



# The Impact of Emotions in Customer Experience: CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki 2024

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The aim of this thesis was to explore the impact emotions play in customer experience and discover the emotions commonly elicited in the customer experience at CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki. The purpose of this thesis revealed the role of emotions in a customer's likeliness to review, recommend, and repurchase, all in which form customer loyalty and brand advocacy. The client, CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki, is a hostel providing affordable accommodation and promoting social interaction for making new friends.

The theoretical background informs readers about customer experience, customer journeys, customer experience management, employee experience, employee rounding, and employee expectations. Emotions and empathy play a significant role in customer experience and when not managed correctly, customer values can be contradicted, which impacts brand image and customer loyalty. The theoretical background proceeds in covering customers' expectations, because implementing integrated experiences, providing human interaction, and personalizing journey's forms a happy customer.

The research was conducted using qualitative research methodologies, interviews, and card-sorting, which was used for data collection. The interviews with hostel visitors were aimed at exploring which of the 20 emotions from "The Hierarchy of Emotional Value" (Figure 2.) was evoked throughout the customer experience at CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki. Also, discovering why, or how their emotions are driving or destroying long-term value and spending was crucial in managing their customer experience. The key findings from the interviews inspired the output of this thesis, the output is 4 development ideas for CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki.

The client has provided feedback about the thesis stating that the output gifts them the motivation to consider the emotions of guests in the future. The development ideas will be discussed and considered in the future with the management team of CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki to ensure good customer experiences are formed and positive emotions are elicited.

Keywords: Customer Experience, Customer Loyalty, Employee Experience, Empathy, Brand Advocacy

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## 1 Introduction

For years now, organizations have measured customer experience by the overall satisfaction of a product. However, the modern age shapes the way customer experience should be perceived. Good customer experiences are formed by emotion. (Barnes & Kelleher 2014, 8). The aim of this thesis is to explore the way emotions impact the customer experience and investigate their impact in a customer's likeliness to review, repurchase, and recommend. The purpose of this thesis should reveal that businesses must focus on eliciting emotions by focusing on employee experience and meeting customer expectations.

The research theories discuss the use of interviews and card-sorting to form an in-depth, semi-structured and personalized interview based on emotions from The Hierarchy of Emotional Value. (Figure 2). These research methods were developed around this and thus aims to investigate which of these 20 emotions are elicited in CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki's customer experience and why or how they are driving or destroying value and long-term spending. After providing a theory about each methodology, how the card-sorting and interviews were implemented is discussed. After the implementation discussions, the results from each research method reveals key findings and outcomes which indicate a guest's willingness to repurchase, recommend and review the hostel and the output gifts 4 development ideas that will be relayed to the management based on the customer experiences of the interviewees.

The thesis consists of six chapters. First, there is an introduction now discussing the content of the thesis followed by a company introduction. The third chapter of this thesis is the theoretical background, it introduces topics customer experience, customer journeys, customer experience management before it is sectioned into 3 parts. The first part gives word on, employee experience, the practicality and success of employee rounding and common employee expectations. The second part dives into the role of emotions in the customer experience and explores The Hierarchy of Emotional Value (Figure 2), empathy in the workplace and finally the factor emotions and customers values have in brand image and customer loyalty. The third part covers customer expectations, integrated experiences, human interaction, and personalization. Fourth chapter covers research theories, methodologies, implementations, and the results. The fifth chapter delivers 4 development ideas as the output and the sixth chapter ends this thesis with a conclusion. With that being said, the next chapter introduces the client: CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki and then dives into an introduction to the theoretical background of customer experience which will also elaborate on the topics it that the chapter covers.

## 2 CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki

Located in Valilla Helsinki, CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki was founded in 2012 and provides affordable accommodation with a goal at creating a social vibe for guests to meet friends. CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki is located on Sturenkatu 27, it is about 15 minutes by bus away from the city-centre. What makes CheapSleep Hostel different is not only the affordable pricing but there are also many rooms. They offer not only mixed-sex dormitory rooms, but all-female dormitory rooms that come with free Wi-Fi, family rooms that can fit up to 4 people and an en-suite. (Guest Reservations 2024.)

The hostel also has several popular facilities, they have a communal kitchen where shelves for free food are available, bathrooms, showers and lift for disabled guests, an on-site supermarket called Alepa, free parking and free WiFi. In 2023, CheapSleep opened a barception, a reception with a bar attached. Now, they sell snacks, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks at an affordable drink price. With that said, CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki's reception is open 24 hours 7 days a week, which makes contacting customer service easy and check in is seamless. The hostel experiences repeat customers more often than other properties, and couples rate the hostel 8.0 for two-person trips. (Booking.com 2024.)

