quality of service, satisfaction and emotional bond is mainly formed during the "moment of truth" (Oliver, 2010).

Expectancy-Disconfirmation Paradigm explains that a "positive disconfirmation" happens when the actual service performance exceeds the guest expectations which leads to higher satisfaction levels. (Pizam et al., 2016).

Determinants of Satisfaction

The primary drivers of guest satisfaction include both tangible and intangible factors:

1. **Service Quality (SERVQUAL):** Reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness are the five categories that guests use to evaluate their level of satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1988). For example, the empathy shown during a difficult check-in often has a greater and lasting impact on guest's mind than a tangible requirement of a clean room. This will surely have a vital impact on overall satisfaction score.
2. **Perceived Value:** In this method the guest feels satisfied if the given service is better and higher than the perceived service. Also, guest satisfaction is reinforced if the cost was appropriate with the quality of their stay. (Zeithaml, 1988).
3. **Atmospherics and Physical Environment:** The design, lights, fragrance, and arrangement of the space is often termed as the "servicescape." This servicescape plays a vital role in setting a good mood which leads to higher satisfaction levels (Bitner, 1992).

The relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Customer Satisfaction in the Hospitality Industry

Core of the service-profit chain is formed by the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Customer Satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Service delivery is ensured by technical proficiency while emotional intelligence ensures that the service is felt which directly influences the overall experience of a guest.

The "product" in the hospitality, is an experience that is frequently linked to the person delivering it. Employees with high EI are better able to carry out emotional labor that involves aligning their displayed emotions with organizational expectations to put the guest at ease (Hochschild, 1983). The guest's perceived service quality significantly boosts when a staff alters the communication style that matches the guest's perceived emotional state such as stress, fatigue, or excitement. (Gronroos, 2011).

1. Anticipatory Service and Empathy

A key element of emotional intelligence is Empathy. It enables employees to shift their approach of reactive service to anticipatory service. By creating "moments of delight" just by

sensing a guest's needs before they are actually spoken, employees can exceed the standard perceived expectations of guests. Customer satisfaction is mostly driven by this positive disconfirmation of expectations. (Oliver, 2010). For example, if a front-desk agent notices a guest who is unwell and shivering and he/she proactively offers a warm beverage to the guest will demonstrate empathy that excels the basic service etiquette.

2. Service Recovery and Emotional Regulation

Service failures are a part of hospitality industry. Staff's emotional intelligence during service recovery has a greater impact on customer satisfaction. Employees with high self-regulation can remain composed when faced with an angry guest, preventing the "emotional contagion" of negativity (Goleman, 1995). High emotional intelligence amongst employees often turns a dissatisfied guest into a loyal promoter by understanding guest's feeling and showing them sincere concern. This phenomenon known as the service recovery paradox (Pizam et al., 2016).

3. Building Long-term Rapport

A prerequisite for loyalty is customer satisfaction. EI enables staff to build genuine rapport and social bonds with guests. When guests feel an emotional connection to the staff, they are more likely to overlook minor tangible shortcomings and report higher satisfaction scores on platforms like TripAdvisor (Kandampully et al., 2015).

The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test

A four-branch model developed by Mayer and Salovey called as MSCEIT is an ability-based assessment tool designed to measure emotional intelligence (EI). The model looks at the individual's capacity to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions, that are particularly relevant to the hospitality industry as this work has significant emotional demands and is seen as a key requirement for outstanding service.

The MSCEIT Model and its Four Branches

The MSCEIT is an ability-based test that assesses emotional intelligence as a set of mental abilities, rather than a personality trait or a soft skill. The model is built upon the four-branch model of emotional intelligence, which conceptualizes EI as having a hierarchical structure with a global underlying factor and four specific abilities. These branches are accessed using a range of stimuli that mirror actual people everyday situations.

Perceiving Emotions

This section assesses the ability to recognize emotions within self and others using non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice, as well as in objects, art, stories, and music. For instance, one of the sections from this branch involves identifying emotions through facial expressions and abstract pictures. Some items in this section seemed extremely easy, while most people chose no emotion as an appropriate answer.

