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Customer Relationship Management in the Hotel Industry

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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LaKewa Davis

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Customer Relationship Management in the Hotel Industry

by

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MS, University of Phoenix, 2011

BS, Oakland University, 2001

Doctoral study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2023

Abstract

The inability to satisfy customers in the hospitality industry is a concern for business managers, as a decrease in customer satisfaction can lead to unhappy customers, which adversely affects business performance and profitability. Grounded in the customer relationship management theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore how managers of boutiques improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability. Participants were four boutique hotel managers in the metro Detroit area who successfully improved customer satisfaction and increased profitability. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, customer reviews, hotel website documents, customer indices, and hotel industry reports. Data were analyzed using Yin's five-step thematic analysis process, resulting in four themes: customer orientation practices, customer satisfaction and loyalty, creating positive customer experiences, and technological capabilities. A key recommendation for business managers is to provide a complimentary gift to customers visiting the hotel on special occasions. The implications for positive social change include the possibility of increased job security for employees and environmental sustainability for the local community.

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Dedication

First, let me start by saying Father God thank you for your Grace and Mercy in my pursuit of this doctoral degree. It is because of you God that I remained steadfast, stayed motivated, and made it to the finish line. I dedicate this doctoral study to my mother Karen Renee Ellis (late). You mean the world to me, and I thank you for making sacrifices to take care of me and my siblings and for being my number one supporter. I can hear you from heaven, saying that's my baby, job well done. I love you mom, I did it!

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem	1
Problem Statement	2
Purpose Statement.....	2
Nature of the Study	2
Research Question	4
Interview Questions	4
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Operational Definitions.....	6
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	7
Assumptions.....	7
Limitations	7
Delimitations.....	8
Significance of the Study	8
Contribution to Business Practice.....	8
Implications for Social Change.....	8
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	9
Customer Relationship Management (CRM)	10
Components of CRM	13

Benefits and Deficiencies of CRM	15
Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM)	17
Supporting and Rival Theories	18
State of the Hotel Industry	24
Technology and Hotels	26
Customer Experience in the Hotel Industry	29
Customer Satisfaction	33
Customer Dissatisfaction	35
Customer Selection	37
Transition	38
Section 2: The Project	38
Purpose Statement.....	39
Role of the Researcher	39
Participants.....	41
Research Method and Design	42
Research Method	42
Research Design.....	44
Population and Sampling	45
Ethical Research.....	47
Data Collection Instruments	49
Data Collection Technique	52
Data Organization Technique	54

Data Analysis	55
Reliability and Validity.....	57
Transition and Summary.....	62
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change	63
Presentation of the Findings.....	63
Theme 1: Customer Orientation Practices	64
Theme 2: Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty.....	70
Theme 3: Creating Positive Customer Experiences.....	74
Theme 4: Technological Capabilities	82
Applications to Professional Practice	87
Implications for Social Change.....	89
Recommendations for Action	90
Recommendations for Further Research.....	93
Reflections	94
Conclusion	96
References.....	98
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	153
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	156

List of Tables

Table 1. References to Customer Orientation Practices	70
Table 2. References to Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty	74
Table 3. References to Creating Positive Customer Experiences.....	82
Table 4. References to Technological Capabilities.....	87

List of Figures

Figure 1. Components of CRM Framework	13
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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The hotel industry has a vested interest in ensuring that customers are the focal point of operations. Without customers, hotels could not effectively assess their success in the market (Li et al., 2020a). Hoteliers seek to build a long-lasting rapport with customers and sustain loyalty while achieving a competitive advantage; therefore, it is important to identify how to secure customer satisfaction (Mokhtar et al., 2019). Customer relationship management (CRM) may lead to improved customer satisfaction and increased profitability (Elfarmawi, 2019).

Background of the Problem

Tourism contributes to the growth of the hotel industry, with customer buying power being a determining factor in terms of the success or potential loss of a company (Itani et al., 2019; Nurmatov et al., 2021). With the availability of online forums and social media, customers are more aware of the importance and significance of their feedback. Understanding how customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and company profits are linked is important for most companies, but especially the hospitality industry (Otto et al., 2019). Customers dictate expectations and quality of service and require attentiveness. When customer experiences are unfavorable, they may inform others about those experiences, which can affect profits for companies (Kim et al., 2019). If a customer expressed dissatisfaction with a company before 2013, their complaint would reach approximately 20 individuals (Berry et al., 2018). Currently, dissatisfied customers can reach more than 1000 potential patrons using social media and the Internet to make complaints about services, products, and experiences, which can be detrimental to

businesses (Berry et al., 2018). A review of CRM strategies was used to show how managers of boutique hotels can improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability.

Problem Statement

The inability to satisfy customers in the hospitality industry is a concern as a decrease in customer satisfaction leads to reduced profits in the industry (Sarwari et al., 2021). Dissatisfied customers are 75% more likely to complain to others, which can have a detrimental effect on businesses and lead to customer disloyalty and profit loss (Kim et al., 2019). The general business problem was that hotels were losing profits due to unsatisfactory customer interactions and a lack of customer centricity. The specific business problem was that some managers of boutique hotels lacked CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore how managers of boutique hotels use CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability. The target population was hotel managers from four boutique hotels in the metro Detroit area who successfully implemented CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability. Implications for positive social change include improved customer relationships that lead to increased loyalty and repeat customer patronage, which can help sustain the local economy and foster job security.

Nature of the Study

There are three methodologies when conducting research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Strijker et al., 2020). Qualitative research involves the

exploration of a phenomenon to understand experiences based on interpretations (Nassaji, 2020). The qualitative methodology was the method I chose for this study because it allows me to explore perspectives of individuals to gain a comprehensive understanding of what they are experiencing and what those experiences mean for the individual. The quantitative research method involves generating numerical data based on correlations, experiments, hypotheses, and inferences (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because numerical data would not help me identify strategies related to CRM practices. Mixed methods research is an approach where researchers integrate qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of experiences (Shi et al., 2020). Mixed methods research was not appropriate because the quantitative part of the methodology did not fit the study.

Of the four qualitative research designs (case study, phenomenological, narrative, and ethnography), the research design chosen for this proposed study was a multiple case study design. Researchers use case studies to understand the setting or context of an occurrence in real time and provide an answer regarding why and how the occurrence took place (Alam, 2020). A multiple case study design was preferable to a single case study because I was exploring CRM strategies that apply in multiple hotels versus a single hotel. The phenomenological, narrative, and ethnographic designs were not appropriate designs for this study. The phenomenological design helps researchers explore data involving experience-based phenomena (Williams, 2021). My aim was not to explore what managers experienced using CRM strategies, but rather how they used these strategies to address satisfaction and profitability. The narrative design involves

collecting data through storytelling (Prout et al., 2020). Obtaining historical viewpoints from individuals to describe CRM strategies was not relevant in the context of this study. By using an ethnographic design, researchers can document the experiences of groups by being a part of the culture and integrating themselves into the physical space of the group (Ngenye & Kreps, 2020). In this study, I did not need to integrate myself into the culture of the hotel managers to understand how CRM strategies were implemented.

Research Question

How do managers of boutique hotels successfully use CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability?

Interview Questions

1. What CRM strategies did you use to enhance your customers' experience?
2. What CRM strategies did you use to respond to customer dissatisfaction?
3. What processes did you use to ensure successful implementation of CRM strategies in your hotel?
4. What were the challenges in implementing your CRM strategies at your hotel?
5. How did you overcome the challenges of implementing your CRM strategies?
6. What technologies did you use to support your CRM strategies?
7. How did you use your CRM strategies to maintain competitive advantage with other hotels?
8. How did you use CRM strategies to ensure the customer is the priority?
9. How have your CRM strategies improved the financial performance of your hotel?

10. What other information might you share regarding how managers of boutique hotels use CRM strategies to affect customer satisfaction and increase profitability?

Conceptual Framework

The CRM framework introduced by Berry is the conceptual framework I used for this study. The concept evolved from relationship marketing (RM), which is defined as a marketing strategy to develop and maintain long-term relationships with consumers (Berry, 1983). CRM has three main components: processes, people, and technology (Berry, 1983). Firms can use five strategies developed by Berry to help shape these components and create lasting relationships with customers. These strategies are a) development of core services designed to entice customers, b) relationship customization by offering innovative services based on customer attributes, c) service augmentation to offer additional services that are beneficial to customers, d) relationship pricing by providing customers rewards for combining services, and e) internal marketing to ensure employees are well cared for and can better serve customers (Berry, 2002).

Organizational leaders use the CRM framework to improve customer relationships and increase competitive advantage (Sardjono et al., 2021). Using the CRM framework helped managers of boutique hotels understand how to tailor products and services for customers and foster relationship building with employees and customers to improve interactions and develop strategies to improve profitability. CRM was an applicable and appropriate framework for this study because focusing on the core

components, people, processes, and technology, in a hotel setting may contribute to better outcomes for both the company and customers.

Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions were used within the study:

Boutique hotel: A hotel that has no more than 100 guest rooms, has unique characteristics or aesthetics, and provides tailored services and products that create a distinctive experience (Loureiro et al., 2020; Punnasuparoma & Choibamroongb, 2020)

Core services: Essential services customers are entitled to that companies base their business on to build rapport with customers (Berry, 1983).

Customer relationship management (CRM): A combination of techniques companies use to increase competitive advantage while building valuable targeted relationships with customers (Stuchlý et al., 2020).

Hoteliers: Owners or managers of a hotel (Erkuş & Terhorst, 2020).

Relationship marketing: Strategy that organizations use to increase profits and enhance customer relationships through building rapport and fostering retention on a continuing basis (Johanesová & Vaňová, 2020).

Social customer relationship management (SCRM): The engagement with customers by using technology such as social media to improve customer experiences (Lamrhari et al., 2022).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are unverifiable truths of a study that are unsupported by facts (Burton, 2022). There were multiple assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that boutique hotel managers would take the time to participate in an interview to provide their perspectives on how to secure customer satisfaction and increase profitability through the use of CRM strategies. A second assumption was that participants answered questions honestly during interviews. I also assumed that my interview questions were sufficient to garner comprehensive information about CRM strategies used in a boutique hotel. Finally, I assumed the participants of the study could add value to CRM strategies used in a boutique hotel that would benefit the hotel industry.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses of a study that a researcher cannot affect (Burton, 2022). One limitation of this study was participant expertise. They only needed one year of experience to participate which limited the knowledge they shared on implementing CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability in a boutique hotel. A second limitation was that participants time constraints when scheduling interviews. Many of the participants only had a limited amount of time to give to the interview process which was a deterrent to participation. A third limitation was data collection. Void of in-person interviewing, I was limited to digital means of interviewing through Zoom to follow safety protocols put in place by the institution.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries of a study (Sianes, 2021). One delimitation was that all participants were located in the metro Detroit area. No other geographical area was considered. A second delimitation was that only participants who had successfully implemented CRM strategies in a boutique hotel that improved customer satisfaction and increased profitability were chosen to participate in the study. The last delimitation was that the study was only focused on four boutique hotels.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Findings from this study may be of value to managers in the hotel industry by providing insights regarding how to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability. Through appropriate implementation of CRM strategies, managers in the hotel industry may be better able to customize services, increase customer satisfaction, acquire potential new customers, and increase profits for the company. Managers of boutique hotels can use this study to potentially identify successful strategies to service customers, learn new ways of providing luxury experiences in intimate settings, and develop strategies to increase profits through fulfillment of customer experiences. Study results may also help managers improve service practices that improve customer retention and communication.

Implications for Social Change

Results of the proposed study may contribute to positive social change through improved customer relationships that lead to increased loyalty and repeat customer

patronage, which can help sustain the local economy and foster job security. When customers are happy with services they receive from a company, they are more likely to return or tell others to patronize them. This study may also contribute to social change via better management practices to support staff, reinvestment in the local economy to foster sustainability, and improvement of products and services to create exceptional experiences for customers.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore how managers in boutique hotels used CRM strategies as a means to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability. The target population was managers of boutique hotels. The CRM framework was used to provide perspectives for the study. I also reviewed supporting and rival theories such as resource-based view theory (RBV), two-factor theory, three-factor theory, and path-goal theory to strengthen the choice of using the CRM framework.

I used various sources such as peer-reviewed and professional journals, seminal works, books, government sources, and websites. I used the following resources to retrieve literature: Google Scholar, JSTOR, Directory of Open Access Journals, Wiley Online Library, ProQuest, Business Source Complete, ResearchGate, Science Direct, EBSCOHost, Whitepapers, SAGE Premier, ABI/INFORM Global, peer-reviewed articles, seminal work, and Online Journals Search Engine. Search terms included: *customer relationship management, relationship marketing, technology, hotel industry, customer satisfaction, customer dissatisfaction, customer selection, customer engagement, profitability, management, and Boutique hotel.*

The literature review included comprehensive information involving the following themes: CRM, benefits of CRM, deficiencies of CRM, SCRM, hotel industry, technology and hotels, customer engagement, customer satisfaction, customer dissatisfaction, and customer selection. There were 366 sources included in this study. Of these, 85% were peer-reviewed and published between 2019 and 2023.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

CRM was the conceptual framework used for the study. The creation of relationship marketing was a result of power given to consumers after the 1980s recession (Rasul, 2017). Businesses decided to reevaluate the way they handled customer business and moved from transactional to relational interactions (Borisavljević & Radosavljević, 2021). Relationship marketing was a flexible approach to creating lasting relationships with customers and generating customer loyalty and satisfaction (Putra & Putri, 2019). Retaining customers is a benefit for companies seeking to increase competitive advantage and maintain customer growth (Berry, 2002). Berry (1995) indicated the foundation of relationship marketing includes five core strategies: core service, relationship customization, service augmentation, relationship pricing, and internal marketing.

The first strategy, core service, means the provision of essential services that companies base their business on to build rapport with customers (Berry, 1983). The core service of a hotel is customer service. Varying customer service approaches allow organizations to differentiate themselves from competitors, as well as appeal to new customers and increase profits (Berry, 1995). The second strategy of relationship

customization is tailoring services or products to customers to create loyalty (Berry, 1983). For example, firms can use technology to keep accounts of customer data and adjust services and products accordingly. Hoteliers may use such data to provide unique services to customers, which may result in repeat patronage and positive word of mouth. The third strategy was service augmentation, which involves enhancing and adding services that go beyond customary practices (Berry & Gresham, 1986). Managers may use augmented services to retain customers by offering unique rewards or encouraging friendly competition among employees. Allowing employees to reap incentives based on servicing outcomes may lead to more involvement, higher quality servicing, more satisfied customers, and happier employees.

The fourth strategy was relationship pricing or creating price points to generate maintenance of customers (Berry, 2002). Organizations that depend heavily on customers can use relationship pricing through bundling services or products at a discount rate. Relationship pricing involves providing lower rates to customers after they have committed to doing a certain amount of business with organizations. For instance, customers who feel they are getting a discount for staying with a hotel for longer as a result of receiving an extra night for a lower rate after spending a week with a hotel are more likely to return to that same hotel. Internal marketing refers to investing in employees so they are enabled to deliver quality and consistent services. While marketing tends to focus on external customers, employees must be knowledgeable about marketing and have necessary skills and aptitude to assist customers (Berry & Gresham, 1986). As

such, the skills and abilities an employee has can affect customer satisfaction and profitability for companies (Berry, 1993).