More aspects are the range of hostel activities due to the arcade and game room located in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor common room, as the hostel environment is very international, the working language is in English and has a multilingual staff team. Buffet breakfast is available for an affordable price from 7:00 AM to 10:00 AM to ensure guests don't leave feeling hungry. CheapSleep Helsinki has 242 rooms, 37 of these are private guest rooms, the rest are mixed or all-female dormitories, it is a 15-minute walk from the Linnanmaki Amusement Park and Helsinki Hall of Culture and 2.4 km from the Olympic Stadium. (Trip.com 2024.)



Figure 1: CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki (Booking.com 2024)

### 3 Customer Experience

This chapter discusses many topics related to customer experience and is divided into 3 main topics. The first topic is all about the background of customer experience. It first explores what customer experience is. Following this, a history of customer experience is discussed to explain how it has evolved. To ensure that a practical and seamless experience is provided to customers, there must be specific measures that are taken to track, improve and manage the experience, which is why customer journeys and customer experience management comes into significance and is discussed here. Then the thesis explores what employee experience is and its link to customer experience. This section aims to highlight that employee experience is crucial in delivering a seamless customer experience because employees are the foundation to which the organization flourishes. A workplace with employees that are respected and appreciated are more likely to take risks and go out of their way. (Maylett, Wride, & Patterson 2017, 24). Secondly, this section covers employee rounding, it tells what it is, its importance and how to do it. Finally, the section discusses employee expectations, the expectations covered are flexibility, mental health benefits and HR technology.

The second chapter of the theoretical framework follows the emotions in a customer experience. Since emotions play a keen role, it is best to elicit positive emotions in the experience to ensure brand advocacy and customer loyalty is achieved. This chapter opens up about why emotions are important in customer experience and provides a discussion about The Hierarchy of Emotional Value, it walks readers through the elements of the hierarchy before diving into the importance of empathy and the impact emotions and customer values have in customer loyalty and brand image.

Finally, this chapter focuses on the expectations of the modern customer because the needs of today's customer are changing exponentially. Customers now expect a positive customer experience in return for the products they purchase which includes 'rational and emotional' experiences. (Waghmare 2019, 52). It highlights that answering customer needs elicits a positive experience and discusses integrated experiences, human interaction, and personalization.

#### 3.1 Background of Customer Experience

To start off, customer experience is defined as the action's a business takes to prioritize their customers' needs and oversee their journeys. (McKinsey & Company 2022). It is a direct relationship between company to customer and incorporates all of the interactions that customers make with a company. (Wintermantel 2024). It is a fundamental practice in business that is increasing in demand dating back as early as the 1920s, where it first became

known as a form of market research meant to improve advertising. After the war and in the 1970s it 'further spread into all sectors', due to the commodification of services shaping ideas that value and loyalty is formed through aspects other than pricing and availability. (Made For 2022.)

In 1994 and 1998, because of the World Wide Web and mobile payments, organizations learned that managing the customer experience is an imperative element in growing relationships with customers and understanding who they are. (Villani 2018, 2). A satisfying customer experience manages the journey not only from start to finish but before and after, it is linked to a customer's willingness to become loyal customers, brand advocates, recommend, and repurchase. (Klaus 2014, 2.)

A customer journey is the practice of outlining the stages of a customer's relationship with a company and offers the organization a comprehensive picture of what their customers want and expect. It helps to understand how customers are interacting and connecting with a company. Additionally, it investigates their emotions, motivations, and thoughts at every point of contact. This allows companies to see themselves from their customers point of view. It clarifies the emotions and experiences in their experience and highlights patterns, attitudes, issues, and opportunities for development at every stage. (Villani 2018, 83.) Which is also why Customer Experience Management is important in customer experience and the customer journey.

Customer Experience Management is about the steps a business takes to measure who their customers are and how their personal experiences are influencing the company image. By managing customer experiences, business leaders learn and adapt to their customers' needs. (Peppers, Rogers, & Kotler 2016, 6.) Additionally, customer experience management guides customers and gets companies to understand what it is like to be in their customers shoes, which ultimately requires the customer journey to help ideate a good customer experience. (Walden 2017, 25-26.) When customer experience management is not implemented, experiences, services, and products become complex and confusing in nature, this is when poor customer experience ignites. (McKinsey & Company 2016, 16). Customer experience management helps in analyzing, asking customers what they want, and monitoring touch points along the entire journey, which is vital for boosting loyalty, customer retention, brand advocacy, and forming a good customer experience. (Bordeaux 2021.)

The next part discusses the why employee experience is important in customer experience, it then talks about why employee rounding improves the employee experience and what common employee expectations are.

### 3.1.1 Customer experience begins with employee experience

Employee experience is important because at the end of the day, employees create a customer experience that mirrors their own experiences in a company. Employees who feel valued, involved, and respected drive the customer experience, saves a significant amount of time and saves money. Employees create many opinions around their interactions in a company, which is when they eventually give a customer experience that is congruent to their experience. (Maylett et al 2017, 23- 25.) Employee experience is created and affected by the employee and company. Therefore, employee experience is the joining of employee expectations, needs and wants and the company's long-term redesign to their expectations, needs and wants. (Morgan & Goldsmith 2017, 6-8.)