Use of Emotions to Facilitate Thought

This is the ability that refers to the capacity of generating, using and feeling emotion needed to communicate the feelings or to incorporate them into other cognitive processes. This includes understanding how some moods can simplify thinking processes and thus compare the emotions to sensations like color, light, and temperature.

Understanding Emotions

This branch studies emotional information of individuals and understand the relationship transitions that happen because emotions combine and evolve over time. Here meanings of each emotion are also appreciated. This branch also involves various tasks that that relates to acknowledging the changing and development of emotions.

Managing Emotions

This is the final branch in MSCEIT model that

This final branch assesses the ability of oneself and others in modulating emotions that helps promote personal understanding and growth. This branch also rates various emotional strategies that can be used in regulating emotions and interpersonal relationships.

MSCEIT in the Hospitality Industry

Emotional intelligence is particularly significant in the hospitality industry because employees often engage in emotional labor, which requires them to display appropriate emotions to deliver outstanding customer service. The MSCEIT can help in this context by assessing an individual's emotional abilities, which are crucial for success in service-oriented roles. While the specific application of MSCEIT in the hospitality industry has been explored, its role in assessing employees' EI has been studied for over a decade. Research indicates that EI is positively related to job performance among hospitality workers, suggesting that tests like the MSCEIT could be valuable for recruitment and personnel assessment in this sector. However,

it is noted that the MSCEIT might be better suited for distinguishing individuals at the lower end of the EI trait, rather than accurately differentiating between average and high-EI individuals.

REVIEW OF IMPORTANT LITERATURE

- Beals, B. A. (2006) in their research emphasizes that in the service-centric hospitality industry, the provider is essentially "part of the product" (Langhorn, 2004). Emotional Intelligence (EI) significantly correlates with customer satisfaction and effective leadership, accounting for approximately 30% of management performance variance (Dulewicz et al., 2003). While core domains like self-awareness and relationship management are linked to professional longevity, studies show that socio-demographic variables such as gender and job classification often yield few significant differences in EI levels among professionals. However, a notable research gap remains: there is a lack of longitudinal data exploring how specific hospitality-based EI training interventions directly impact long-term employee retention and the "internal customer" (employee) satisfaction within diverse global markets.
- Agashe, R., Jain, S., & Kumar, D. (2020) in their research states that Emotional Intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as a critical determinant of leadership success in the service-intensive hospitality sector. Comprising domains such as self-awareness and relationship management, EI enables managers to navigate the industry's high-pressure environments and intangible product delivery. While studies indicate that hospitality professionals often possess above-average EI, a disconnect exists between industry needs and academic preparation. A significant research gap persists regarding the systematic integration of EI into hospitality curricula; specifically, there is limited empirical evidence on how formalized undergraduate EI training directly impacts long-term leadership retention and service recovery outcomes in the Indian context.
- Raina, P. K., & Sira, R. (2019). Research suggests that Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a critical determinant of leadership success within the service-centric hospitality sector. Defined as the ability to understand and manage personal and others' emotions, EI encompasses four key domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. While hospitality professionals often exhibit above-average EI levels, a significant research gap exists regarding the lack of EI integration within current hospitality training curricula and recruitment processes. Furthermore, there is limited longitudinal evidence exploring how formalized undergraduate EI development specifically

influences long-term career progression and service recovery excellence in the Indian context.

- Guney, M. (2024). The provided research highlights that emotional intelligence (EI) is a fundamental driver of success within the hospitality sector. High levels of EI among employees directly correlate with superior service delivery, heightened customer satisfaction, and a more harmonious organizational climate. Key findings suggest that emotionally intelligent staffs are better equipped to handle workplace stress, resolve conflicts, and adapt to evolving guest requirements. While the study emphasizes that EI training can reduce turnover and improve morale, a significant research gap remains regarding the generalizability of these findings across diverse cultural contexts and larger, more varied sample sizes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Hospitality business is people-oriented business where products and services play equal importance. In the age of strong market competition technical skills alone will not help in customer retention and loyalty. Thus, emotional intelligence is of utmost importance. There is a need to understand employees emotional intelligence during high pressure environment that impacts directly on customer satisfaction. The study will show how employees perceive, manage, understand emotions and what are their perspectives on customer satisfaction through emotional intelligence.