As relationship marketing expanded to include technological advances, CRM was introduced (Nogueira & Borchardt, 2022). CRM became prominent in the early part of the 20th century (Matraeva et al., 2022). Stuchlý et al. (2020) suggested CRM is a process in which targeted customer interactions help to create competitive advantage and profitability for companies. Al-Gasawneh et al. (2021) posited CRM involves customer centricity, customer retention, and relationship maintenance. Lokuge et al. (2020) postulated that CRM involves using technology to analyze information to improve products, services, and value. A common theme is focus on customers. Fundamentally, organizations use CRM to focus on customers and add value to companies through the use of technology (Shukla & Pattnaik, 2019).

As the popularity of CRM increased, leaders in organizations chose to embrace the CRM framework, making it a universal tool for building customer relationships (Sota et al., 2018). CRM became a strategy for leaders wishing to improve customer interactions using technology to track customer data, strengthen customer-business relationships, and increase retention (Ullah & Narain, 2020). Leaders who use CRM and focus on improving relationships with customers also increase their competitive advantage (Raheem & Fadiyya, 2020). This population should view customers from a holistic perspective and understand there are a variety of ways to build and maintain customer-business relationships (Dadwal et al., 2022). CRM strategies include the interactions and engagements companies have with customers, in addition to financial

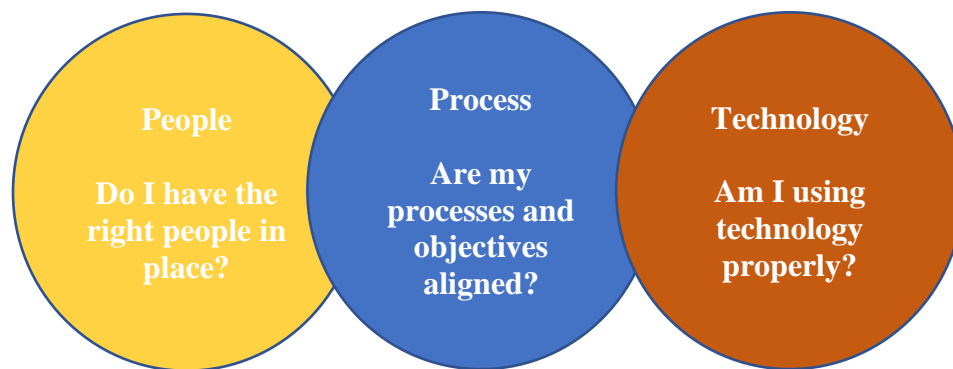
support customers can offer (Dewnarain et al., 2018). Focusing on improved internal processes through implementation of CRM leads to enthusiasm and better customer service from employees (Saha et al., 2021).

Components of CRM

Components of the CRM framework included strategies regarding people, processes, and technology essential to organizations (Tazkarji & Stafford, 2020). Application of CRM in hotels required those in management to understand how to satisfy their customers, how to effectively build relationships with customers, and what tools to use to ensure profitability (Sota et al., 2019). Tazkarji and Stafford (2020) asserted that absence of one or more of these components may lead to imbalances within companies (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Components of CRM Framework



Note. Adapted from “People. Process. Technology. And Data. A Heretic’s View”, by S. Gold, R. Harper and J. Katz, 2023,

<https://journal.jabian.com/people-process-technology-and-data-a-heretics-view>. Copyright 2023 by Jabian Consulting.

People

CRM includes both external and internal customers. External customers are individuals who do not work for the company (Ahn et al., 2020). Organizations develop strategies for engagement involving external customers. Internal customers are individuals who have direct relationships with organizations and are primarily employees (Ahn et al., 2020; Mat Yusof et al., 2020). Internal customers are employees within companies who are the face of the business. Employees are internal customers who engage with external customers and serve as pertinent sources of knowledge (Qiu et al., 2021). Properly staffed and well-trained employees can assume the role of customer advocate and retrieve data that will help companies gain a competitive advantage.

Processes

CRM requires organizations to look at current processes and align them with more customer-oriented processes (Dubey & Sangle, 2019). Customer centricity is used to guide acquisition and maintenance of customer relationships through exceptional service to ensure customer satisfaction and organizational sustainability (Pardo-Jaramillo et al., 2020). Companies have moved from the basic transactional way of doing business to a more relational way that includes identifying relevant customers that bring value to the company, evaluating customer data to determine what products and services will best suit customers, and implementing innovative products or services to gain competitive advantage (Ertz et al., 2019). Alignment with more customer-focused processes in hotels requires companies to innovate ways of focusing on customer needs. Identifying relevant

and effective processes is important for operational growth and sustainability for companies (Al-Homery et al., 2019).

Technology

Technology continues to alter the ways leaders think when conducting business (Dubey et al., 2020). It is an important factor in terms of increasing profitability, identifying customer impacts, and integrating data and services in organizations (Ismană-Ilisan, 2018). Organizations have invested approximately \$10 billion annually in CRM technology (Zhang & Watson et al., 2018). This indicates the importance technology has on organizational progress. Leaders may leverage technology and develop strategic approaches to identify and build rapport with customers, as well as deliver quality customer services (De Keyser et al., 2019). Technology use within hotels allows managers to conveniently service customers through various channels.

Benefits and Deficiencies of CRM

One benefit of CRM was that extrapolated information allows organizations to make more efficient and effective decisions regarding customer needs using technology, thereby improving customer loyalty (Sakuntala, 2018). Costs associated with bringing in new customers are significantly higher than costs associated with maintaining customers (Ismană-Ilisan, 2018). Data availability is easily and immediately accessible for anyone with appropriate access in companies, and management can identify customer information and feedback in an organized way (Petrović, 2020).

Companies using CRM can tailor services, reduce costs, and have better customer service by comparing customer value to company profitability (Petrović, 2020). This is

beneficial, as retention of customers positively affects profitability in organizations (Sağlam & Montaser, 2021). CRM also allows companies to track and segment customer data to better cater to the needs of customers and use technology to improve products, services, and rapport (Lokuge et al., 2020). There is also a direct link between the use of CRM and positive company performance, economic performance increases when there is better management of customer data (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2020).

Despite the benefits of using the CRM framework, there were some deficiencies. These included the need for hardware installations, software upgrades, company training, and ongoing support to implement sustainable CRM initiatives (Rodriguez & Boyer, 2020). Implementation of CRM may refer to either deployment of CRM for the first time or switching from an old system to a new one (Rahimi & Kozak, 2017).

Factors such as the time required to implement a new program, the costs of implementation, and the complexity and nuance of tasks can cause new CRM programs to fail (Rahimi & Kozak, 2017). Tazkarji and Stafford (2020) indicated unsuccessful CRM implementations occur because of poor planning and lack of consideration in terms of enormity of implementation. Panda (2022) found numbers for CRM failure were at 90%. Only focusing on one or two aspects of CRM versus all components can also lead to failure of implementation (Petrović, 2020). In addition, use of the program could leave customers feeling unappreciated and unhappy, which could potentially yield negative outcomes for companies (Nguyen et al., 2020). The idea of CRM is to create an environment of necessity and avoid alienation of customers.

Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM)

The advent of social media technology has led to new methods organizations can use to establish relationships with customers. Changes in strategy to include both transactional and interactional relationships with customers have promoted advancement of CRM to include SCRM, or CRM 2.0 (Dewnarain et al., 2018). Li et al. (2020a) defined SCRM as a method of communicating with customers in a transparent way using technology that does not compromise customer integrity and involves focusing on customer experiences. The ease with which organizational leaders can use social platforms as a means for communicating and managing relationships is convenient and helps with fostering customer relationships (Ghanadpour & Shokouhyar, 2021; Shokohyar et al., 2017). Through social media, it is now possible for customers to review or create user-generated content, thereby increasing their access and interactions with organizations (Dewnarain et al., 2018).

Enhanced use of social media tools is increasingly important to the hospitality industry (Aydin, 2019). Given the aim of hotels to satisfy customers and build lasting relationships, components of SCRM may apply to the hotel industry as well. The implementation of SCRM may elicit brand loyalty by empowering customers with methods for interacting with their experience through collaboration with the hotel (Dewnarain et al., 2018). Organizations should consider SCRM as a method for cooperating with customers, increasing customer loyalty, and accruing accurate and meaningful insight from the customer (Shokohyar et al., 2017). However, the use of

social media to attract customers and maintain customer loyalty is most beneficial for companies whose ideal customer is a social media user (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021).

Supporting and Rival Theories

Customer relationship management was the conceptual framework for this study. There were four supporting and alternate theories I chose to review: Barney's RBV theory, Herzberg's two-factor theory, Kano's three-factor theory, and House's path-goal theory. I explored how these theories impacted customer satisfaction and profitability.

RBV Theory

The RBV theory is a conceptual framework that provides context on a business or organization's success, based on the efficacy of its resources (Hoskisson et al., 2018; Wernerfelt, 1984). Taken a step further, it aligns with the idea that organizations may gain a competitive advantage by focusing on more effective and efficient uses of organizational resources, especially when compared to peer organizations (Barney, 1991). The strategic use of valuable resources in an organization may positively affect growth of the company (Penrose, 2017). The resources an organization has, how it manages those resources, and the organization's competitive advantage can all be linked using the RBV theory (Barney, 1991).

Within the RBV theory, resources include anything that the company considers an asset, either tangible or intangible (Penrose, 2017). Examples of types of resources incorporated by Wernerfelt (1984) in the original RBV framework included technological resources, human resources, economic resources, raw resources, and organizational resources. Different approaches to the RBV theory emphasize different resources, such as

how a business can use its resources to identify attributes of an employee that influence performance, to develop and offer new goods or services to create differentiation, and to implement unique and innovative strategies to ensure competitive advantage (Andersén, 2021; Kamboj & Rana, 2021; Ployhart, 2021).

There are four factors that an organization may analyze to determine if they can leverage resources to garner competitive advantage: the value of the resource, the rarity of the resource, the imperfect imitability of the resource, and the nonsubstitutability of the resource (Barney, 1991). Resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and nonsubstitutable, or VRINs, are some of the most useful resources to which a company can have access (Wernerfelt, 1984). Resources that are difficult or impossible to replicate or replace allow the business to carve out their own niche in the market, which can drive profits and ensure long-term survival in the market (Greve, 2020). Once a VRIN is identified or a niche is established, businesses also benefit from being strong stewards of their resources, to ensure the resources and, subsequently, their advantage have a long life (Hoskisson et al., 2018). In the case of employees, having engaged, supportive employees may lead to better performance, and can ensure that the organization maintains its advantage and financial standing in the industry (Mong et al., 2021).

Within the context of hotel management, the RBV theory may help hoteliers understand how to develop products and services to improve customer experiences, determine new ways of building relationships with customers, and create strategies to increase business and profitability. By understanding the specific need a hotel fills for guests and customers, the hotelier can cater to that need and increase their stake in that

market, improve their stewardship of their resources, and ensure long-term sustainability and profitability of their business. RBV strategies allow hoteliers to use a combination of assets to create and sustain customer satisfaction and competitive advantage (Rahman et al., 2018).

Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg et al. (1959) developed the two-factor theory, which focuses on factors that can increase employee satisfaction and decrease employee dissatisfaction to determine how organizations can achieve employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and competitive advantage. The theory consists of two elements: motivation factors, which are the factors that increase positive sentiments, and hygiene factors, which are the factors that increase negative sentiments (Ju, 2021). Often, motivation factors are linked to intrinsic motivation and parts of employment that drive an employee to want to succeed and grow professionally, and hygiene factors are linked to extrinsic motivation and parts of employment that leads to more comfortable living situations, such as organizational culture, salary, and job security (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Both factors influence how an employee identifies with being satisfied or dissatisfied in the workplace (Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). Job satisfaction is the positive emotional perspective that employees have about their jobs (Popoola & Fagbola, 2020). Ensuring that employees are satisfied with their jobs may lead to more rewarding outcomes for the company, employee, and customer (Abdelmegeed Abdelwahed et al., 2022). Job dissatisfaction is the perspective of unhappiness that employees have about their jobs (Jahan et al., 2023). Ignoring the dissatisfaction of employees may lead to

negative customer interactions and the potential for loss of loyalty and profits among both employees and customers, as unhappy employees are more likely to demonstrate lower performance, worse outcomes, poorer attitudes, and more turnover, all of which negatively impact customer experiences (Li et al., 2020c).

Three-Factor Theory

Kano et al. (1984) expanded upon the two-factor theory to identify the relationship between consumers and products/services. The three-factor theory is a way for companies to identify the combination of services that will increase customer satisfaction, increase profits, and encourage repeat visitors (Davras, 2020).

The theory includes five elements that indicate how to garner customer satisfaction: (a) basics, (b) performance, (c) excitement, (e) reverse, and (f) indifference. The first three factors have been identified as the most important factors (Davras & Caber, 2019).

Albayrak (2019) provided definitions for the basic, performance, and excitement factors.

Basic factors are products or services that are bare minimum offerings in a business. The products or services are an expectation of the hotel by the customer. Customers do not necessarily feel satisfaction when basic factors are available but could feel dissatisfied if basic factors are not present. For example, having toilet tissue in the hotel room does not create satisfaction but if not available, can generate dissatisfaction.

Performance factors are products or services that may influence customer satisfaction in tandem with customer dissatisfaction. They can create satisfaction if present and dissatisfaction if not present. For example, if a concierge helps secure entertainment for a hotel guest, then satisfaction may be present. Consequently, if a

concierge is unwilling to secure entertainment because of bias, then this may generate dissatisfaction.

Excitement factors are products or services that are unexpected by the customer. They generate satisfaction when present, but do not necessarily generate dissatisfaction if not present. For example, finding chocolate covered strawberries in the room is exciting and can create satisfaction, but the absence of chocolate covered strawberries would not create dissatisfaction because they were not initially an expectation.

Hoteliers may use the three-factor theory to develop better customer service standards, more succinct approaches to interacting with customers and clearer insight into how to affect customer satisfaction (Schofield et al., 2020). Customer satisfaction is dependent on perception of service received and the three-factor theory is a means to pre-determine customer needs and wants (Abenzoza et al., 2019). Identifying basic, performance and excitement factors provide a way for hoteliers to strategically decrease customer dissatisfaction and increase customer satisfaction (Dueñas et al., 2021).

Path-Goal Theory

The path-goal theory, or PGT, is derived from a theory that leaders' behaviors can impact employees' motivation and performance (House, 1971). PGT utilizes the same basic premise that employee motivation, performance, and satisfaction are improved or hindered by the attitudes and behaviors of their superiors (Rahman, 2022). Effective leaders who can boost employee motivation are also able to encourage employees to meet and even exceed their goals through ample support and guidance on how they can meet those goals.

There are four main characteristics of leadership, as defined by the PGT: achievement-oriented leadership, directive leadership, participative leadership, and supportive leadership (House, 1971). Each type of leadership has a unique situation in which it can be helpful, and effective leaders can tailor their leadership style based on the situation, the employee and their needs, and their relationship with the employee, to ensure the employee is satisfied and maintains a high opinion of them (Rabiul et al., 2021).

The related conceptual frameworks discussed provide context and support for the conceptual framework of customer relationship management and its relevance in the hotel industry. RBV theory is a framework that emphasizes effective and efficient utilization of existing resources to improve performance (Wernerfelt, 1984). Herzberg et al. (1959) two-factor theory analyzes how certain actions or behaviors increase satisfaction while others increase dissatisfaction, then suggests ways in which a business can improve satisfaction while decreasing dissatisfaction. Kano et al.'s (1984) three-factor theory expands on two-factor theory to determine how organizations can optimize their customer relationships, loyalty, and profits. PGT suggested that leadership attitudes and behaviors have an impact on employees, and effective leaders can boost motivation and performance in their employees (House, 1971). Customer relationship management was ultimately the conceptual framework being used for this study and provided ample support for and information on how to leverage other aspects of business to increase and improve customer relationships. There are a myriad of ways a business can utilize CRM, but all the options focus on how the customer can add value to the business (Pedron et al.,

2018). In the hotel industry, customers are the primary unit of measure and way to indicate success; there are services provided to the customer, but there are no goods to measure or test. As a result, the customer is the most important part of a hotel's business and, as such, is the focus of this research.