A good employee experience inspires mindset, attitude and establishes company culture so it is important that organizations make employees priority number one. When employees are not well cared for poor customer service ignites. Starbucks is relatively known for its great customer service; former CEO Howard Shultz announced the secret behind their success. He said that their number one task was to make sure that the employees delivering and communicating the experience to customers are well taken care of and stated that taking care of the customer came second. (Green 2017, chap. XXI, XIII & XXI.)

Employee rounding is a solution that puts employees first and it is explored in the next section. Employee rounding hands control to employees about how their 8-hour days go and what they expect from employers. The section next talks about what employee rounding is and why it is important.

### 3.1.2 How to improve the employee experience

Rounding is not a "how's it going" banter, it is a well-thought-out, deliberate conversation that boosts self-confidence in employees and is the best way to truly understand your employees' 'what'. Their 'what' is the thing that matters, motivates, and drives them to show up to work. Rounding is done by meeting a couple times a month and asking a set of questions aimed at knowing them personally and professionally. The goal is to ensure that employees have what they need and that their skills are recognized, rewarded, and applied to in renewed or progressive areas such as new departments, tasks, and additional training. The outcome creates a culture of employees that see themselves as assets, who feel heard, appreciated, valued, and trusted by managers. (Studer 2019, 94-95.)

Rounding originates in the field of healthcare, the routinely practice of doctors checking on patients. In a reversed business context, the patients are employees, and the doctors are CEO's, company leaders and managers. Rounding requires evidence-based leadership to observe what's going on in the organization, it approaches issues head-on to figure out what

employees truly expect from company leaders. (Studer 2007, 46-48.) There are many benefits of practicing employee rounding which include improved approachability, increased positivity, empowerment, engagement, more efficient systems, proactivity, transparent and trusting communication and improved relationships. Rounding also forms solutions to barriers and reduces stress and negativity in employees. (Tetzlaff & McLeod 2016, 16 & 18-19.) An example of questions that can be asked is in (Appendix 3).

Rounding is the ultimate employee to employer engager. When done correctly, the leaders' job becomes easier by reducing turnover and boosting efficiency. It is a method used to prevent problems and reinforce positive behaviors. This evidence-based practice promotes joy and allows workers to bond one on one with managers, brainstorm ideas, and press out concerns, all of which help foster feelings of purpose behind the work they do. (Crosby 2022).

The next section discusses employee expectations. The expectations explore how HR and regular employees can have more control over their work and mental health. The expectations examined are flexibility, mental health benefits and HR technology. The key findings in the sections are results from research studies conducted by Businessolver. The section conveys information from Businessolver's 2023 State of Workplace Empathy (Businessolver 2023), 2023 State of Workplace Empathy Empathetic Technology Smarter Service report (Businessolver 2023a), and 2024 Workplace Empathy reports. (Businessolver 2024). These statistics come from HR professionals, CEOs, and regular employees.

### 3.1.3 Employee Expectations

Employee expectations are important because when met, they create engaged employees. Engaged employees have a direct impact in customer experience as they feel confident and often willing go the extra mile for customers without being asked, they also pass positive emotions onto customers as a result. (Swayze 2023.) Which is why this thesis talks about employee expectations. Before heading on to emotions in customer experience, the final section of this chapter discusses 3 main expectations: flexibility, mental health benefits, and HR technology.

The first employee expectation is flexibility. When it comes to flexibility, a study of 10,000 workers found 96% of employees picked flexibility in their work hours as the number 1 empathetic benefit. Even though workers with flexible schedules are 40% more productive, flexibility goes deeper than scheduling and location. (Businessolver 2023, 11.) In fact, 93% feel workplace location benefits are empathetic, 81% of workers state they want flexibility in where they work and 93% want flexibility in their schedules. Unfortunately, only 39% of organizations in the USA offer flexible location and scheduling benefits, which is lower than

half. (Businessolver 2023, 12.) Additionally, for over 9 years, flexibility has been noted to be a key empathetic benefit, and in 2024, only 36% of employees recorded that they have access to flexible workhours. (Businessolver 2024, 4.)

The second employee expectation in this section covers mental health benefits because many things lead to poor mental health in working life. As a matter of fact, 84% of respondents state they went through a mental health problem and the factors included emotionally draining work, work-life balance difficulties, a lack of recognition and in 2024, emotional distress and burnout are the top factors. (Businessolver 2024, 9.). Anyone in the workplace regardless of their position can be impacted by mental health. 55% of CEOs, 50% of employees and 45% of HR personnel experienced mental health problems since 2023, but the stigma of mental health prevents them from taking time off. Unfortunately, 81% of CEOs, 72% of HR personnel and 67% of employees said yes that companies think mental health issues are viewed as a burden or weak. (Businessolver 2024, 3.) The most valuable benefits to nurture employee mental health along are: Open door policies, mental health benefits, employee assistance programs, flexible work hours, access to online mental health resources or clinics and being encouraged to take breaks away from work. (Businessolver 2024, 13.)