The study includes quantitative data to objectively measure the variables and determine the statistical significance of relationship. The data is collected at single point in time to give in-depth understanding of current organizational climate.

Quantitative data was gathered through structured surveys distributed to employees of hotel industry. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. The secondary data has been collected from different research papers, articles, projects, news, thesis, etc.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the concept of Emotional Intelligence and Customer Satisfaction.
- To identify key emotions for hospitality industry based on ability-based assessment tool

- Understanding Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Customer Satisfaction in Hospitality Industry.

LIMITATION

A study was conducted with a small group of employees. The research is a one-sided view of employee only; no customer point of view was taken. Because the data was collected from a specific group of professionals, possibly within a single region or institution, the findings might be influenced by local work cultures and may not be universally applicable to all hotel environments.

HYPOTHESIS

H₀: There is no significant relationship between a staff member's ability to manage emotions and the customer's likelihood of being highly satisfied.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between a staff member's ability to manage emotions and the customer's likelihood of being highly satisfied.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Following is the descriptive analysis of demographics of survey respondents in detail:

Gender Distribution: The study sample consisted of both male and female participants giving a balanced perspective on emotional intelligence of employees in hospitality industry. The distribution of respondents is quite balanced to identify and suggest the findings. 57.14% (n=28) of respondents were male and 42.86% (n=21) respondents were female.

Age Group: the majority of the employees (65.31%, n=32) who responded were fall in the age bracket of 25-35 followed by 36-45 age group (28.57%, n=14) and least respondents from the age group of 46-55 (6.12%, n= 3)

Years of Experience: Professional experience plays a very vital role in how employees perceive and handle guest emotions. The years of experience of respondents showed that maximum respondents fall in the category of 1-5 years of experience (49.98%, n=24) followed by 10+ years (20.41%, n=10), less than a year (16.33%, n=8) and 5-10 years (14.29%, n=7). Nearly half of the respondents are technically proficient but still are refining their emotional skills.

Employment Status: Employment status can quite influence on the level of employee engagement with the guests and maintain the service standards. Maximum of respondents are full-time employed (83.67%, n= 41) adding a significant reliability of the study. Only 16.33%, n= 8 respondents from the survey are working part-time.

Table 1: Emotional Intelligence based on MSCEIT Model

Branch / Category	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Branch 1: Perceiving Emotions	63	84	44	5	0	4.05	0.43
Branch 2: Facilitating Thought	78	89	21	8	0	4.21	0.56
Branch 3: Understanding Emotions	76	99	18	3	0	4.27	0.49
Branch 4: Managing Emotions	88	66	38	3	1	4.21	0.64
Customer Satisfaction	89	80	20	3	4		

Above table 1 is a measurement of different branches of emotional intelligence based on MSCEIT model. All the scores are measured on 5-point Likert scale. The detailed analysis is given below:

Note that since each branch contains 4 questions and there are 49 respondents, each branch total represents 196 individual responses (49x4).

Branch 1: Perceiving Emotions – this branch deals with first impression of an emotions like understanding and noticing facial expressions, body language, recognizing one’s own feelings during busy hours. As per the survey around 84 of individual responses agree in perceiving emotions followed by 63 individual responses who strongly agree, 44 individual responses selected neutral option and 5 individual responses disagreed to perceived emotions. This branch has the lowest mean (4.05) among the four, though it is still high. It suggests that while

hotel staffs are competent at understanding the guests, they find this slightly more difficult than understanding or managing those emotions. The low SD (0.43) indicates that most employees scored very close to the mean; there is a high level of agreement among staff that they are generally observant of guest cues.