State of the Hotel Industry

The hotel industry is a specific sector under the broader umbrella of the hospitality or tourism industry (Romero & Tejada, 2019). The hotel industry includes the lodging and accommodation of individuals. Not only are customers or guests provided with a place to stay, but they are also given access to amenities and services that provide them with more comfortable, enjoyable experiences, like meals, transportation, personalized service, and more (Nain, 2018). Increasingly, individuals who have the means are choosing to travel where a luxurious experience is available (Iloranta, 2019).

Due to the increasing choice of individuals to spend their income on travel, the hotel industry has the most progressive growth of industries of its size and style (Sangwan & Bhakar, 2018). To continue to grow, a hotel's most important responsibilities are acquiring and retaining customers and delivering distinctive services to be successful (Wikhamn, 2019). The industry's main output is the customer experience, so customer satisfaction is the focus for a hotel to be successful. In 2019-20, hotel visits garnered over \$375,000,000 in the United States, proving the hotel industry can be a lucrative sector in the hospitality industry that generates large financial gains and consistent employment opportunities (Dimitrić et al., 2019; Paulose & Shakeel, 2021). However, many of the issues faced by the hotel industry are relatively standard in the

hospitality field. Before seeing high profits, hoteliers must address and overcome the impacts of a rapidly changing economy, rising wages, increasing technological expectations of guests, exacting standards of hygiene, stiff competition, and high expectations for service, among other things (Nain, 2018).

In addition to the challenges hotels face during a standard year, at the end of the first quarter of 2020, the hotel industry suffered a significant blow from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic created a deficit in hotel stays and significantly decreased travel in 2020, making it ever more important for hoteliers to focus on customer relationships and building connections to drive business (Paulose & Shakeel, 2021). Patronage and customer interactions are key to the growth of the hotel industry and hoteliers must find ways to improve these factors by focusing on the needs of customers (Morosan & DeFranco, 2019). Despite the lessening of restrictions on travel that have occurred throughout 2021, the practices and tactics used during the pandemic can be utilized on an ongoing basis to improve business and outcomes for hotels, even as the industry begins to recover.

Expected projection of recovery for the hotel industry was unknown at the time of the study, but there has been slow progression and hope that with innovation from hoteliers, stakeholders, and the government, the industry will rebound sooner than anticipated (Patrick, 2020; Webster et al., 2020). People have begun to travel again, and with travel comes hotel stays. As hotels have reopened and begun to reach their pre-pandemic capacity, the changes made to accommodate COVID and its associated

restrictions could be used to improve the overall customer experience, to the benefit of the hotel.

Customers are the foundation of the hotel industry. Understanding customer behaviors and needs is pertinent to the overall success not only of individual hotels, but also the industry overall (Agag & Colmekcioglu, 2020). Hoteliers must use the tools at their disposal including CRM strategies and systems to differentiate their products and services among customers. Only when hotels are established as market leaders do they earn customer loyalty. In turn, satisfied customers help hotels maintain marketplace stability over time, which leads to long-term success (Sota et al., 2019).

Technology and Hotels

Within the last 20 years technological advancement have come a long way in enhancing how individuals engage with businesses (Hoyer et al., 2020). Technology is important in most organizations because its use often helps managers operate more efficiently. Within the hotel industry technology is important because hoteliers have to accommodate customers with distinct needs, preferences, and even dates of visits at any given moment. A digitized approach to customer service may yield more efficient and effective interactions and engagement with customers, thereby creating better experiences (Opute et al., 2020). The innovation of technology also allows organizations to be more competitive (Coccia & Watts, 2020). Technology benefits an organization through its operations by the understanding of tools or processes that allow managers to identify business successes and gaps and better allocate resources accordingly (Wang et al., 2018). To meet the needs of customers, and to offer more diverse services, an

organization should utilize technology built on the integration and management of customers (Park, 2017).

Hardware and software fall under the umbrella of technology. Hardware is the actual devices that are created or used, such as the computers or mobile phones used for check-in. (Shin et al., 2019). Software, on the other hand, is the systems and coding that makes the hardware function (Jaiswal, 2019), such as an operating system or applications, like eZee Front desk. Hoteliers should be aware of both types of technology, as they help hoteliers foster service transformation (Kandampully et al., 2021). Having access to technologies is not sufficient; all employees must have a base understanding of how to use the technology and be proficient in it, to provide seamless interactions and address demands when needed (Ra et al., 2019). Both hardware and software are vulnerable to attacks; when working with private information, hotels must be prepared to prevent and fix vulnerabilities in their technologies, to protect customers as much as possible (Gwebu & Barrows, 2020). Hotels that are interested in remaining competitive should be prepared and willing to invest in technology that enhances operational efficiencies, addresses environmental concerns and reduce access barriers for customers (Chan et al., 2020).

Of the various types of technology available, some are more relevant to individuals, especially within the hotel industry and within the context of customer satisfaction. Customer relationships can be influenced and improved by technology like social media, marketing tools, search engines, videos, and customer databases (Parvez Shaik et al., 2018). Managerial relationships can be influenced similarly, with the

additions of various workplace tools, like communications platforms (Alrawadieh et al., 2020). The specific tools available to hotels differ from business to business, but most will benefit from a multi-pronged approach to technology that incorporates a combination of these tools.

Hoteliers may use technology to keep track of customer data, communicate effectively, and customize service more efficiently for customers (Shin et al., 2019). From robot assistants to green technology, hotels are investing in technology to create competitive advantage and superior service experiences (Forés et al., 2020; Lukanova & Ilieva, 2019). Some basic technological features include on-screen check out, climate control systems, tablets, and smart phone alarm chargers (Shin et al., 2019). More advanced technology includes options like self-service kiosks (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). The rate at which hotels are adopting technology depends on numerous factors, from available resources and availability of technology to willingness of management to change.

As with any major change, adopting new technology and digital practices in a hotel setting has both risks and rewards. By implementing more sophisticated technological and data practices, hoteliers increase their chances of saving time and resources while providing a more luxurious experience to customers, which can increase overall higher resources (Alrawadieh et al., 2020). Hoteliers can achieve efficiencies that affect positive financial outcomes (Ivanov & Webster, 2019). However, new technologies can be costly, and require extensive training for employees, which costs the hotel time and money (Alrawadieh et al., 2020).

One of the primary potential benefits of technology in the hotel industry was an increased knowledge of customer behaviors and preferences. Knowledge of customer specifics was integral to understanding the behaviors and activities of a hotel's customer base, retaining customers, and increasing competitive advantage (Talón-Ballesteros et al., 2018). Knowing the customer and how to interact with them will go a long way with building rapport, trust, loyalty, and the desire to patron the hotel again. Using technology such as CRM software allow hoteliers to develop customer profiles that identify customer preferences, hotel visits, rewards, and much more to sustain long-lasting relationships with their customers (Sota et al., 2019).

The idea that customer relationships can be improved through technology is one that is supported throughout the industry. Many researchers and hoteliers alike agree that regardless of a hotel's CRM strategy, they must effectively utilize technology to support it (Madhovi & Dhliwayo, 2017). Technology can be used to better understand customer choices, but also recall customer preferences, which can result in a multi-tiered approach to marketing and operations that prioritizes data-driven decision-making (Talón-Ballesteros et al., 2018).

Customer Experience in the Hotel Industry

The ways in which businesses choose to connect with and engage customers has changed over time, shifting from being transactional and focusing solely on the sale and purchase of an item or service into being relationship-focused, with the customer as an individual being important to the sale (So et al., 2020). With continuous changes, researchers and businesspeople alike found that traditional metrics of measuring

satisfaction, like value or quality, are no longer the standard and prefer to focus more on mining reviews and conducting analysis of customers ratings to measure satisfaction (Kim & Chung, 2020; Li et al., 2020a). Businesses no longer solely defer to quality metrics as an indicator for customer loyalty because it is not considered a strong enough indicator (So et al., 2020). Instead, hotels are focused on customer engagement as a tool to build long-term loyalty and satisfaction. Customer experience is an important metric organization's use to build brand recognition and is based on the premise that customers are now making decisions based on factors other than quality, and are motivated by things like peer recommendations, blogs or reviews, personal understanding, and word-of-mouth (Hollebeek et al., 2021; So et al., 2020).

While most industry experts agree that Customer experience is important, the idea of how to effectively address Customer experience was difficult and required businesses to have a strategic plan in place to address it (Kumar et al., 2019; So et al., 2021). Other industries that have had to address the shift from transactions to Customer experience included the service industry, where a high focus on customer-centric activities and customer-business interactions has led to increased attention on the issue (Prentice & Loureiro, 2018). The service industry has focused more on Customer experience in recent years, and the hospitality industry can learn from its practices. The emphasis of Customer experience in other industries also highlights the fact that Customer experience is not a new concept and is prevalent in literature within many fields of study including psychology, marketing, sociology, tourism, and hospitality (Rather et al., 2019). Despite its prevalence in other industries, tourism and hospitality are the most recent industries to

focus more on Customer experience, leaving some gaps in understanding around how best to drive Customer experience in boutique hotels.

Different researchers reveal that despite varying definitions of Customer experience, at the core, of successful Customer experience is investment in the process, services provided, and interactions with the customer. Harrigan et al. (2020) defined Customer experience as the repetitive interactions with a business by a customer. Customer experience is an exchange of services between two entities where relationship continuity is present (Bozkurt et al., 2021). Hollebeek et al. (2019) stated Customer experience is a customer's physical, perceptual, and behavioral investment to interact with a business. Kumar et al. (2019) further agreed that Customer experience is the high connectivity of a customer with a business that generates value. Businesses cannot entirely control Customer experience, as it relies heavily on the customers themselves, but can work to ensure customers have a positive enough experience they want to remain engaged.

Customer experience in the hotel industry is as important an effort as management engagement, or lack thereof, and can impact a hotel's performance. With any interaction at a hotel whether it is the front desk, housekeeping, concierge, dining, or online, customers, determine both value created by the hotel, and the level of engagement they have in the hotel (Zhang & Jahromi et al., 2018). Because the customer is always assessing value, satisfaction, and engagement, hoteliers must be providing a high-quality experience all the time; one missed opportunity, such as a bad review online or a negative

interaction with a staff member, can have negative repercussions on Customer experience.

Hoteliers should focus on the internet for an opportunity to build Customer experience. Riley (2020) stated individuals access the internet over 40% of the time on any given day. High consumer engagement online varies depending on intentions, but when in relation to hospitality, Customer experience comes in the form of online reviews (Zhang et al., 2021). Through online forums like review websites or applications, customers are able to advise others of their experiences, influence other customer decisions, and be influenced themselves by other customers (Gómez et al., 2019). Online reviews can help hotels identify how they are performing in the eyes of the customer and how to address concerns to remain competitive (Wu et al., 2021). In an increasingly connected and online world, hoteliers must look outside the personal interactions they have with customers and into the online interaction's customers can have with one another.

Hoteliers should create lasting relationships by driving up customer engagement and simultaneously using customer engagement to continue to improve relationships. Genuine responses to individual customer needs have a direct effect on loyalty and profits, and foster trust and engagement (Wang et al., 2020). Hoteliers may affect outcomes of Customer experience by acknowledging a customer's inquiry or issue allowing both parties to build a mutually beneficial and strong relationship (Kumar et al., 2018).

Customer Satisfaction

Every organization that provides a service relies on customers to utilize their services, to re-patronage the business, to drive new business, and to help keep the business running. As a result, customer satisfaction is considered a vital part of the hospitality industry and particularly the hotel industry. Due to its importance, industry experts and managers alike have increasingly emphasized customer satisfaction as a core pillar of success (Bi et al., 2020).

Deciding to stay in a hotel or app-based lodgings such as VBRO, customers not only expect phenomenal experiences, exclusive rewards, and better amenities, but also justification for any high costs associated with they stay (Koo et al., 2020). As customer expectations have risen, so has the bar on customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is the perception of happiness a customer feels when service or product expectations meet their needs, or a general sense of positivity and good feelings about their choices and experiences during and after a stay (Khudhair et al., 2019). Customer expectations, satisfaction, and business have all become deeply intertwined, and hoteliers must be prepared to meet high expectations to earn satisfaction and repeat business.

One way in which hoteliers address and achieve customer satisfaction is by differentiating their hotel and services from their competitors. Offering unique services and products not only sets one hotel apart from others, but also increases the chances that customers will be satisfied, and that the hotel will be successful (Nobar & Rostamzadeh, 2018). There is a direct relationship between differentiation, satisfaction, and success;

customers who are having unique and positive experiences are more likely to enjoy their stay and want to return.

As hoteliers focus on differentiating their hotel and services, they must remain genuine, because customers can sense disingenuous attempts at customer satisfaction. Genuine efforts to secure great experiences and provide quality services are determinants of customer satisfaction (Kim & Kim, 2022). When customers are satisfied, their trust increases (Matute et al., 2019; Parihar & Dawra, 2020). Trust in an establishment helps to increase customer loyalty, garner repeat patronage, and foster increased profits for a business (Farid Shamsudin et al., 2019; Iglesias et al., 2020). Satisfaction is subjective, but if a business can meet and exceed expectations of a customer, the customer is more likely to be happy and maintain loyalty to the business (Huang & Yu, 2018; Mokhtar et al., 2019). Hotel personnel have the unique opportunity to create experiences for customers that focus on customer engagement and satisfaction.

Taking a customer-focused, or customer-oriented, approach to customer service as CRM theory advocates for, can have a significantly beneficial impact on customer satisfaction (Sofi et al., 2020). Focusing on building and maintaining relationships with customers improves customer satisfaction and, hotel success (Huang & Yu, 2018). One of the most effective ways of stewarding strong customer relationships and subsequent satisfaction is through the collection and utilization of specific customer information, to provide personalized and effective service (Matute et al., 2019). An effective hotel does not attempt to use a one-size-fits-all approach when improving customer satisfaction. No two customers are the same, so the ways in which a hotelier builds relationships with and

caters to the needs of customers should not be identical across customers (Bi et al., 2020). Hoteliers can tailor individualized relationships and services in numerous ways that are aligned with CRM practices, such as organization of information, technological tools, managerial approaches, and more (Sofi et al., 2020).

In approaching customer satisfaction, hoteliers should recognize satisfaction and dissatisfaction are entirely unique and cannot be considered as opposites, despite their names (Vo Thi & Hoang Doan, 2019). Satisfaction is the presence of positive sentiment, while dissatisfaction is the presence of negative sentiment; the absence of one does not inherently mean the other is present (Ann & Blum, 2020). Focusing on achieving customer satisfaction must go deeper than avoiding or eliminating dissatisfaction (Vo Thi & Hoang Doan, 2019).

Customer Dissatisfaction

Customers are determined to get the most for their money and desire to receive the most enjoyable experience money can buy (Chicu et al., 2019; Hirata, 2019; Rita et al., 2019). Being dissatisfied on a trip or at a hotel is not a desirable outcome for most customers. Customer dissatisfaction is the emotional state of an individual whose experiences and expectations are unfavorable or unfulfilled and is often associated with negative emotions (Park et al., 2021). Customers who experience dissatisfaction have a higher likelihood of expressing their dissatisfaction through various mediums, such as negative reviews or expressing frustration on social media, that may negatively affect profitability for the company (Xia et al., 2019).