The final expectation among employees is adequate HR technology. HR technology drives empathy and efficiency and aids in regulating and delegating tasks. Adequate technology decreases the burden of showing up to work, it provides empathetic resources and services for HR professionals. Other than these points, technology streamlines strategy, addresses employees needs and feedback. Unfortunately, while these things are important aspects in producing productive work shifts, more than 30% of HR teams operate without any kind of benefits technology, they are also without tools to collect data, monitor and magnify employee input, and efficiently manage employee population. (Businessolver 2023a, 5). In fact, while 59% of HR employers use self-service tools and people analytics, 56% use HR services and 54% use automation tools. (Businessolver 2023a, 9.)

Technology makes human resource jobs easier and empathy fatigue less prevalent. Therefore, HR workers require critical tools to help address employee needs. 69% of HR employees want a single mobile app to access all benefit resources, 36% want text-message reminders, 35% want personalized messaging aligned with their personal situations and 27% prefer to engage with an interactive virtual assistant. Employee Assistance Program is a program that employees can take part in that addresses a range of issues they face in work and at outside of it. Employees expect this program to be accessible with technology. (Businessolver 2023a, 9.) That concludes the first chapter of the theoretical framework. The next chapter introduces why emotions are important in customer experience and provides a discussion about The Hierarchy of Emotional Value before diving into empathy and the impact emotions and customer values have in customer loyalty and brand image.

### 3.2 Emotions in CX and “The Hierarchy of Emotional Value”

This section discusses the importance of emotions in the customer experience because emotions accounted for 90 percent of a purchase decision in 2022, according to scientific research by The Black Project and Hotspex. Therefore, it’s non-negotiable that emotions are the primary decision maker in the customer experience, a significantly climbing number. (Männistö 2022, 5.) Considerably, a Harvard Business Review declared that companies see customers with an emotional connection to their brand as 56% more valuable than customers who have none and 60% of customers would buy more if businesses cared more for them. (Qualtrics n.d.) Unfortunately, only 6% of professionals in the industry trying to measure emotions have the correct metrics to successfully do it. (Männistö 2022, 5). As well, many organizations do not consider that customers make purchases based on their emotions. (Shaw & Hamilton 2016, 30.) This is tragic because when emotions are measured, key metrics like Net Promoter Scores, Customer Effort Scores and Key Performance Indicators improve on their own and it is sad that customer experience management programs lack this consideration. (Powton 2017.)

Colin Shaw oversaw major improvement to Maersk Line’s Net Promoter Score in 30 months after his clients focused on eliciting 3 emotions during the customer experience. The three emotions were pleased, cared for and trusting. (Shaw 2012, 2.) Nevertheless, companies should focus on eliciting positive emotions and find out how to appeal to them throughout the customer journey. (Shaw 2012, 4). Next there will be a figure (Figure 2.) of The Hierarchy of Emotional Value. The text after describes the figure to readers.

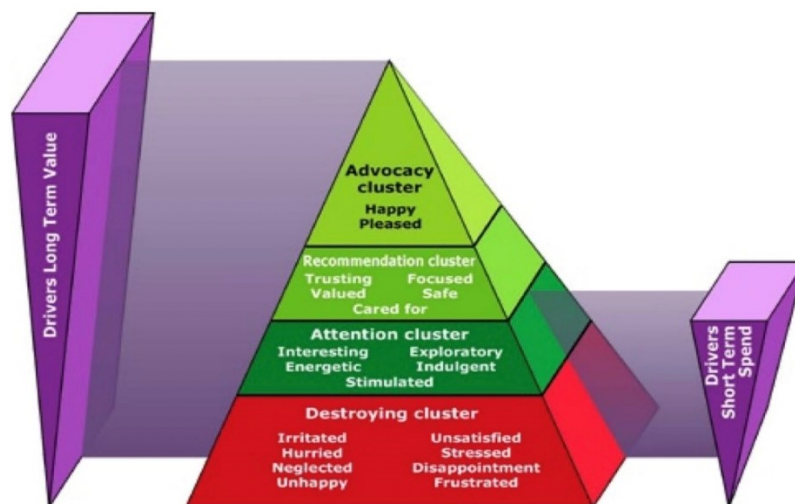


Figure 2: “The Hierarchy of Emotional Value” (Shaw 2013).