Branch 2: Facilitating Thought—these branch states employees uses their emotions to delivers service as per standards and maintains a very healthy and helpful environment. As per the survey 89 individual responses agreed, 78 individual responses strongly agreed, 21 individual responses were neutral, 8 individual responses disagreed the use of emotion in delivering service standards. A mean of 4.21 indicates that employees believe they effectively use their positive moods to improve the "atmosphere" of a guest's stay. They use empathy to prioritize guest needs.

This is the "empathy in action" branch. A high score here is vital for the hospitality industry because it suggests that when an employee feels positive, they are more creative in solving guest issues.

Branch 3: Understanding Emotions – this branch deals with understanding how and why someone feels in a certain way and how employees it can change overtime. As per the survey 99 individual responses agreed, 76 individual responses strongly agreed, 18 individual responses were neutral and 3 individual responses disagreed to the state of understanding emotions. This is the highest-scoring branch (4.27). It suggests that hotel employees possess a sophisticated cognitive understanding of why guests feel the way they do (e.g., realizing a guest's anger is actually a result of travel fatigue). Because employees score highest here, they are less likely to take guest outbursts personally, which is a significant asset in high-stress service environments.

Branch 4: Managing Emotions –this branch studies the promotion of personal growth while focusing on the ability to stay open in understanding and dealing with emotions. As per the survey 88 individual responses strongly agreed, 66 individual responses agreed, 38 individual responses were neutral and 3 individual responses disagreed and 1 individual response strongly disagreed to the state of managing emotions. While the mean is high (4.21), it has the highest Standard Deviation (0.64). This indicates significant variability among the staff. In hospitality, this is arguably the most important branch for customer satisfaction. The higher SD suggests that while some staff is experts at de-escalating angry guests, others struggle with it. This identifies a clear area for HR training: emotional regulation.

Customer Satisfaction: this is the survey of employee's perspective on customer satisfaction that showed 89 individual responses strongly agreed, 80 individual responses agreed, 20 individual responses were neutral and 3 individual responses disagreed and 4 individual responses strongly disagreed.

HYPOTHESIS VALIDATION

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between a staff member's ability to manage emotions and the customer's likelihood of being highly satisfied.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between a staff member's ability to manage emotions and the customer's likelihood of being highly satisfied.

One-Way ANOVA test has been used to validate the hypothesis. For more in-depth explanation p-values were used for each emotional management questions. In statistical testing, when a p-value is less than .05 is considered as significant relationship.

Table 2: Following are the results of the said test -

One-Way ANOVA (Welch's)				
	F	df1	df2	p
Branch 4 - Professional Composure	9.97	2	5.23	0.016
Branch 4 - De-escalation Skills	1.20	2	5.92	0.366
Branch 4 - Emotional Recovery	28.24	2	5.01	0.002
Branch 4 - Win-Win Conflict Resolution	5.25	2	6.78	0.042

The above table indicates a significant relationship between managing emotions and customer satisfaction. Based on the ANOVA table, we can see that this hypothesis is supported by three out of the four specific branches of emotional management as given below:

Branch	F-Value	P-Value	Result
Emotional Recovery	28.24	.002	Highly Significant
Professional Composure	9.97	.016	Significant
Win-Win Conflict Resolution	5.25	.042	Significant
De-escalation Skills	1.20	.366	Not Significant

Findings and Justification

1. The Strongest Driver: Emotional Recovery ($p = 0.002$)

This is the most significant result. The very low p-value and high F-value (28.24) indicate that a staff member's ability to "bounce back" from a negative interaction without letting it affect the next guest is the strongest predictor of high customer satisfaction.

2. The Role of Composure ($p = 0.016$) and Win-Win Outcomes ($p = 0.042$)

Both of these areas show a statistically significant relationship with satisfaction ($p < 0.05$). This means that when staff stay professional during rudeness and aim for mutually beneficial resolutions, it measurably increases the likelihood of a customer being highly satisfied.

3. The Exception: De-escalation Skills ($p = 0.366$)

Interestingly, de-escalation skills did not show a significant relationship in this specific test. Because the p-value (0.366) is much higher than 0.05, we cannot conclude that de-escalation skills alone (as measured here) significantly impact the likelihood of high satisfaction. This might be because de-escalation is seen as "damage control" rather than a "satisfaction booster."