Because customers can use digital means to express dissatisfaction more quickly, it is imperative for hoteliers to identify issues, develop an action plan, and rectify the source of dissatisfaction in a timely fashion, ideally before customers are able to express dissatisfaction publicly, but at least as soon as public dissatisfaction has been expressed (Priya, 2020). Ignoring or failing to recognize the source of customer dissatisfaction may not only negatively affect cost and retention but may also encourage negative behaviors from customers through word-of-mouth reviews and complaints about the hotel (Kim et al., 2019). Responding to customer concerns in a timely manner may reduce dissatisfaction and improve financial outcomes (Sarkar et al., 2021).

To combat customer dissatisfaction, hoteliers need to pay attention to their customers and cater the hotel experience to the needs of customers. Presenting innovative ideas through strategic planning may help to satisfy customers while increasing competitive advantage (Azhar Mohd Harif et al., 2022; Lau et al., 2019). Ensuring high-quality experiences, paying attention to details, providing a clean and professional environment, and addressing concerns as they arise are all strategies that can decrease dissatisfaction. No hotelier will be able to entirely avoid dissatisfaction all the time, so the key to combating customer dissatisfaction is ensuring the customer feels listened to and the nature of their problem is addressed as completely as possible in the moment (Lau et al., 2019). Listening, being attentive, and making real-time adjustments are all elements of customer service that hoteliers can use to avoid customer dissatisfaction and improve customer satisfaction (Alteren & Tudoran, 2019).

Customer Selection

Due to the competitive nature of business the idea of retaining all customers is not a realistic goal for any business (Yoo et al., 2019). Organizations should focus on developing relationships and retaining the most beneficial customers instead of trying to retain all their customers (Larsson & Broström, 2019). To assist organizations in differentiating between the value of customers, companies may use a customer portfolio analysis (CPA) to determine which customers are the most beneficial to the business, analyze customers purchasing habits, and segment customers into like groups (Abdi & Abolmakarem, 2019). The CPA includes four categories of customers: the platinum and gold customers considered to be of high value to the organization; and the silver and bronze customers, considered to be of low value to the organization (Hadad & Keren, 2022). Each level corresponds to the level of profitability related to customer retention (Hadad & Keren, 2022). Platinum customers are more cost efficient and make more purchases on average. Bronze customers are more costly and make purchases far less frequently on average (Morisada et al., 2019). Customer retention consists of reoccurring patronage with a company (Larsson & Broström, 2019). High-value customers are individuals who continue to transact with the organization in a way that does not demand excessive costs to maintain a relationship with the firm and increases the profitability of the company over time (Kumar, 2018). The ability of an organization to determine when high value customers will interact with a company increases the ability of the organization to ensure optimal customer satisfaction (Stancheva, 2017).

Transition

Section 1 included the background of the problem, problem and purpose statements, nature of the study, the overarching research question, and interview questions. Additionally, in Section 1, I addressed the conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study, significance of the study, and a comprehensive synthesis and analysis of research via a literature review.

In Section 2, I reiterate the purpose for the study, provide an explanation of my role as the researcher, and discuss participants in the study, as well as the research method and design, population and sampling, and ethical procedures. Section 2 contains information about data collection instruments, techniques, and data analysis as well as data organization techniques, in addition to addressing reliability and validity of the study. Section 3 includes a presentation of findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further research. Section 3 ends with my reflections and a conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Included in Section 2 are details regarding my role as the researcher, participant identification, the research method and design, population sampling, ethical procedures, data collection process, instruments, techniques, and analysis. I built upon the foundation of the study and explained credibility and validity transferability of data as well as data integrity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how managers of boutique hotels use CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction to increase profitability. The target population included hotel managers from four boutique hotels in the Detroit metro area who successfully implemented CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability. Implications for positive social change include improved customer relationships that lead to increased loyalty and repeat customer patronage, which can help sustain the local economy and foster job security.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary collector of data in research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Qualitative researchers strive to build rapport with their study participants, as well as collect and analyze data (Yadav, 2021). The role of the qualitative researcher is to explore and interpret real-life experiences of study participants involving the phenomena under study (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). I was the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative multiple case study and conducted semistructured interviews with participants. My role as the primary researcher was to ensure the data collection process and resulting interpretations were ethical, valid, and reliable. I possess over 20 years of experience in the customer service industry but have no experience in or connection to the hotel industry.

During collection of data, I ensured protection of rights for participants in accordance with Belmont Report protocol. The Belmont Report details ethical guidelines for researchers to protect rights of individuals in research (U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, 1979). It is the responsibility of researchers to comply with ethical research standards when dealing with human subjects (Balon et al., 2019). I adhered to and applied ethical principles that were established in the Belmont Report.

Researchers may ensure ethical research by adhering to protocols designed to prevent intentional and unintentional bias (McKenna & Gray, 2018). Hong and Cross Francis (2020) asserted researchers must identify their potential biases. To mitigate bias, I chose to use bracketing. Bracketing involves setting aside preconceived ideologies about topics to avoid imposing personal viewpoints and experiences in research (Gregory, 2019). Bracketing can increase rigor of studies and allow participants to provide insights regarding topics without judgement (Hissa & Timulak, 2020). I used my reflective journal to document data from interviews and review information afterwards to prevent myself from interjecting with my own ideas about the topic. Reflective journals help to reduce potential biases by keeping in focus data that are relevant and helping researchers to be objective (Park & Huh, 2019).

I collected relevant data from participants via in-depth semistructured interviews. Along with bracketing, reduction of bias occurred by using an interview protocol (see Appendix A), which gave participants opportunities to share information that was both detailed and relevant. The interview protocol was necessary to have a clear guide for starting and completing interviews. I remained on track, asking probing questions after initial interview questions, and maintained the continuity of questions during interviews with participants. Interview protocols involve ensuring alignment between interview and

research questions, reduction of overtalking, and strategic retrieval of information (Roberts, 2020).

Participants

Researchers choose participants who provide relevant information in terms of addressing research questions (Johnson et al., 2020). All participants for the study were managers of boutique hotels in the metro Detroit area who successfully implemented CRM strategies. All participants successfully implemented CRM strategies in a hotel environment, had at least 1 year of experience as a boutique hotel manager, had experience using strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase hotel profitability, and were managers in the metro Detroit area who were willing to participate in the study.

Gaining access to participants consisted of appealing to key individuals and establishing relationships to gain pertinent information on the topic. Researchers may opt to gain access to participants through traditional means such as face-to-face encounters or mail, while others use types of technology such as emails, telephones, and social media to gain access to participants (Gray et al., 2020). To gain access to participants, I first searched the internet for boutique hotels in the Detroit metro area. I used hotel directories and conducted internet searches to locate names of potential participants. After locating information, my next step was to establish communication with managers at each hotel. I reached out via telephone to speak with managers to provide a high-level overview of the purpose of the study as well as eligibility criteria, and gauge interest in participating. Once I confirmed interest, I sent follow up emails with invitations to participate in the

study and interview, along with consent forms. Participants can make informed decisions about participation when they are clear about logistics and are given opportunities to choose what they want to do (Klykken, 2021).

Establishing working relationships with participants involves mutually beneficial outcomes for researchers and participants (Riese, 2019). I thoroughly explained the objective of the study to each participant, indicated how each participant was valuable to the development of the study, reviewed risks and benefits of participation, and answered any questions. Subsequent communications happened via email, telephone, and online communication software program Zoom. My goals were to ensure open communication, be transparent, and reduce business disruptions.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Researchers use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods (Taherdoost, 2022). The qualitative methodology was the chosen research method for this proposed study. I explored CRM strategies managers used to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability in the hotel industry. The qualitative methodology involves research that is nonnumerical in which researchers explore topics in a purposeful manner (Nassaji, 2020). Researchers use qualitative methods to conduct in-depth examinations of real-world experiences via the experiences of those directly involved with the phenomenon (Pyo et al., 2023). The qualitative method was the most appropriate option to answer the research question for this study: How do managers of boutique hotels successfully use CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability? The qualitative

design was used to gain better insights and understanding of strategies used to affect satisfaction and profits in the hotel industry. Via a qualitative design, researchers can understand human attitudes, behaviors, and experiences that occur due to occurrences of a particular phenomenon (Quinlan et al., 2019). The qualitative method involves addressing how or what questions involving a phenomenon in order to gain comprehensive replies (Suwedi-Kapesa et al., 2023). For the purpose of this study, the qualitative research method was most appropriate.

Researchers use the quantitative methodology to analyze data by using numbers (Jamieson et al., 2022). The quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study as my aim was not to quantify information or to determine the number of ways managers use CRM strategies, but rather gain an understanding of how and why experts do so. Quantitative researchers also use tools to gather and measure large amounts of information that can provide specific numerical outputs related to a topic (Mohajan, 2020). Although the quantitative method is an efficient research method, when used, researchers do not consider the environment in which the phenomenon takes place and test hypothesis to derive singular outcomes (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019).

Mixed methods research incorporates both the qualitative and quantitative research methods to deliver a more comprehensive understanding of an issue but is time consuming and resource constraining (Palinkas et al., 2019). I was not privy to an abundance of time or money for this study nor does numerical data add value to the study. Mixed method research weakens the influences that the qualitative and quantitative methods have separately and favors a more multi-focused approach to research (Piccioli,

2019). This study does not require duality or a multi-focused approach because the use of the qualitative method alone generated relevant information regarding the phenomenon sufficiently. Mixed methodology was not suitable for the study.

Research Design

Case study, ethnography, narrative, and phenomenology are potential qualitative research designs (Yin, 2018). The multiple case study design was the appropriate choice for this study. Case studies are a real-life in-depth inquiry used to explore groups of individuals or a situation bounded within a set period (Alpi & Evans, 2019). Using the case study design allows researchers to combine meaningful theory and knowledge that connects to the real world (Takahashi & Araujo, 2019). The use of a multiple case study design allowed me to explore the issue with the most relevant individuals and draw a parallel between knowledge and application. Researchers who use the multiple case study design obtain further information about a phenomenon through comparison of cases (Takahashi & Araujo, 2019). In using the case study design, I was able to analyze each organization's public documents, core strategies, and management techniques. The multiple case study design was appropriate for this study as I sought to gather in-depth knowledge from managers regarding their experiences in boutique hotels and how they go about improving customer satisfaction and increasing profitability. Ethnographic studies include insight into the intricacies of cultural groups through physical presence of the researcher (Strudwick, 2019). Ethnographic research requires the allowance of lengthy integration into a culture to explore a phenomenon (Lapshun & Fusch, 2021). The ethnographic design was not applicable to this study as the focus was not to integrate

myself into the culture of boutique managers. Phenomenology is the study of a phenomenon and is a design used to gain an understanding of an individual's view of the world based on lived experiences (Lundh, 2019). Although the experiences of managers who implement CRM strategies were of value to the study, I was not exploring the manager's perspective on CRM strategies, so the phenomenology design was not appropriate for this study. Madden et al. (2018) stated the use of the narrative design helps to assign meaning of personal experiences through storytelling. Parker et al. (2019) further posited researchers then use the information derived from narrative research to describe the lived experiences through chronicling from the individual. The narrative design was inappropriate for this study as gathering information through storytelling would not answer the research question.

Qualitative researchers strive to attain data saturation to ensure the content validity of their study (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Saturation occurs when there is no new data to discover (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To secure data saturation, I started by attempting to interview at least six participants. No new data emerged after four interviews, so no new participants were added to the study. Once there was no repetition of data in the collection process, data saturation was complete. Mwita (2022) stated researchers may reach data saturation when there is no new information that emerges during the data analysis process.

Population and Sampling

Choosing the correct sample size can help ensure the credibility of a study (Weis & Willems, 2017). To attain an appropriate sample size, one method a researcher may

use is the purposeful sampling method (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Purposeful sampling is the intentional selection of individuals from a population that can provide in-depth knowledge of a specific phenomenon (Morgan, 2022). The target population for this study were managers of boutique hotels that have breadth and depth of knowledge of using CRM strategies to affect customer satisfaction and profits.

Sampling in qualitative studies are sufficient using a small number of participants (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Colaizzi (1978) stated 12 participants is sufficient when doing a case study, but Young and Casey (2019) posited that between four and six interviews were enough to provide rich data. Smaller samples generate more relevant and focused data than larger samples (Weller et al., 2018). As such, this multiple case study fell within the guidelines that justified the use of at least four participants as fair representation of the population.

Sample size and data saturation are interwoven in qualitative research (Weis & Willems, 2017). Data saturation involves replicability of data with no new data emerging on a specific topic (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). To ensure data saturation, I continued data collection until no new information emerged. I used semistructured interviews to gather relevant data on the topic, including follow-up interviews with participants or adding new participants until the same data were replicated.

The selection criteria for this study included boutique managers who (a) worked in the hotel industry, (b) had a tenure of at least 1 year in the position, (c) had experience using strategies to improve customer satisfaction to increase hotel profitability, and (e) were willing to participate in the study. The method for interviewing participants was

Zoom. I requested that the participants be in a space that was comfortable and free from distractions to foster engagement and privacy in interview sessions. Price et al., (2020) indicated a relaxed setting encourages open dialogue. Participants also had the option of deciding what time and date worked best for their schedules. I made sure to adhere to the same expectations that I asked of the participants.

Ethical Research

Ethical research involves the researcher committing to the care and well-being of participants in a study (Siddiqui & Sharp, 2021). The use of informed consent helps researchers ensure participants understand their rights, roles, and responsibilities in a study while maintaining autonomy (Dankar et al., 2019). Before the semistructured interviews occurred, each participant received an informed consent (see Appendix A) via email to review and sign if they agreed to participate in the study. I asked that all participants verify understanding of the details in the consent form and acknowledge receipt of the consent form. The consent form advised participants that participation in the study was voluntary, did not include any physical or mental risk, and explained the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the study. To ensure clarity and understanding, I offered a Zoom meeting to explain content within the consent form in detail.

All participants who chose to participate had the right to withdraw at any time throughout the study, by advising me in writing via email of their desire to cease participation in the study. No participants opted to withdraw from the study. Participants have the right to both participate in and withdraw from a study without issue (Arnott et

al., 2020). The participants were able to inform me of their decision to withdraw at any time from the study without explanation of departure and there was no penalty for withdrawing. If I had received written correspondence, via email, of the participants desire to not participate, then I would have confirmed withdrawal with the participant and removed all participant data from the study that could identify the participant. Data would include if any were collected. Data collected was destroyed via professional shredding of physical data and there was advisement of permanent deletion for digital data after 5 years. Incentives in a research study do not notably affect participation (Abdelazeem et al., 2022). I did not offer incentives for participating in the study.

To ensure the reputability of the study and ethical protection of participants I adhered to guidelines outlined by Walden University Institutional Review Board and the Belmont Report protocol related to ethics, conduct, and responsibilities of research. Ethical research should align with the Belmont Report protocol, which provides guidelines on interacting with individuals during research (Doerr & Meeder, 2022). *The Belmont Report* provides guidance for interacting with individuals during research that centers around beneficence, justice, and informed consent (Doerr & Meeder, 2022). To comply with the ethical guidelines indicated in the Belmont Report, I followed all protocols to ensure adherence to anonymity and protection of participants and data. Participants were aware of the voluntary nature of the study and their ability to withdraw at any time. I adhered to rules governing the careful determination of certain groups to avoid the exploitation or exclusion of any participants solely to gain new information on the topic. Participants had an opportunity to respond to interview questions in a

judgement free environment, they received assurance of the avoidance of misuse of their information, and that a guarantee that I would not use the data outside of this study. The obligation of a researcher is to conduct research that will respect the rights of the participants involved (Drolet et al., 2022). I saved all digital data in password-protected files on an external hard drive and hard copies of data from each participant will remain locked in storage for 5 years. After 5 years the digital data will be erased, and hard copies of data shredded. The Walden University Institutional Review Board approval number for this study was 02-23-22-0413653.