The figure above presents to readers The Hierarchy or Emotional Value (Figure 2) and represents the importance of emotions in the customer experience. The main point is that

there are 20 emotions that drive value and long-term spending and also form short-term value and spending in the customer experience. The hierarchy is shaped as a pyramid and divides the 20 emotions into a total of 4 clusters. First, there are 2 clusters that drive long term value and spending, these are the Advocacy cluster and the Recommendation cluster. Advocacy and Recommendation emotions benefit organizations by bringing revenue streams up and increasing customer loyalty, they manifest themselves through the customer experience and play a large role in connection to customer experience. Subconsciously, humans pick up emotions throughout their journey and it takes seconds and minutes to successfully drive or substantially destroy value. (Shaw & Hamilton 2016, 23-25 & 163-164.) The emotions in these clusters form a loyal customer, advocacy emotions in the top cluster are happy and pleased while recommendation emotions are trusting, valued, cared for, focused and safe. (Shaw 2013.)

The Attention cluster forms short-term spending and small value, while they may stimulate curiosity and are the common emotions marketers aim to evoke, they do not ensure that a customer will repurchase. These emotions are: Interesting, energetic, stimulated, exploratory and indulgent. The Destroying Cluster on the bottom is a group of emotions that drive short term value, are linked to negative emotions, and destroy customer loyalty and or spending when induced. These emotions are irritated, hurried, neglected, unhappy, unsatisfied, stressed, disappointment, and frustrated. (Shaw 2013.) Therefore, positive emotions drive long term value and negative emotions drive short term value and destroy it. Shaw believes that evoking the 20 emotions from The Hierarchy of Emotional Value into the customer journey plays a keen emotional indicator on whether the customer will come back. (Shaw 2013).

Due to the large role of emotions in the customer experience, empathy is an essential benefit in the experience as it gives the ability to see things from the customers point of view, and as well, in the employees' shoes. Employees deserve empathy because they create a better experience for the customer, as discussed in 3.1.1. The next section of this chapter talks about the importance empathy has in greater detail, what it is and its purpose before diving into the factor of emotions and customer values in customer loyalty and brand image.

### 3.2.1 The importance of empathy

Historically speaking, empathy came in various formations for its ability to 'shift the shape of self', cross the threshold into alien forms, be present in other realities, transform into art pieces and take on the experience's others have. (Lanzoni 2018, 2). Empathy is the ability to view things from someone else's point of view by placing yourself their shoes. Empathy develops compassion toward a person and their situation, making the situation feel less intense and distressing. (Reid 2024). Empathy is important because it has been linked to

'altruistic helping behaviour', that pushes people to assist others in despair. People who display empathy in the workplace develop value and feel purpose in not only their jobs but their lives. Individuals with high empathy are more likely to take on complex duties because they 'feel' for a customer, whereas those with poor empathy are 'more sensitive' to the conditions they find themselves in. (Perrewe, Jonathon, Halbesleben & Christopher 2015, 14-15.)

Today, a lack of empathy results in burnout and hurdles. 63% of CEOs find it difficult to express empathy consistently, 47% of employees find it challenging, and 42% of HR professionals. Moreover, Jon Shanahan, Businessolver President and CEO states that many CEOs feel that they are perceived as being weak or feel tension when they use empathy which creates a sort of stigma that then snowballs into a negative company culture, this is coined as 'empathy stigma'. (Businessolver 2024, 9.) Therefore, empathy is a key skill to have because empathy in the workplace forms relationships among employees by allowing one another to bond. Building relationships in the workplace increases levels of productivity and communication and empathetic managers are documented to excel in work. (Durga 2022.) 87% of employees have said that empathy is essential but when statements and promises are not followed through with action it is seen as "disingenuous". (Hemmerdinger 2023). Delivering an experience laced with value, support, and meaning is what it means to have empathy for employees. With that comes an even better customer experience, understanding that employees are the face of a brand and serve the number one priority in customer experience is the recipe in relating employee experience and customer experience together. (Swayze 2023.)

The next section covers customer loyalty and brand image, which can be largely affected by emotions and customer values. Cancel culture is linked to customer experience because it diminishes customer loyalty and advocates for brand cancellation. Cancel culture is a result of emotions evoked in the destroying cluster, which limits value and provokes short-term spending, from The Hierarchy of Emotional Value. (Figure 2.)

### 3.2.2 The factor of emotion and customer value in brand image and loyalty

Brand image and customer loyalty is highly susceptible to emotions and customer values and this section argues why, it all starts with cancel culture. Cancel culture effects brand image because its goal is boycott and publicly humiliate organizations that have done things which society does not tolerate, often on political or social grounds. (Newport Institute 2022). It plays a significant role in customer loyalty because it encourages customers to withdrawal support by unfollowing and or switching brands. It is regarded as a significant phenomenon because of its inciteful public pressure to cancel brands. (Mohsen 2022, 2.) With the intent to 'jump-start forward movement', the fuel for cancel cultures fire comes nonetheless from

emotions themselves. Emotions such as outrage, disgust, and fear elicit a response intended to reject or punish. When evoked, these emotions set aside empathy and forgiveness in exchange for anger and manifests as removing financial support from a business, getting employees fired, verbally targeting, blocking, and unfollowing social media accounts, protesting and public shaming. (Newport Institute 2022).