It can be further stated that the data provides strong evidence to accept H_1 . While not every sub-skill is equally impactful, the overall ability to manage emotions—particularly Emotional Recovery and Professional Composure—have a statistically significant and positive relationship with achieving high customer satisfaction. From the test results it can be further stated that null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted and thus there is a significant

relationship between a staff member's ability to manage emotions and the customer's likelihood of being highly satisfied.

FINDINGS

1. The demographic study shows that out of 49 respondents 29 were male and 21 were female respondents ensuring equal distribution that avoided any potential bias towards any specific gender and their communication style.
2. The age group distribution showcased mainly young adults in professional workforce suggesting that the sample consists of respondents are in their peak performing years and are very much active in guest service operations.
3. The data of years of experience reflects a range of industry experts. The survey data helped to capture insights from both developing and professional employees of hospitality sector.
4. High percentage of nearly 83.67% of full-time employees suggests that the respondents in the data survey are majorly exposed to daily customer interactions, following service standards and understanding organization culture thus increasing the scope of finding the employees emotional intelligence and customer satisfaction through service standards.
5. Understanding Emotions was the popular choice of respondents with nearly 90% of respondents falling in positive category.
6. Facilitating Thought study showed that emotions are fairly used as a tool for service standards with around 85.2% positive responses.
7. Managing Emotions had the highest percentage of positive responses, that suggests employees are good at understanding emotions of oneself and others.
8. Perceiving Emotions had the highest number of neutral count stating that observation of verbal and no-verbal communication signals are difficult to identify during busy hours.
9. Training staff in emotional resilience and recovery techniques is likely to yield the highest return on investment for guest satisfaction scores.

SUGGESTION

1. Implement trainings on observation skills as employees find it difficult to observe during high stress period.
2. Create a standardized service recovery booklet for employees so that the consistency is followed and shown by each employee.
3. Employees can be helped with understanding emotions through various activities and role plays and shift their habit of showing sympathy to proactive empathy.
4. Provide short breaks whenever possible to employees to relieve work stress and burnout in order to follow service standards without stress.
5. Employees can incorporate emotional intelligence metrics while evaluating employee performance in order to develop ability within employees of problem solving by developing good emotional quotient.

CONCLUSION

This research underscores the pivotal role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a strategic asset in the hospitality industry, directly correlating with enhanced customer satisfaction. By utilizing the MSCEIT framework, the study highlights that while hospitality professionals demonstrate a high cognitive understanding of emotions, the practical application specifically emotional management is the primary differentiator in service excellence. The statistical validation of the hypothesis confirms that an employee's ability to manage emotions is not merely a "soft skill" but a significant predictor of guest satisfaction. Most notably, the study identifies Emotional Recovery ($p = 0.002$) as the most critical factor for success. This suggests that the ability of staff to maintain professional composure and "bounce back" from high-stress interactions is more valued by guests than traditional de-escalation or damage control. The lack of statistical significance for de-escalation skills alone ($p = 0.366$) reinforces the idea that modern hotel guests view conflict resolution as a baseline expectation, whereas emotional resilience and proactive empathy are viewed as value-added service enhancers. Furthermore, the high variability in the "Managing Emotions" branch ($SD = 0.64$) reveals a critical gap in standardized emotional training. While the workforce is predominantly young and technically proficient, there is a clear need for institutionalizing EI through: Standardized Training: Focusing on emotional resilience and rapid recovery techniques. Performance Integration:

Incorporating EI metrics into formal evaluations to foster a culture of "proactive empathy."Operational Support: Implementing structured breaks and service recovery protocols to mitigate burnout and maintain high service standards. In conclusion, for hospitality organizations to remain competitive in an increasingly demanding market, they must pivot from purely functional service models to emotionally intelligent service delivery. Prioritizing the emotional well-being and regulation skills of the workforce will lead to a more resilient staff capable of delivering the consistent, high-quality experiences that drive long-term customer loyalty.

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