Researchers should not mention study participants by name in the research, but instead use an alternate identifier (Edwards, 2020). To ensure confidentiality in this study and protect names and organizations, I replaced identifying information with an alphanumeric code: O1P1, O2P2, O3P3, O4P4, O5P5, and O6P6. The O was used to represent the organization, P represented the participants and the numbers attached to each letter referred to the interview order.

Data Collection Instruments

Researchers may use various data collection instruments such as interviews, observations, documents (archival data), and questionnaires in qualitative research (Johnson et al., 2020). I collected data through interviews and organizational public documents. As the primary data collection instrument for the study, my process for gathering data from the participants included using an interview protocol (see Appendix A). An interview protocol can assist researchers in the semistructured interview process to avoid overlooking relevant information or going off on a tangent during the interview

(Yeong et al., 2018). Ten open-ended interview questions were asked (see Appendix B) with an option for follow-up questions if necessary. Semistructured interviews may allow participants to answer pre-planned open-ended questions in a dialogue format while allowing the interviewer to explore in more depth, participant's answers through follow-up questions (Gani et al., 2020).

Additionally, reviewing public company documents allowed me to further explore the strategies managers used to effectively implement CRM strategies and further glean relevant information about the research question. Researchers review documents primarily for three reasons: to gain insight into historical procedures, to identify discrepancies between what is said and what is done in a company, and to support other methods of data collection in the research (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Review of various documents is a way to gain access to rich data that can inform how companies effectively utilize strategies (Mackieson et al., 2019). After approval and permissions, reviewing hotel website documents, hotel industry reports, historical data online, documented CRM practices, customer reviews and corporate satisfaction data as supplemental information allowed me to gain a better understanding of the hotel's techniques. Document review allowed me to identify relevant information and themes that emerged and compare the data with data derived from interviews to ensure credibility in the study.

Enhancing reliability and validity of the data collection process involved member checking and triangulation. Member checking involves participants reviewing findings to verify accuracy and ensuring what the participants shared matches what the researcher

documents (Candela, 2019). Researchers use member checking to gain participant approval regarding their interpretations of the information acquired during semistructured interviews (Thomas, 2017). I conducted member checking after completing an analysis of each interview. I sent an electronic copy of the interpretations to the participants to review after the interviews were complete. Participants were given 72 hours to review and respond to the documented interviews. Participants had the opportunity to review summarized data and provide feedback on inaccuracies or inconsistencies. One participant responded with an inaccuracy on what was documented. I corrected the inaccuracy and returned the document to the participant for a second review. The participant made no further corrections. I recorded audio from all participant interviews using Zoom and a handheld audio recorder. Participants did not have access to Skype so no interview data was captured using this medium. Recording the interviews allowed me to accurately compare what was said to what was noted. Review of feedback and corrections happened through emails with participants. Should contradictions arise researchers and participants should work together to align the data and ensure accuracy (Varpio et al., 2017). Triangulation is another method to ensure validity and reliability in a study. Researchers use triangulation as a strategy to strengthen their research through multiple methods of data collection (Dzwigol, 2020). Multiple methods of data collection bring value and credibility to research, especially when conducting case studies (Yin, 2017). In the study, I used triangulation by conducting interviews and reviewing public organizational documents.

Data Collection Technique

Interviews allow individuals the opportunity to provide understanding of a topic from their perspective and knowledge base (Thelwall & Nevill, 2021). I conducted semistructured interviews using Zoom audio and a handheld audio recorder. During a situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic the use of audio/visual conferencing equipment provides the opportunity to continue academic research pursuits while maintaining the health and safety of participants and researchers (Sy et al., 2020). Each semistructured interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A). The interview protocol began with introductions and clarification regarding the purpose of the proposed study, followed by review of the informed consent form to ensure participants understood their rights and the voluntary nature of the study. Once participants signed the consent form, I asked for permission to record via Zoom as a primary form of data collection. If participants did not give permission, my primary method of data collection became note taking along with audio recording. If they did give permission, I proceeded with recording the call along with taking notes in a journal and pausing at any time if they asked. Researchers use reflective journals to document what they hear and see while researching to document information from participants so they can encourage further communication (Meyer & Willis, 2019). To conclude the interview, I thanked the participants for their contribution to the study and let them know that I would conduct member checking and would ask them to review the summaries for accuracy and provide clarification should the need arise.

An advantage of virtual interviews includes the participants being able to see that the researcher is paying attention. Participants feel that researchers are more attentive during the interview process when using a virtual means of interviewing (Khalil & Cowie, 2020). Another advantage is flexibility. I recorded each interview using the audio recording features of Zoom and saved them to my external hard drive for later review and transcription. Researchers can also steer the conversation if they see the participant is going off track (Gani et al., 2020). It is easy for some individuals to overshare and go off on a tangent so researchers can redirect the conversation to deter unnecessary information. Lastly, researchers can interact with participants more easily through a beneficially shared exchange (Lee et al., 2021b). Both the researcher and the participant have the opportunity to get something out of the interview. Participants shared their strategies and the researcher gained insight on the topic for the study.

A disadvantage of virtual interviews is internet accessibility (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Some individuals may not have the available internet bandwidth and applications to participate in a virtual interview. Another disadvantage is availability of participants and limitations on time (Khalil & Cowie, 2020). Some individuals may indicate that they will participate, but do not show up for the interview or reschedule several times. To mitigate these disadvantages, I adhered to my interview protocol (see Appendix A), was flexible with scheduling interviews with participants, and utilized technology widely available to minimize cost and time.

As a secondary data collection technique, I gathered information through a review of public company documents. I reviewed the documents, making note of relevant

information that supports the research question. Documents included reviewing hotel website documents, hotel industry reports, historical data online, customer reviews and corporate satisfaction data. Finally, I compared data derived from interviews with data retrieved from company documents to cross-check commonalities or variations in actual CRM practices.

An advantage of document review is that researchers can use it to draw parallelism between what is documented and what is performed in an organization (Wood et al., 2020). Also, researchers can validate and support information from interviews (Natow, 2019). A disadvantage of reviewing organizational documents include the relevancy and completeness of documents in relation to the time of review (Yin, 2018). Changes happen often and quickly in a company and a document may be obsolete compared to when it initially originated.

Member checking provides an opportunity for participants to review and reflect on information they provide (Candela, 2019). I conducted member checking by sending an electronic copy of the interpretation to the participants to check for inaccuracies or inconsistencies followed by a scheduled phone call to address any revisions. Member checking allowed me to increase credibility and reliability of this proposed study by encouraging participants to validate what they have shared before analyzing data.

Data Organization Technique

Upon completion of each interview, the handwritten reflective journal notes and participant interview responses were organized using NVivo. NVivo is computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) used to identify themes within the data.

The use of CAQDAS minimizes bias, allows for more efficiency when analyzing data, and delivers quicker outputs of information (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). To provide confidentiality throughout the research process, each participant had an alphanumeric code assigned, to match a corresponding labeled online folder. I used O1P1, O2P2, O3P3, O4P4, O5P5, and O6P6 to identify each participant. Each folder contained digital correspondences, specifics of each interview, and any reflective journal notes for each participant accordingly. Yin (2018) indicated using a coding system helps researchers ensure the anonymity of participants. I stored all video recordings of the Zoom interviews on an external hard drive. Each digitized document has file password protection and encryption, and all raw data was locked in a safe for 5 years. After 5 years, physical documents such as journal entries and interview transcriptions will go through the shredding process, and digital data will be permanently deleted.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data consists of developing coding and conducting a content analysis (Lester et al., 2020; Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). For this qualitative multiple case study, I used methodological triangulation to analyze data from participant interviews and public documents to increase the validity of the study. The use of triangulation ensures the integrity of the research (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Researchers who use triangulation as a data analysis method can reduce bias and limit the weaknesses a single analysis method may produce (Heesen et al., 2019; Natow, 2019). Data analysis using multiple methods is a way for researchers to ensure reliability of the research (Quintão et al., 2020).

The use of data analysis provides researchers the opportunity to discover key themes and patterns within a study that provide information related to the research question (Yin, 2018). To analyze data for this study exploring how managers of boutique hotels implement CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability, I conducted thematic analysis. Thematic analysis in qualitative research requires researchers to review data strategically and derive themes from the data (Thompson, 2022). Thematic analysis consists of (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) drawing conclusions about the data (Yin, 2018).

In the first step of compiling data, I consider the information obtained from semistructured interviews and corporate documents. Moser and Korstjens (2018) stated a researcher should review the data several times and understand what the data includes thoroughly. Data organization is important to become more familiar with the information and to identify preliminary patterns. Using technology can help with analyzing data (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). NVivo 10 was used to transcribe recorded Zoom interviews and compile information found during the review of corporate documents and my reflective journal.

The second step of thematic analysis involves disassembling (Yin, 2018). Disassembling the data includes breaking down the data into relevant sets of information through coding (Peel, 2020). NVivo was useful as a tool to code data, identify themes, discover patterns, and derive relevant knowledge. NVivo allows researchers to look at raw data and identify themes or patterns in the data (Swygart-Hobaugh, 2019). The use of

NVivo helped me glean insight about the data based on keywords and phrases as well as categorize data after the collection process.

The third step of reassembling data involves taking previously emerged codes and putting them into common themes (Peel, 2020). Reassembling data also employed NVivo software. Using NVivo I organized and coded the data, the conducted theme generation by running queries and reports to identify patterns. To complement the data and secure triangulation of the information, notes from my reflective journal and company documents were also put into NVivo to decipher coding and generate themes.

The fourth step of thematic analysis of interpreting the data involved interpreting the findings. This phase included examining the results of the thematic analysis and aligning it to the information from previous literature and conceptual framework. It is important that the data interpreted provides clarity for the researcher and relevant results are apparent (Luo & He, 2021).

The final step consisted of drawing conclusions. Researchers can draw conclusions and establish meaning from data related to their study (Yin, 2018). When drawing conclusions of a study the results must be in alignment with the research question (Fisher & Bloomfield, 2019). My aim was to provide clear and concise findings about how boutique managers use CRM strategies in their hotel and create a study that was transferable.

Reliability and Validity

A pertinent factor in any study is the consideration of reliability and validity and the importance each has in research which is the responsibility of the researcher in

avoiding bias (Quintão et al., 2020). Through the establishment of reliability and validity, a researcher may ensure trustworthiness in a qualitative study (Hayashi et al., 2019).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) expanded upon the concept of reliability and validity through four criteria that align with qualitative research: dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Reliability

Reliability includes both consistency and replicability of results in research (Meng, 2020). Using various methods to enhance reliability helps the researcher ensure the results of the study are honest and truthful (Quintão et al., 2020). While reliability is the unit of measure that researchers use in quantitative studies to determine thoroughness and permanence (Surucu & Maslakci, 2020). Janis (2022) stated reliability in qualitative studies is synonymous with dependability.

Dependability refers to replication of data and sustainability over time (Stenfors et al., 2020). A study is deemed dependable when a researcher can provide specific actions to take in a study, and other researchers are able to follow those actions without issue (Stenfors et al., 2020). Dependability within this multiple case study was supported using methodological triangulation and member checking along with my interview protocol. Using various sources from which to draw data helps strengthen dependability (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). I used both interviews and company documents as sources. Member checking involves participant review of the researchers' interpretation of their responses during the semistructured interview and provides an opportunity for participants to address possible inaccuracies with the allowance for modification of information before

analysis (Varpio et al., 2017). After each interview, I conducted member checking to allow participants the opportunity to review the data and ensure consistency and that the information interpreted from interviews is factual.

Validity

Validity is a measurement researchers use to determine the precision of tools, instruments, and other elements within a proposed study (Surucu & Maslakci, 2020). Credibility, confirmability, and transferability are measurements of validity in qualitative research (Hayashi et al., 2019). Having validity in a study ensures rigor and accurate outcomes. In qualitative research, Maxwell (2020) posited that validity deals with generalization in which data is used in varying circumstances to elicit the same results, while Earnest (2020) stated validity involves the appropriateness of a study. Additionally, Amin et al. (2020) indicated researchers can use member checking to validate the findings of a study. To create validity within this study, I used triangulation to compare data obtained in interviews and corporate documents and conduct member checking to validate the accuracy of the semistructured interview data. Participants received summaries of their interviews for review and possible correction of data, then I took the interview data and compared it to company documents to support or debunk participant interview data. Doing member checking and triangulation in research not only increases validity, but also helps researchers create research that adds value to the current literature on the topic (Alfrey et al., 2022).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the authenticity and believability of the findings in research (Stenfors et al., 2020). Application of various triangulation methods, such as interviews, and member checking support credibility, allowing for further exploration and the comprehensiveness of a study (Bouncken et al., 2021). To ensure credibility I verified data using member checking and multiple reviews of corporate documents. Member checking is a valid way to create credibility (Candela, 2019). Increased credibility in research includes rigor, transparency, and an understanding of how the outcomes of the research tie to the choices selected for the development of the research (Johnson et al., 2020).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the assurance that research findings are unbiased and objective, and that the researchers' own beliefs do not interfere consciously nor unconsciously (Singh et al., 2021). To ensure confirmability I used member checking and a reflective journal in my study. Member checking involves allowing the participant to review and validate documented information for accuracy and truthfulness (Johnson et al., 2020). Researchers use member checking as a check and balance process to help ensure the authenticity of the data. Use of a reflective journal allows researchers to establish the confirmability of results based on information obtained from participants, rather than the researchers preconceptions (Thomas, 2017). A reflective journal helped me document the steps taken that resulted in the findings of the study.

Transferability

Transferability relates to the concept that findings are variable and will have comparable results if moved to equivalent settings (Makel et al., 2022). Determination of transferability lies with the reader and so a detailed narrative of the data and various specifics of the study is necessary for review (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). To ensure transferability I provided rich descriptions throughout my study to allow for transference of data in similar circumstances for comparison purposes. This included design, methodology, population, sample size, interview protocol, analysis process, and other specifics of the study. Researchers and reviewers will have an opportunity to look at the information provided to decide if replication is applicable.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is imperative in any qualitative study as it is a way to ensure the exhaustion of data as it relates to the research question (Mwita, 2022). Data saturation takes place when no new information can be learned about a phenomenon (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). My strategy for the fulfillment of data saturation was to provide participants the opportunity to review data to ensure accuracy after their interviews. I also used methodological triangulation to strengthen the validity of the proposal by reviewing company documents. Additionally, I completed a thorough exploration of themes and a detailed review of literature related to the topic. Buckley (2022) asserted that theme exploration and a review of the literature will ensure data saturation.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how managers of boutique hotels used CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability. Section 2 included the purpose statement, a detailed explanation of my role as the researcher, a description of participants in the study, the research method and design, a review of population and sampling methods, and ethical procedures. Section 2 also includes data collection and techniques and analysis of data as well as data organization techniques. Additionally, in Section 2, I discussed study reliability and validity. In Section 3, I provide a presentation of study findings, applications to professional practice, and implications for social change. Section 3 also includes detailed recommendations for action, suggestions for further research, and reflections on my experiences during the doctoral journey.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how managers of boutique hotels used CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability. To secure validity, I used methodological triangulation by collecting data from four boutique hotel managers using semistructured interviews and supplemental data via customer reviews, public records, and data on the hotel industry. Participants responded to 10 open-ended questions about how they used CRM strategies in their hotels. Emergent themes involving how managers of boutique hotels use CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability were customer orientation practices, customer satisfaction and loyalty, creating positive customer experiences, and technological capabilities.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: How do managers of boutique hotels successfully use CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability? After IRB approval, I contacted participants via social media and telephone calls to solicit participation. I initially confirmed each participant met criteria of having successfully implemented CRM strategies in a hotel environment, at least 1 year of experience as a boutique hotel manager, and experience using strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase hotel profitability. Participants were boutique managers in the metro Detroit area who were identified throughout the study by alphanumeric codes O1P1, O2P2, O3P3 and O4P4 to ensure anonymity. O1, O2, O3 and O4 was used as pseudonyms for hotels specifically.