These actions are often objectionable and offensive. (Dudenhoefer 2020). Furthermore, due to its efficiency in connecting people and sharing, social media is the powerhouse where cancel culture lives. (Hands 2020). Many use platforms on social media to target companies with a socially 'inappropriate' brand image, campaign message, or statement. Some common justice issues include sexism, antisemitism, homophobia, abuse, and racism. These social justice issues easily trigger emotions and controversy. (Slyt 2020.)

In the end, we follow brands because it is a form of identity expression, part of our identity expression is formed by 'following those who embody our identity'. Cancelling is caused by the contradiction of a customer's values and beliefs. Customers no longer wish to support brands that challenge their cognitive, emotional, and personal values. Our beliefs are linked to our social identities, so when a brand is selling identity as part of their value proposition, customers now demand that companies remain authentic, consistent, and transparent. (Tyson 2019.) Additionally, today's customers want meaningful connections from brands, they expect excellent customer experience and would rather support brands that align with their personal values according to Mckenzie. (no date.) That's why brand image and customer loyalty is highly affected by emotions and values. In fact, 44% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 64 said they would boycott a company for mistreating animals, 41% for mistreating workers, 40% for corruption and fraud, 38% for tolerating racism, and 35% for damaging the environment. Of those surveyed, 34%, 33%, and 32% said they would boycott a company for selling unhealthy products, selling defective products, and tolerating sexism, revealed a study from 2020. (Buchholz 2021.)

Therefore, cancel culture affects customer loyalty and brand image due to the harshness of emotions triggering a customer's values and social media. This is unfortunate however it can be avoided. One way to do this is talked about in the next chapter. The next chapter discusses the expectations of customers today. When listening to customer needs, it is important to follow through with actions, so the following sections highlights how customer expectations have changed, and what they often expect today. These expectations are integrated experiences, human interaction, and personalization.

### 3.3 Expectations of the modern customer

Customer expectations are 'any set of behaviors or actions that is anticipated when interacting with a brand'. Customer expectations in the past were based mostly on

fundamental characteristics like quality and price. However, the modern customer expects proactive and friendly service, personalized touchpoints, and an integrated experience with their digital channels. In fact, 61% of customers expect better personalization as technology advances and 65% expect companies to adapt to their needs and preferences. (State of the Connected Customer 2020.)

The difference between a satisfied customer and a dissatisfied one is the satisfied customer contributes is 2.6 times more revenue than the dissatisfied customer. Fostering a great customer experience by following customer expectations ensures spending and loyalty. Maintaining consistency across all touchpoints, controlling the customer journey, and delivering a satisfying customer experience are all necessary to create a satisfied customer whose needs are met. Furthermore, customers today expect companies to preserve their integrity while keeping their word, which may be accomplished by providing the assistance and care they have pledged to. (Frichou 2022.)

Customers prioritize ease and efficiency over enjoyment and value the following aspects in a customer experience: ease of payment, efficiency, convenience, and friendly, informed staff. On the same note, customers naturally draw parallels between their experiences in the physical world versus the effectiveness of the digital journeys via internet and mobile apps and expect minimal differences in their digital and physical journeys. “This means that customers want good products with quality information, great advice, reviews from friends, lightning-fast checkouts and easy-peasy returns”. (Lafrenière 2019, 6 & 10.) The next section talks about the customer expectations are. First the section talks about integrated experiences and then human interaction, before finalizing with personalized experiences.

### 3.3.1 Integrated experiences.

The first expectation customers want is integrated experiences. Nowadays, customers expect that shopping and customer service is easier to deal with and they want a connected experience. As of fact, 79% of customers demand consistent interactions across departments, 55% believe they are speaking with different departments rather than a single business, and 56% say they frequently repeat or clarify information to different agents, according to a 2023 survey. (State of the Connected Customer 2020.)

One way to create a connected experience for customers is by breaking down the business silos, in better words, taking down the silo mentality. The silo mentality is an attitude that arises when certain departments or sectors refuse to share information with others within the same company. This strategy will reduce efficiency throughout the operation, weaken morale, and may contribute to the collapse of a productive organizational culture. (Gleeson 2021).

The first step in overcoming the silo mentality is to develop a common vision. This means overcoming behavioral issues and making sure that all members of the executive team are knowledgeable on the organization's long-term goals, departmental objectives, and significant projects. Second, by cooperating to accomplish a shared objective. This entails ensuring that workers understand the goals and how various system components overlap and combine to create a unified view. Third, encouraging and rewarding the shared objective among groups, people, and sizable audiences. Fourth, setting deadlines for the shared goal, benchmarking, assigning tasks and goals to management team members, and organizing frequent meetings with the aim of holding staff members accountable for their assigned work, are all ways to execute and measure goals. Lastly, assembling a successful team that is knowledgeable, cooperative, creative, and self-assured. Management should encourage and facilitate interdepartmental communication, reduce the number of long and frequent meetings, create accessible meeting spaces, implement a system for cross-departmental education and training, and welcome constructive criticism from other departments to achieve this. (Gleeson 2021.)

Experiences that are integrated enhance user interactions across several platforms and touchpoints to provide a seamless experience; integrated experiences give each touchpoint a sense of coherence and connection. (Bre 2024.) Another way to create an integrated experience is through omni channels. Omni channels are an excellent solution to create this type of seamless, integrated experience for the customer. Omni channels facilitate both online and in-store shopping and offer information in a variety of media formats and removes the need for customers to give information frequently. Instead, it focuses on the customer's experience and emotional connection. (Guest 2016, 143 & 161-162.)

A company that uses an omni channels approach is Starbucks. Starbucks has a rewards app that allows users to make orders and track loyalty points altogether. Before paying for their morning coffee, employees scan the customers Starbucks card in their rewards app, acquiring more points and rewards as a result. Customers have access to their purchase history and points in one place through their mobile rewards app. With each purchase scanned, points are collected which can be used later for free products and deals. Customers can also check and refill their cards straight from the app. This can be done in person, over the phone, or on the website too. Additionally, customers can choose whether they want promotional advertisements sent to their email or through the app. Updates to the card or profile are published in real-time across all channels, enabling information sharing at the same time. (Fontanella 2024.)

Lastly, websites must be easy to use, clear, and concise. All devices, including tablets, PCs, and smartphones, should be able to access them. Websites ought to be tested across a variety of browsers, including Google Chrome, Safari, and others. Asking friends or family for

feedback on how the website works on their devices is also advised to ensure that the functions and graphics remain consistent regardless of the user's location or device. (Leigh 2018, 18.) All touchpoints like the website should be designed well so users get 'real-time' information about what is in store, number of stocks, opening and holiday hours, product availability and details. (Barnes & Kelleher 2014, 45).

Aside from integrated experiences, there are other expectations that customers want to see met in their journey. Which is why the next part of this section covers human interaction. In a world of technological advancement, human interaction is required to fulfill customer expectations, which the next part discusses and talks about why it is important in the customer experience.

### 3.3.2 Human interactions.

In today's world, technology does not support all aspects in a journey. Customers require human interaction because good customer experience is formed when emotional expectations are met. Emotional and rational expectations include surprise offers, empathy, integrity, security, familiarity, honesty, and trust. As well, 64% of customers expect that they receive real-time interactions with companies. (Waghmare 2019, 52-53.) That is why human interaction is crucial, and staff interactions are impactful. Aside from this, customers may learn about products from several sources and are likely well-informed. Therefore, customers want the staff to be knowledgeable as well, since they rely on them to correctly inform them about a brand, the things they sell and adequate product knowledge. (Villani 2018, 4).

Since customers are human, naturally they react to human connection instinctively and successfully more than they do AI, slogans, packaging, or discounts according to Maylett et al. (2017, 24-25). 82% of United States customers and 74% of non-U.S. customers demand human interaction in their customer journey. Additionally, 59% said that companies have lost the human touch in customer experience. (Puthiyamadam 2017.) To add, 80% of customers, human validation of output from AI is regularly sought out, and unfortunately due to the rise of technology taking over human jobs, 61% of customers say they are treated as numbers by companies. (State of the Connected Customer 2020.)

Although automated support systems were designed to handle problems and improve customer care and support, they have a significant drawback. They lack the human touch that is essential in customer experience. These automations have made customers feel forgotten rather than cared for. The new technology has become so prevalent that customers feel as though they are "stuck in voicemail jail." (Ajouez 2023.) This consequence has left customers demanding that they receive human interaction. In May of 2022, the government of Spain announced a bill that would make it "obligatory" for companies to use real people in customer service pick up calls, and to be responded to within 15 minutes. Basic service

providers for phone internet and utilities must also offer customer service 24 hours a day, all year due to the negative outlash from the public about automated voices over the phone. (EuroNews 2022.)

The final customer expectation in the customer experience which is covered in this thesis is personalization. The next part talks about the importance of personalization and why understanding customers and providing a service tailored to their needs and lifestyle can improve the customer experience, it also talks about the significance of affordable and sustainable personalization.

### 3.3.3 Personalization

Personalization is important because not every customer is the same, 80% of customers with high emotional engagement expect brands to know their preferences on a personal level while 52% of customers would switch brands if their experiences were not personalized. (Waghmare 2019, 52.)