Based on analysis of data, four primary themes emerged. The four themes were customer orientation practices, customer satisfaction and loyalty, creating positive customer experiences, and technological capabilities. These four themes represent CRM strategies boutique managers in the Detroit metro area use to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability.

Theme 1: Customer Orientation Practices

The first emergent theme was customer orientation practices, which is an essential factor of CRM. Customer orientation involves focusing on customers in order to understand customer needs and help foster good relationships and secure customer satisfaction (Oren, 2022). This theme was prevalent throughout participant interviews. Information gathered from reviewing hospitality data, hotel marketing techniques, and the company website documents helped in terms of development of customer orientation practices. I looked at hospitality data for boutique hotels to determine percentages of customers visiting boutique hotels versus other hotels as well as underlying reasons. I then looked at each hotel website to identify how they were marketing to bring in customers. Each site focused on ambience, family atmosphere, and individualized customer attention.

Companies take customer information data to create favorable environments for customers that are tailored to their needs (Xia & Ha, 2021). Employees also play a major role in terms of customer orientation practices because they are the first contact customers have with the business. It is important for managers to have the right people in place with the right qualities to serve customers (Hüttel, 2021).

All four participants said customer orientation practices were important in their hotels, suggesting the importance of being customer-focused to build better rapport and services for customers. Managers used marketing techniques such as vibrant colors and pictures for their websites, defining unique attributes and histories of hotels through tours, as well as unique amenities and services for customers upon check-in. Additionally, based on hospitality data, boutique hotels have been the choice for customers with a steady occupancy rate of 74% compared to 72% for larger-chain hotels by year (Van Hartesvelt, 2006). The occupancy rate for boutique hotels is higher due to customer centricity, ambience, service, and culture in the hotel. Participant and supplemental data was focused on understanding customers through needs analysis, finding resolutions and providing solutions for customer issues, and addressing training and staffing requirements for employees to handle customer needs.

O1P1 expressed the importance of customer orientation practices such as having conversations with customers prior to their arrival. There are diverse reasons why guests visit hotels, and those reasons may be different based on location, time of year, and personal needs (Milićević et al., 2020). O1P1 said they do short interviews to address customer basic needs in order to gain understanding of the purpose for their visit, their general health needs, and other needs involving accessibility, parking, food restrictions, dietary needs, and health issues such as diabetes. Similarly, O2P2 used a dedicated employee to reach out to customers and introduce staff in order to gain additional information about guests' needs. They asked questions about why they were visiting the hotel, if they were there for business or for leisure, if they were familiar with the

property, and if they had a special occasion they were celebrating. O3P3 focused on staff and training and asked their staff to “keep their head on a swivel” in terms of always watching the lobby and immediate surroundings for guests. O3P3 advised their staff that if they see somebody struggling with luggage, they should get a bell cart without being asked, or if they see a guest with a child visiting the restaurant, they should get a highchair before the guest asks for it. The intent is to know what customers need before customers know what they need.

Customer-oriented interactions include finding solutions for guests and resolving issues. Efficient complaint resolution leads to customer satisfaction due to customers feeling like they are being heard (Cheng et al., 2019). All participants agreed with this sentiment. O3P3 said, “the best way to address an issue is by directly and quickly dealing with the issue at the time of conception.” They indicated they focused on providing perks or compensation to resolve issues quickly. O1P3 also said, “resolving issues quickly reduces customer anxiety and frustration.”

O4P4 made sure whenever customers visited the front desk that all issues were addressed during the initial point of contact. O4P4 stated “if we can’t solve it at that point, then we encourage them to reach out to a manager through emails or telephone.” O2P2 said they would take additional steps to provide solutions to customer issues by reaching out to customers to apologize and offer resolutions. O2P2 stated, “this may be an extra day of stay, a free upgrade on the next visit, or dinner at the restaurant.” According to O2P2, “resolving issues is really all about seeing what people are saying, responding to them in time, getting to people directly when you can, and trying to bring

them back because, they are our bread and butter.” O1P1, like other participants, listened carefully to customer concerns and tried to address them efficiently. Similarly, O1P1 offered extra amenities and if customers were not satisfied, then they offered a refund. Attempts to address concerns of customers with genuine resolutions help managers maintain their customer base and continue to foster beneficial customer interactions (Angelovska, 2021).

Another customer orientation practice prevalent throughout participant data was training and staffing. Staff plays a major role in customer orientation practices; communication style and personality of employees can affect daily interactions (Nakamura & Oomiya, 2021). Training can help shape how employees communicate and perform when dealing with customers to ensure better customer interactions (Zharfan & Putra, 2022). O3P3 focused on preparing employees to assist customers by making training a priority. O3P3 said, “I do a monthly training that involves going through new implementations, new documents, or processes.” O4P4 also used training and education to deploy the right staff, and said, “we do lots of training and when a new situation comes up, we talk through it to make sure we handle it correctly.”

Staffing was important to O2P2 because they mentioned whomever the customer interacts with when they first check-in may dictate how long the customer decides to stay as a guest. In the hospitality industry, hoteliers have begun opting to employ people who are just as diverse as the products and services offered to the guests, which has helped with competitive advantage (Sandstrom & Reynolds, 2019). O2P2 said, “you don’t hire

someone based on experience, you hire someone based on personality who can represent the hotel and care about giving great customer service.”

Liu et al. (2020) noted customer orientation practices are a priority for businesses and listening to the customer and addressing any needs is paramount. Hotels must keep customer-oriented practices at the forefront to create competitive advantage and increase hotel performance (Li Sa et al., 2020b). Managers who seek to create value by being customer oriented tend to be more successful overall. The application of customer orientation practices by a business is a way to hear what the customer needs are and to address those needs (Liu et al., 2020). Managers can assess customers’ needs, collect customer information, and address customer concerns to serve customers without forgoing any business needs (Barney-McNamara et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021a). The theme of customer orientation practices was evident throughout the literature in the context of hotels relating to customer satisfaction, advertising and marketing, and strategy and performance (Jawabreh et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021; Serafim & Cristóvão Veríssimo, 2021). Education and training of employees play a vital role in customer orientation. Employees who are properly educated or trained can benefit the hotel through innovation, creativity, and productivity to better service customers (Chikazhe & Nyakunuwa, 2021). The prevalence of customer orientation in the literature shows its relevance and importance of embedding it in all aspects of running a hotel. Business performance is contingent upon customer orientation practices. (Hanaysha & Al-Shaikh, 2022).

Customer orientation practices align with the CRM conceptual framework because it focuses on people and is a tenet of internal marketing, which Berry (1983) stated was an important factor of customer service. Internal marketing requires a business to focus on the employee to better serve the customer (Berry, 2002). The idea is that a company provides the employee with what they need: education, training, and support and in return, the employee is happier, which can lead to more positive interactions with the customers (Raeisi et al., 2020). Internal marketing methods help managers of businesses see increased employee satisfaction, better customer orientation practices, and improved relationships with customers (Huang, 2019; Tang et al., 2020). Managers who anticipate and meet customers' needs are better able to consistently provide world class service throughout the customers lifecycle (Hanaysha & Al-Shaikh, 2022). Customer orientation is an important practice in CRM and is a major component of internal marketing which managers use to strategically sustain customer relationships and organizational growth. (Al-Gasawneh et al., 2021; Ibrahim & Yesiltas, 2021). In discussing the first theme, Table 1 illustrates the frequency and weighted percentage of times participant's referenced customer orientation practices or any of its components.

Table 1

References to Customer Orientation Practices

Participants	Frequency	Weighted Percentage
O1P1	11	12
O2P2	31	31
O3P3	20	22
O4P4	10	18
Total	72	Average 20.75%

Theme 2: Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

The second theme was customer satisfaction and loyalty. Satisfaction and loyalty are two intertwined service quality dimensions, with satisfaction playing a major role on loyalty outcomes (Gogoi & Jyoti, 2020). To create customer loyalty, customer satisfaction should be the focus (El-Adly, 2019). There are several factors that play a part in the achievement of satisfying customers and maintaining the loyalty of those customers: dependability of staff, reactive measures to issues, accessibility to products and services, and tailored experiences (Zielińska & Bačík, 2020). All participants stressed the importance of making sure the customer is happy and doing what they can to secure their re-patronage. To support the data from the interviews, I reviewed online customer service satisfaction scores for each participant and the number of individuals that visited the hotel in a three-year time span. Reviewing online customer satisfaction scores and re-patronage data helped me identify important patterns of the participants and customers. Looking at three-year visit data showed how often customers returned to the hotel while customer service satisfaction scores indicate how well the hotel is doing overall. Satisfaction scores were high for each participant supporting data received from participant via interviews. Re-patronage to the hotel over the last three years was on average twice per quarter for each participant. This is taking into consideration the effects of the pandemic. Customer satisfaction scores are subjective measurements attributed to a business from a customer to provide insight on how services or products are perceived (Dawes et al., 2020). Participants were able to identify perceived patterns of issues or

positive feedback of a visit by looking at customer satisfaction scores and understand how they tie into customer satisfaction and loyalty.

When asked about how participants achieved satisfaction and loyalty of customers, the participant responses varied but focused on making sure the customer was put first. O2P2 said, “you have to focus on not just having that communication with the guests but ensuring that you’re giving them what was promised and doing it in the right way.” O2P2 said they pay attention to little details, which is what people notice. Customer reviews have reflected that outcome and people have come back. Monitoring customer reviews allows hoteliers to adjust according to the needs and wants of the customer (Padma & Ahn, 2020). Customer satisfaction scores are a good indication of whether business outputs match customers perspectives and O3P3 took it a step further by creating a guest satisfaction form for staff to identify specific information about customer related issues. O3P3 said “I do an audit to reconcile any issues by reaching out to the customer to verify if they were taken care of.” O3P3 also stated “it is the relationships that you make with your guests that keep them coming back.” O1P1 connects with the customer more directly asking whether or not the customer is satisfied and if there's anything that they can do to increase the perception of a good stay. Asking a customer about how they feel or if they would recommend a product or service to someone else is an effective predictor of satisfaction and loyalty (Rosli & Nayan, 2020). O4P4’s understanding of satisfaction and loyalty comes from a different perspective. O4P4 revealed the staff are an extended family with their own families and challenges and the focus is on making sure the staff is taken care of first. O4P4 said, “from that,

satisfaction just trickles down.” O4P4 takes care of family first and subsequently can focus on customers and take care of them.

Using supplemental data from the public online travel booking platform (Goldberg, 2023), I was able to identify the customer satisfaction score of each participants hotel. O2 had an overall customer satisfaction score of 4.5/5. O3 had a customer satisfaction score of 4.5/5. O1 customer satisfaction score was 4/5. O4 customer satisfaction score was 4/5. Managers are aware of the importance customer satisfaction plays on customer loyalty which is why customer satisfaction is a critical measure of business performance (Parasuraman et al., 2021). Re-patronage of a business is primarily dependent upon if a customer is satisfied (Diputra & Yasa, 2021). This is especially true in the hotel industry where the customer is the business and service is a priority.

Customer satisfaction and loyalty are interconnected in the sense that if customers are satisfied, they are more likely to be loyal to a business (Alshurideh et al., 2020). The theme of customer satisfaction and loyalty aligned with the data obtained in conducting this study and throughout the literature. Customer satisfaction and loyalty were the end goals of each participant, and the literature supported the discovery that customer satisfaction and loyalty are a result of understanding the customers’ needs and delivering on those needs (Alzoubi et al., 2021). Effective communication plays a vital role on customer satisfaction in the hotel industry. The way a business communicates can influence how satisfied a customer will be and dictate if they return to the business (Fadli et al., 2021). Customers are the financial source of most businesses and are ultimately a determinant of sustainability of that business (Farid Shamsudin et al., 2019). This is

especially applicable in the hotel industry. Since customers have so much power with the accessibility of social media, it is imperative that the preservation of customer satisfaction and loyalty are on the forefront of any manager's mind to affect business performance (Hruska & Maresova, 2020). Managers should make a conscious effort to foster harmonious relationships with customers to increase customer loyalty, customer satisfaction and financial performance (Khairawati, 2019). Business longevity is dependent on customer patronage and perceived satisfaction, so strategic planning is necessary to manage these efforts (Vilkaite-Vaitone & Skackauskiene, 2020). Customer satisfaction and loyalty can be difficult to establish but it is not impossible if trust is established and customer expectations are exceeded regularly (Barreto & Ramalho, 2019; Pasaribu et al., 2022).

The second theme customer satisfaction and loyalty aligns with the CRM conceptual framework because it deals with people, processes, and the relationship marketing tenet of relationship customization. Relationship customization is about tailoring services or products to the customers' needs to create loyalty (Berry, 1983). It takes more than a brand name to satisfy or keep customers. Addressing factors such as customer wants, needs, expectations, and market trends help with satisfaction and loyalty (Herhausen et al., 2019). Hotels build relationships through identifying the aforementioned factors and delivering personalized services that the customer want. When services are personalized the hotel and the customer benefits. When a customer visits the hotel, customer data is collectible through various mediums (face-to-face, online, reviews, etc.), and managers are able to use that data to personalize the customers'

stay. Personalization then starts the process over with the customer wanting to frequent the hotel, with the cumulative effect of businesses increasing profits (Baloglu & Bai, 2021). Cakici et al. (2019) posited that organizations could garner satisfaction and loyalty if management focuses on relationship building. The deployment of CRM strategies is important to create that long-lasting connection with customers, maximize customer satisfaction, and foster loyalty (Herman et al., 2021). An increase in customer satisfaction efforts paired with low customer complaints are key to effective CRM in a business (Wahab & Khong, 2019). In discussing the second theme, Table 2 illustrates the frequency and weighted percentage of times participant's referenced customer satisfaction, loyalty, or any of its components.

Table 2

References to Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

Participants	Frequency	Weighted Percentage
O1P1	9	10
O2P2	20	16
O3P3	8	4
O4P4	8	12
Total	45	Average 11.25%

Theme 3: Creating Positive Customer Experiences

Creating positive customer experiences was the third emergent theme. Customer experiences are subjective, dependent on external encounters, and influenced by perception (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). Customer experience also includes the feelings of the customer and in what way or format they express themselves (Keiningham et al., 2020). Creating positive customer experiences is necessary for businesses, especially

hotels and can be challenging because of the subjective nature of a customer's experience (Bueno et al., 2019). To foster positive experiences, managers must design experiences that are broad enough to apply to many and closes the gap between actual and perceived satisfaction around the experience (De Keyser et al., 2020).

Through careful assessment and review of customer feedback, managers can determine how to create moments and situations that go above and beyond expectations to create a positive customer experience. I accessed hotel customer reviews to inform me of the experience customers had and to support what participants indicated. Customers provided detailed indications on their experiences at the hotels, making sure to call out any available or unavailable amenities, unique experiences, friendliness of staff, and accessibility to areas. I further looked at each participant's website to review documents related to amenities and history of the hotel. These documents provided insight into what the hotel does to create unique experiences for customers and the hotel's history drives home the importance of the experience. Participant interviews, customer reviews, hotel history, and hotel amenities were all congruent.

Participants revealed several ways they create positive customer experiences for their customers which include having a welcoming establishment and employees, offering amenities, being optimally located, and having available food and beverage options. Using customer review data helps companies generate new innovative ways of servicing and provide insight on the perception of the customers (Zhang & Kim, 2021). To supplement participants data, I used customer reviews to determine if what the participants were saying matched or differed from the expectations of the customers

experiences. In identifying those instances of creating positive customer experiences O4P4 stated “we're definitely big on customer service and in trying to make everyone feel welcome and feel at home. We always want you to come to us and feel welcome doing so.” O4P4 went on to say, “we like to promote our bars that are within the hotel like the candy bar and wine bar, the café to get a bite to eat, and the salon to get a haircut.” O4 customer reviews revealed the following:

Customer 1: The entire staff here was superb. Probably one of my best experiences at a hotel. From the housekeeping staff to the front desk, everyone was super nice. We enjoyed ourselves so much we ended up staying an extra night which they seamlessly made happen. If we ever have the occasion to come back, we will definitely make this our first choice for our stay.

Customer 2: It's a fun little boutique hotel, but I wish it had a few more amenities for the price. A small fridge in the room would be great, or at least one more ice machine (preferably not in the basement). The beds are comfortable, linens are smooth and crisp, and the showers are gorgeous. The hotel staff has always been friendly and kind every time we've stayed.

Customer 3: I really enjoyed my stay at O4! The hotel is so chic and unique looking, the service received at the front desk, to the coffee station and valet was on point. The Candy Bar was fun and a great way to cap off the night. The room we stayed in was small but charming and the location of the hotel is perfect with lots of restaurants and bars within walking distance. I will definitely stay again when I'm back in Detroit.

O3P3 described creating a positive experience begins as soon as the customer walks through the door and continues throughout the stay. O3P3 pays attention to the customer's not only to greet them, but to identify ways to connect with the customer through shared interest. Accessibility, a friendly face, and communicative correspondences aid in the perception of a positive experience for the customer (Fan et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2019). O3P3 also shared how they put fresh baked cookies at the front desk and created an internal database of transportation services to help customers get to and from their destinations without issue. Customer reviews reflected the viewpoint of O3P3 with having a welcoming establishment and amenities:

Customer 1: We stayed at the O3 for the Draft Party at the Little Caesars Arena. We love staying at O3. The location of the hotel in relation to things to do is phenomenal. The hospitality of the staff is second to none. I would like to thank O3P3 for the warm welcome and always making our stay enjoyable.

Customer 2: Stayed here for a first-time work trip, I can't remember the last time I've come across such kind staff. Each and every one of the workers at this hotel went above and beyond for me, unprompted. I genuinely felt supported and very well taken care of. The men and women at the front desk and in the lil café with the free coffee-- all amazing folks. Thank you guys!!!

Customer 3: Had a great stay at the O3 in downtown Detroit. The hospitality from the valet to the front desk is top notch. The front desk made us feel at home from the moment we checked in till we came to retrieve our luggage hours after checking out. Whenever my travels bring me back to Detroit, I will return to O3.

Although welcoming the customer was a priority, O1P1 seeks to create a positive customer experience through the amenities, food, and location. Customers look for companies that provide unique or varying amenities beyond basic necessities such as toiletries in a hotel (Kim et al., 2022). O1P1 embodied going above and beyond for the customer by listening to what the customer's like to have in their own home and having those items at the hotel. Items such as first aid kits, wheelchairs, refrigerators, ironing boards, nightlights, and fans. They even have portable fireplaces. O1P1 prided themselves on giving the customer a great experience going above and beyond to assist their customers citing a time when a couple needed personal assistance. O1P1 recalled a couple from Canada needing to get a COVID test before they returned home. They jumped into action and called around until they found a location that would do a COVID test for them online. To solidify a positive experience O1P1 even followed up with the couple to make sure that everything was all set. Looking at customer reviews, there was alignment between O1P1 actions and customer experiences.

Customer 1: This was the best dining experience I've had in a long time. Elegant, warm, food was superior. Prime rib melted in our mouths. Service: top rate. Very attentive and friendly. We plan on staying for a weekend this summer if restrictions allow.

Customer 2: Beautiful, elegant, and walking distance to the most popular venues like Ford Field and the Fox. The food is excellent, and the rooms are in true historic style. A must see if you are looking for a unique, safe, and delightful place to stay in downtown Detroit.

Customer 3: An amazing piece of Detroit history that was comfy and cozy to stay at. Room was very spacious, clean, and well taken care of. O1P1 was extremely pleasant and very helpful. They went out of their way to help us when we needed to find a walk-in clinic for our medical needs. They even called us later in the day to make sure we found a clinic. The breakfast in the morning was good with eggs, sausage, home fries and fresh fruit. They even called us before our arrival to ask if we had any dietary needs. I can't say enough about O1. Thank you for a great place to stay!

Similarly, O2P2 focused on the amenities they offer to create that positive customer experience. If someone says they are celebrating an anniversary, O2P2 offers an amenity package like the romance package, discounts on local venues, or a specially curated experience. O2P2 also prided themselves on listening to the customer to foster an enjoyable experience. For example, a customer indicated the desire to have coffee readily available in their room, so they placed a Nespresso machine in each room. O2P2 stated "the goal is to try and make everything personal for every single person." Customer reviews were indicative of what O2P2 shared during their interview.

Customer 1: The hotel has a lovely and relaxing feel similar to an English country home. The three meals I had during my stay were delicious, and the service from all employees I interacted with was great.

Customer 2: Attractive vintage design, beautiful landscaping, discreet location, but close to everything, room was spacious and clean. Beds very comfortable. No

problem finding parking even though it was busy. The restaurant patio is very nice also.

Customer 3: Great spacious rooms, nice bathrooms very clean, breakfast was good lots of options and well worth getting the dine and stay deal.

In relationship to the literature and the third emergent theme of creating positive customer experiences, generating positive customer experiences was a common finding in the literature as relevant to the competitive advantage of most businesses (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Customer experience and competitive advantage are important tenets of having a successful business (Kim & Chen, 2019). Customer experiences are so important that nearly 75% of companies decided to factor in their financials how to address customer experiences to garner better outcomes (Pemberton, 2019). The culmination of everything that a business does: product selections, service offerings, marketing tactics, customer interactions, and issue resolution are all to foster the best customer experience possible for the customer (Rahimian et al., 2020).

In the hotel industry customer experience can be short lived or long lasting. Customers experiences are subjective and usually involve whether they received what they wanted, when they wanted it in a satisfactory manner, and if the customer can be surprised, which enhances the experience even more (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019). The desire to repeat the feeling of joy and happiness is innate in humans. When a customer's emotions and feelings are catered to, they are bound to repeat actions Ko, 2020). In the case of hotels, customers will re-patron, to seek that positive experience they had before. Hoteliers would be remiss if they did not work to strategically manage

the customer experience by using various ways to appeal to the customer. This includes being innovative with products and services, influencing interactions, understanding customer behaviors and reactions, and acting accordingly (Lee et al., 2019).

Customer experience is the third theme and is relevant in CRM because of the focus on people and the tenet of core services. Core services are designed to attract customers to a business through a customer-focused approach that increases customer rapport and organizational performance (Sofi et al., 2020). For the hospitality industry core services can vary, but the prominent core services for hotels are accommodations, food, amenities, quality, and personnel interactions (Chittiprolu et al., 2021). Marketing of these core services helps to pique the interest of customers, while helping managers develop rapport with the customer, and essentially creating long term relationships with the customer (Berry, 2002). Marketing techniques of hotels are geared toward addressing core services to illicit a cognitive response from the customer that foster positive experiences (Baek et al., 2019). In a boutique hotel the ambiance, personalized touches, and intimate interactions with staff create the experience. Tinakhat (2021) posited that to provide exceptional customer experiences, the business has to understand the customers perspective. Customers will tell you what they do and do not want or how they feel. Customer reviews and word of mouth are the ways in which customers express their sentiments and are an opportunity for businesses to communicate and customize products and services for customers (Noori, 2021). CRM is a conduit for hoteliers to use what they gathered from customer perspectives and experiences to innovate and manage customer relationships (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021). Utilization of CRM helps managers focus on

how to create a positive customer experience while facilitating management of customer needs (Tinakhat, 2021). In discussing the third theme, Table 3 illustrates the frequency and weighted percentage of times participant's referenced creating positive customer experiences or any of its components.

Table 3

References to Creating Positive Customer Experiences

Participants	Frequency	Weighted Percentage
O1P1	6	8
O2P2	10	10
O3P3	14	24
O4P4	14	31
Total	124	Average 18.25%

Theme 4: Technological Capabilities

The fourth and final theme was technological capabilities. Technological capabilities centered around managing customer data, employing software/technology tools to connect with customers, and utilizing social media for marketing and rapport building. Technological capabilities are a way in which companies can innovate using the tools they have to increase competitive advantage and obtain financial security (Lin & Lai, 2021). In the hospitality industry, companies may use technology to access, gather, and store information about customers (Ku, 2021). Technology is also used to make the stay of a customer less cumbersome using smart technology: Kiosk, in-room MP3 players, and touch entry room access (Appel et al., 2020).

The information I learned from accessing each hotel's website was instrumental in developing the theme of technological capabilities and supporting what participants

relayed through interviews. I was able to view how reservations are booked, review documents about available technology within the hotel, and identify technology specifics of each hotel. I also had access to social media pages to identify access availability and traffic to and for the customer. Hotel sites allowed virtual tours of rooms, reservation booking, in room technology such as MP3 players, telephones, and onscreen checkout, and ways to communicate with staff through telephone, email, mobile app, or kiosk. The identified documents provided insight on how technology throughout the customer lifecycle at hotels can help increase occupancy, streamline processes, and bring awareness to boutique hotels and what they have to offer.

Based on participant responses, technology was a major component of operating the hotel. O2P2 advised “we use a system called Alice that allows our concierge to reach out to all upcoming arrivals after reservations are made.” O2P2 further elaborated stating “we have configured the system so that on every reservation it indicates the guest’s last visit so that staff can say hey, welcome back when they return or identify if they are new guests.” O2P2 also shared they use a system called Medallia which is used to respond to customers directly regarding their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their stay at the hotel. O3P3 applied technological capabilities by using an Excel spreadsheet to document any interactions or discounts provided to the customers. “I train my employees on how to use the spreadsheet to document discounts and upgrades given.” This enables staff to be accountable. O1P1 did not elaborate on their internal process for using technology but stated they use the internet to do a comparative analysis on other hotels to see what they can do to be competitive. O1P1 confirmed other ways they use

technology include client referrals and online guest reviews. O4P4 used technological capabilities to allow customers to communicate with various areas of the hotel, such as in-room phones, in-room check-in and check-out, and online room service. O4P4 offers premium television channels, complimentary Wi-Fi, and the ability to text the front desk or email the hotel. They also indicated the importance of their website for marketing and reservation purposes.

The use of social media have been instrumental in the progression and performance of a company (Ibrahim, 2021). Customers can connect with a business through various channels to give their perspective on a product or service (Anaya et al., 2020). Use of social media and external websites was common throughout the participants data. O4P4 shared they use Indeed to hire and email/text to resolve issues onsite, while O1P1 said they use TripAdvisor and Air BnB for customer review and feedback. O3P3 said LinkedIn helps them address professional guests traveling, and Facebook helps offer discounts for giving reviews. O2P2 uses a media company, Walker Media, to interact with followers, Instagram to connect with influencers, and Medallia to address customer reviews and feedback.

Technological capabilities discussed in the literature showed up frequently in varying contexts. This theme of technological capabilities is supported in the literature related to data collection and analyzing, customer relationship building, and product and service innovation (Ku, 2021). Technological capabilities require a company to be able to develop innovative technology, institute that technology efficiently, and make revisions as necessary to the technology (Bustinza et al., 2019). A review of the literature also

revealed that the use of smart technology such as digital resources, portable devices, remote access, and energy efficient tools, organizations like hotels can increase profitability while creating more efficiencies (Dalgic & Birdir, 2020). The benefits of technology are apparent but there are some downfalls to technology.

Technology can be an issue for organizations if they do not keep up on the maintenance of the technology and its use becomes less reliable than beneficial (Buhalis, 2019). Strategic decision making and a well thought out action plan or lack thereof can be the difference between the adoption of technology that is innovative and relevant, versus outdated and costly (Buhalis & Moldavska, 2021; Cai et al., 2019). Resources, insight, and experience can be a barrier to the effective implementation of technology as well (Khatter et al., 2021). Not having the necessary knowledge to adopt technology can be a disadvantage. Customers may also opt to reject technology. If customers deem there is a hindrance or conflict of interest with the use of technology, they are more likely to not engage with that technology (Yang et al., 2021).

Technology has allowed companies to establish connections with individuals in ways they could only imagine years ago. The participants in this study felt positive about their use of technology, especially in relationship to using social media. Social media is a channel on which organizations have opted to focus more of their energy; due to the ever-changing technology landscape, to communicate with customers (Appel et al., 2020). Over 3.5 billion individuals use social media worldwide, with the largest platform, Facebook, having the majority at almost 2.5 billion alone (Smith, 2019). With so many

people available to connect with, it is apparent why companies are choosing to pivot to use technology-based platforms and social media to reach the masses.

Technological capabilities are one of the major components of CRM conceptual framework and focuses on technology and service augmentation as a tenet of relationship marketing. CRM technology gives organizations the ability to affect customer satisfaction and loyalty through the obtainment of customer data (Petrović, 2020).

Utilizing a technology-based tracking process helps companies track customer data more effectively, build important relationships, and increase profits (AlQershi et al., 2020).

Service augmentation is optimized when technological capabilities are involved (Berry, 2002). Services in the hotel industry using service augmentation and technological capabilities include express check-in or check-out, complimentary music devices, luxury accommodations, day care services, and elite experiences. There is also service augmentation technology that allows an individual to experience a setting such as hotel accommodations prior to visiting, like an immersive experience which helps to support the choices customers make (Tom Dieck & Han, 2021).

Social media is a lucrative technological capability used for connecting customers to businesses (Chatterjee et al., 2020). CRM and social media create a road to reciprocal communication and information sharing that creates value for the customer and business (Itani et al., 2020). Companies may access social media to monitor customer behaviors, build brand trust, identify product effectiveness, review feedback and concerns, respond to customers, leverage information from competitors pages, and design products and services to the specificity of the customers (Itani et al., 2020; Tran & Strutton, 2019).

CRM and technology used in tandem are an effective way to improve performance, maintenance of customers, and increased profitability (Srivastava et al., 2018). In discussing the final theme, Table 4 illustrates the frequency and weighted percentage of times participant's referenced technological capabilities or any of its components.

Table 4

References to Technological Capabilities

Participants	Frequency	Weighted Percentage
O1P1	2	.44
O2P2	20	17
O3P3	10	6
O4P4	4	4
Total	36	Average 7.00%

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings from this study are of value and applicable to managers of boutique hotels who want to understand how to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability by using CRM strategies. Strategies identified in this study revealed that guest relations is a top priority for managers of boutique hotels that require rapport building and customer satisfaction efforts to affect profitability. Developing positive customer relationships allowed managers in this study to generate profit and improve customer retention. Focusing on the customer with customized experiences and personalized services contribute to the overall satisfaction of the customer which in turn helps foster loyalty from the customer and competitive advantage for the business (Rafiki et al., 2019).

The CRM strategies discovered in this study can also help managers of boutique hotels optimize processes, increase sales, organize customer data, and reduce costs. Implementing processes that are more efficient helps managers reduce costs, identify technological deficiencies and reduce duplicate efforts. Data provided by managers in this study revealed organizing the data of customers has provided a way for them to create personalized experiences for the customer, to employ strategic methods of customer reach outs, and to enhance business strategy. By implementing the CRM strategies identified in this study, managers have been able to increase sales and refocus the profits back into the customer and hotel.

All four major themes emerging from this study, customer orientation, customer satisfaction and loyalty, customer experiences, and technological capabilities are related to CRM and relationship marketing principles, and applicable in a business setting. CRM is essentially the “fundamental business strategy that is coupled with technology to manage the entire customer life cycle” (Al-Gasawneh et al., 2021, p. 28). Relationship marketing which is what CRM is based on, is a strategy in which customer relationship building is essential to the acquisition and retention of customers through marketing and servicing (Cano et al., 2021).

The findings of this study may also help managers implement CRM strategies that help with marketing techniques that will not only bring in new customers but retain existing customers that help the hotel stay profitable. Findings may also guide the recruiting phase of employee hiring to identify the right candidates needed to interface with customers, fostering a healthy relationship and building rapport with customers.

After speaking with participants, it was clear that addressing customer concerns and needs through strategic effort was a way to provide benefit for the customer and the hotel alike. By acknowledging and resolving customer concerns in a timely fashion, managers can demonstrate their commitment to ensuring positive experiences for customers and in turn customers understand their value (Mohd Shahril & Abdul Aziz, 2022). The findings of this study may also help in the application of technology to maintain connections with customers, provide unique experiences for the customers, and innovate ways to foster loyalty amongst customers. The finding of this study may also be beneficial to other personnel associated with the hotel, such as general managers, to develop and improve customer satisfaction practices and achieve financial stability over time.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change from this study include repeat patronage of customers, which increase business and fosters job security for employees, which can stimulate the local economy. Based on the profitability of the hotel, managers may be able to contribute to community programs that help underserved individuals have a better standard of living. Additional implications for social change include becoming the industry standard through better management strategies that encourage teamwork, customer-focused approaches, and improved products and services which could lead to environmental sustainability and long-term job creation. Managers who operate their hotels in a sustainable manner may contribute to environmental sustainability through offering amenities that are safe for use, reducing waste, using high efficiency water and electrical installations, and employing green practices. Managers of boutique hotels know

that part of their success is the ambiance and natural setting of the hotel, so creating a sustainable environment helps the hotel thrive and grow. The longer the business operates, the better chance of sustainable employment for employees to take care of their families, opportunity for onboarding of new employees, and improved employee-guest relations.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how managers of boutique hotels use CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction to increase profitability. The analysis of this study may be of interest to managers of any type of hotel and especially marketing managers of hotels. Managers may choose to deploy various strategies to improve customer satisfaction and profitability in their hotels beyond the ones presented by the participants, but my recommendations are to (a) develop strategies for positive customer employee interactions, (b) optimize human resources to implement those strategies, and (c) develop marketing practices that positively brand the hotel to attract more customers.

The first recommendation is to develop strategies for positive customer employee interactions. Managers in this study felt customer service was a major component of obtaining and retaining customers in their hotel. Customer service is more than just interacting with a customer, it involves maintaining customers, having the right people in place to assist customers, and effectively balancing the company-customer relationship (Metz et al., 2020). Customer service is a preemptive approach that requires behaviors beyond everyday servicing efforts (Sun et al., 2022). Strategies for positive customer

service interactions must be frequent, engaging, adaptable and result in quality outcomes (Rabiul et al., 2022). Managers need to develop strategies that foster positive customer experiences and encourage outstanding customer service interactions to affect satisfaction and loyalty of customers. A strategy could include providing an appreciation gift for customers celebrating a special occasion. Managers must focus on their primary accountability, which is to the customer, to understand what they need and what they desire, to foster better rapport and learn the best way an employee can service the customer. It is not difficult for customers to go to a different business if they feel they are not receiving good customer service, so it is imperative that managers provide the best customer service possible to maintain competitive advantage (Groth et al., 2019).

The second recommendation is to optimize human resources to implement personnel-related strategies for positive customer employee interactions. All participants felt their employees were instrumental in running the business. Although the customer is the crux of any business, employees are also pertinent to the effective operations of a business. Identifying and placing the right individuals with the right skills in the right roles in the company allows for opportunities to interact with customers in a positive way while providing exceptional customer service that may lead to profitable outcomes (Hultman, 2020). It is important to understand how resources are being utilized to provide managers with a better chance of affecting customer loyalty and satisfaction. Acknowledging the need to strategically optimize resources helps managers identify gaps in servicing, highlights improvements needed, and create competitive advantage (Mathews et al., 2021). It is not enough for a manager to just hire an individual to serve a

customer, but to assess the skills, education, and work ethic of a person to determine if they are a good fit for the business overall (Liang et al., 2021). Optimizing resources also includes employee training. Training employees is not only effective for building skills and knowledge but can ensure the survivability of a company through investment in the human resources that support organizational goals and customer service (Waqanimaravu & Arasanmi, 2020).

The last recommendation is the development of marketing practices that positively brand the hotel to attract more customers. All participants relied on marketing either by digital means or word of mouth but felt more could be done. Marketing is a way for companies to show the consumer what products and services they offer and encourage consumption of those products and services (Rosário & Raimundo, 2021). The shift from transactional marketing to customer centric marketing has changed the lens in which organizations look through to interact and retain customers (Hartwig & Jacob, 2021). Developing strategic marketing practices requires managers to balance providing value to the customer and safeguarding the company's interests (Rust, 2020). Distinguishing tangible ways a hotel differs from other hotels through marketing is an advantage managers can use to promote the hotel and the amenities and experiences being offered. The field of marketing has flourished using more technology such as social media, search engine optimization, and software tools. Digital marketing efforts allows companies to reach existing and potential customers on a larger scale with more frequency (Krishen et al., 2021; Olson et al., 2021). With a multitude of available channels through which to market, current and future marketing managers have the potential to deploy marketing

practices that positively brand the hotel to increase financial and company performance while bringing in more customers.

This study may be integrated into the literature through academic/professional journals to express how Boutique hotels maintain their viability in the metro Detroit area. Boutique hotels may also use the content of this study to improve training of employees to service customers more efficiently. I will also provide a link for the published study to all of my participants.

Recommendations for Further Research

I conducted a qualitative multiple case study to explore how managers of boutique hotels used CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction to increase profitability. The population of the study included four managers of boutique hotels in the Metro Detroit area. While the findings of this study applied to managers using CRM strategies in a hotel setting, there were limitations to this study and opportunities for further research.

A limitation of this study was the transferability of the findings to an alternate setting or variation of the current setting. This study focused mainly on the hotel industry and more specifically boutique hotels. Utilizing the same parameters of this study and applying it to different types of hotels such as chain hotels, all-suite hotels, or extended stay hotels may provide more insight on CRM strategies. Replication of this study may also be conducted in a different industry such as the banking, telecommunications, or insurance industries to gain a different perspective of how CRM strategies are used and applied in that setting. The new data may give managers the ability to identify service gaps or the best way to improve performance.

Managers of boutique hotels were the focus of this study. Although managers are aware of what goes on within their hotel, gaining insight from the hotel staff may solicit different results. Staff usually have more interaction with the customers than the managers and therefore may have a different outlook on what CRM strategies could be used to secure customer satisfaction. A phenomenological research approach is recommended to gain employee insight on their experience with interacting with customers.

Further research could include participants outside of the Metro Detroit area. Expanding to all of Michigan or even all the United States would help with generalization. Data collection for this study used interviews, industry documents, public records, and online ratings. A recommendation is to use alternate data sources such as company documents and observations. Lastly, this study was based on the CRM framework, which is rooted in relationship marketing and the ability to build long lasting relationships with customers. I recommend utilizing a different framework such as the three-factor theory to explore how managers use CRM strategies to affect customer satisfaction and profitability. The three-factor theory is a customer satisfaction model aimed at identifying if specific factors influence customer satisfaction (Kano et al., 1984). Application of the three-factor theory could produce different data points or themes based on participant responses.

Reflections

My doctoral journey has been lengthy, arduous, and filled with surprises. When I first started, I did not have a full grasp on what the process would involve and felt that I

could complete the program within four years. Reflecting back, I realized that I was overzealous, and reality kicked in pretty quick. To say I was challenged throughout this process is an understatement. I encountered various obstacles, both personally and academically, that diminished my motivation at times, but my perseverance and desire to never quit kept me moving forward on this doctoral journey. I am the first in my family to strive for this accomplishment of receiving a Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A.) degree, so completion was nonnegotiable.

My study focused on boutique hotels and the customer relationship management (CRM) framework, which I had no background in or understanding of. After reviewing the literature, some research, and consultation with my chair, my interest was piqued at exploring how managers of boutique hotels use CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction to increase profitability. This was not my original topic and although I fought hard to keep my original topic, my committee explained how I was out of alignment and encouraged me to make some changes. After some contemplation I changed my topic, and it was the best thing I could have done. I was able to progress more quickly and feel more connected with my topic. CRM and all its facets were intriguing and applying CRM in the context I did within my study gave me a different perspective overall.

I made sure there were no preconceived ideologies or biases present when selecting or interviewing participants. I avoided bias during my study by making sure I utilized my interview protocol when conducting interviews. The interview protocol kept me on track and left no room for my personal interjections. I did not know anyone in the hotel industry nor anyone implementing CRM in their business, which helped me avoid

bias when soliciting participants for this study. Overall, I am appreciative of the successes I have accomplished which have led me to this point in my doctoral journey. I have grown immensely academically, professionally, and personally.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how managers of boutique hotels use CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction to increase profitability. From the research data, four themes emerged which included customer orientation practices, customer satisfaction and loyalty, creating positive customer experiences, and technological capabilities. The results from this study were connected to the literature and the conceptual framework of CRM. It is recommended that managers develop strategies for positive customer employee interactions, optimize human resources to implement those strategies, and develop marketing practices that positively brand the hotel to attract more customers.

I set out to explore CRM strategies in a small sector of the hospitality industry to glean what drives customer satisfaction and profitability and obtained a wealth of information that can be applied to not only boutique hotels but other variations of hotels. Customer centricity is the focus for these boutique hotel managers and the strategies they put in place are centered on making sure the customer is the priority. In return for implementing CRM strategies, hoteliers are seeing financial gains and long-term sustainability. I recommend exploring different segments of the hotel industry and different regions to identify transferability of the study. Implications for social change in this study is geared toward job creation, job stability, giving back to the community, and

environmental sustainability. The findings from this study support the conceptual framework. CRM entails people, processes, and technology, which are important for the success of a hotel. Attaining knowledge of various strategies that benefit the customer and the hotel simultaneously is imperative to growing, adapting, being competitive, and socially responsible.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What you will do	What you will say script
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage often over a meal or coffee</p>	<p><i>Good morning/afternoon, my name is LaKewa Davis. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me to assist with my study. The interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes. During this time, I will make inquiries about strategies you as a manager use to successfully improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability at _____.</i></p> <p><i>The purpose of my study is to explore how managers of boutique hotels use CRM strategies to improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability.</i></p>
<p>Review aspects of consent form.</p> <p>Ensure the participant understands the content of the form and signs all the forms.</p> <p>Wait for signatures.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Consent Forms</p> <p><i>Before we begin the interview, I will walk you through each section of the informed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>Now that we have completed a review of the informed consent form I ask that you please sign the informed consent form as an indication that you understand the purpose of this study and your rights as a participant and that you agree to speak with me about your experiences of CRM strategies for use in my doctoral study.</i></p> <p><i>Additionally, I will be the only person with access to recordings and notes that I gather today. To ensure confidentiality I will use alphanumeric codes in my study and any publications that emerge from my study.</i></p> <p><i>Again, thank you for agreeing to participate and share your experiences.</i></p>
<p>Ask to record the interview and ensure the participant states their approval.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Recording Permission</p> <p><i>To facilitate my notetaking, I would like to record our Zoom conference call today. The purpose of recording the conference call is to provide me the ability to actively focus on our conversation while maximizing the amount of details received from our interview. Is recording the interview okay?</i></p>

	<p>If yes: <i>Thank you! Please feel free to request I stop recording if at any point if you prefer to keep something discussed off record.</i></p> <p>If no: <i>Thank you! I will not record and will only take notes of our conversation.</i></p>
Ensure participant understands they can ask questions at any time throughout the interview.	<p style="text-align: center;">Initial Question</p> <p><i>Before we begin, do you have any questions?</i></p> <p>If yes: <i>Take a moment to address any questions. Then say <i>If any further questions arise, please feel free to ask them at any point during our interview.</i></i></p> <p>If no: <i>If any questions arise, please feel free to ask them at any point during the interview. It is my goal to provide any information you need to feel comfortable participating.</i></p>
Watch for nonverbal cues. Paraphrase as needed. Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What customer relationship management strategies do you use to enhance your customers experience? 2. What customer relationship management strategies do you use to respond to customer dissatisfaction? 3. What processes do you use to ensure successful implementation of CRM strategies in your hotel? 4. What are the challenges in implementing your CRM strategies at your hotel? 5. How do you overcome the challenges of implementing your CRM strategies? 6. What technologies do you use to support your CRM strategies? 7. How do you use your CRM strategies to maintain competitive advantage with other hotels? 8. How do you use CRM strategies to ensure the customer is the priority? 9. How has your CRM strategies improved the financial performance of your hotel? 10. What other information might you share regarding how managers of boutique hotels use CRM strategies to affect customer satisfaction and increase profitability? <p style="text-align: center;">Reflection</p> <p><i>You mentioned earlier that _____. 11. Can you clarify_____?</i></p>
Reflect on answered or unanswered interview questions that need clarity after probing.	<p style="text-align: center;">Interview Conclusion</p> <p><i>I would like to thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview and provide information regarding how</i></p>

	<p><i>you improve customer satisfaction and increase profitability at _____.</i></p> <p><i>I will be conducting member checking for this interview and will send you an email within 72 hours that includes a summary of key points for each interview question. I ask that you review the email and reach out to me to clarify or add information should the need arise.</i></p> <p><i>Please reach out if you have any questions and thank you for your participation.</i></p>
Wrap up interview thanking participant	

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What customer relationship management strategies do you use to enhance your customers experience?
2. What customer relationship management strategies do you use to respond to customer dissatisfaction?
3. What processes do you use to ensure successful implementation of CRM strategies in your hotel?
4. What are the challenges in implementing your CRM strategies at your hotel?
5. How do you overcome the challenges of implementing your CRM strategies?
6. What technologies do you use to support your CRM strategies?
7. How do you use your CRM strategies to maintain competitive advantage with other hotels?
8. How do you use CRM strategies to ensure the customer is the priority?
9. How has your CRM strategies improved the financial performance of your hotel?
10. What other information might you share regarding how managers of boutique hotels use CRM strategies to affect customer satisfaction and increase profitability?