Understanding the customer requires data about the different segments in a brand. Customer conversations, journeys and technology are tools that aid in learning the customer's needs, reactions, expectations, and purchase anticipation. These tools can classify the words and feelings customers use into insights. These tools help build personas. Personas aid customer support teams and they enable a customer centric environment. Personas give an idea to customer service representatives about who they are dealing with, they personalize the experience for each customer, as each customer is different and typically never the same. (Waghmare 2019, 55 & 61.) Personalizing communication styles delivers a fantastic customer experience. Staff can fine-tune their words through communication channels to emphasize with the challenges certain segments go through. Instead of treating customers like numbers, it is suggested that customers are treated as unique human beings with individual needs, preferences, and lifestyles. Apart from communication styles, this means that companies must stop offering the same product and service to everyone, customers now want to receive offers tailored to them, offering relevant products and content to the right customer. (Lafrenière 2019, 33-34.)

According to Suman Sarkar, affordability is key to personalization. Affordable and sustainable personalization starts by working with what is already available to the company, why produce more product when utilizing current offers can create a more sustainable culture? Rephrasing offers so they speak to the customer about their individual needs can be more important than the product itself. Creating flexible operations can provide a lifeboat for affordability. Rather than keeping one supply chain for all customers, creating different supply chains and suppliers that specialize in specific areas with different demand patterns is ideal. For example, a supplier specializing in synthetic clothes looks different than a supplier

specializing in cotton clothes. Finally, inadequate planning to reduce waste creates expensive product and drives customers away. Personalized products require more resources to correctly answer needs and demands. Reducing raw material waste creates sustainable personalization and eliminating raw waste can be done by using computer programs that optimize and order materials based on current and anticipated demand. (Sarkar 2019, 70-77.)

#### 4 Diving into the customer experience by harnessing emotions

The following section talks about the theory behind this research and then jumps into the methodologies. The strongest research methods to match the theory, emotional theme, and inspiration behind this thesis are card-sorting and interviews. The next section involves theory of card-sorting (emoji cards) and interviews, it also talks about the implementation of card-sorting and the implementation of the interview. Additionally, after the implementations are explained, the next section discusses the key findings of the interviews, the key findings include 3 main themes, the takeaways from the findings as well as information about the feedback received regarding the cards. After the findings are discussed the thesis dives into the output of this thesis which are the development ideas and after the development ideas are told, the entire thesis will be wrapped up in a conclusion which gives a summary to readers about the contents discussed in this thesis.

As a reminder, the aim of this thesis is to explore the impact that emotions play in customer experience. Additionally, this thesis aims at discovering which emotions are commonly elicited in the customer experience at CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki and if they play factors in guest happiness and willingness to repurchase, recommend, and review CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki. Therefore, to understand the meaning behind the research, this section will talk about Colin Shaw who is an expert in Customer Experience and who formed The Hierarchy of Emotional Value which has been covered in section 3.2.

Customer experience specialist Colin Shaw worked with the London Business School to undertake research with the goal of identifying the emotions that shape long-term value and influence the customer experience. They developed what is now known as The Hierarchy of Emotional Value throughout the course of the two-year study, as mentioned in section 3.2. The hierarchy developed the notion that there are 20 emotions which drive or destroy value and spending. It is well known that emotions account for more than half of a customer's experience. (Shaw 2012, 2). Consequently, businesses increase long-term value by generating favorable feelings, which in turn increase sales, Net Promoter Scores, and the number of devoted clients acquired. (Hamilton & Shaw 2016, 7).

Therefore, the research for this thesis aims to check what emotions in The Hierarchy of Emotional Value drive CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki's customer experiences. Their emotional engagement can be figured out by asking them how they feel. (Shaw 2013). The research also aims to figure out if the destroying cluster impacts the guest's willingness to stay again, rate and review, and recommend CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki friends and family. The research will tell if the hostel has formed or destroyed long-term value and spending. Recommendation and Advocacy emotions will indicate long-term value and spending while destroying emotions should indicate short-term value and spending. The research will ask how guests feel about the quality of service and stay, why they feel that way and find out what could be done better. The main outcome of the research are 2 interviews and development ideas based on the guest's customer experience obtained from the interviews. By getting close and personal with their guests, the research will discover if CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki elicited destroying cluster emotions with any of their guests, and if they did, what are the steps they can make in the future to avoid the destroying emotions, these results will form the development ideas discussed further along in the thesis.

The following section talks about the research methodologies. The strongest research methods to match the theory, research design and inspiration behind this thesis are card sorting and interviews. The next section involves theory of cards-sorting, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews. It also talks about the implementation of the card sorting and the implementation of the interviews. Additionally, after the implementations are explained, the next section discusses the key findings of the interviews, the key findings include 3 main themes, the takeaways from the findings as well as information about the feedback received regarding the cards. After the findings are discussed this thesis dives into the output of this thesis which were the development ideas and after the development ideas are told, the entire thesis will be wrapped up in a conclusion, which gives a summary to readers about the contents discussed in this thesis.

#### 4.1 Card Sorting "Emoji Cards"

The use of card sorting has been implemented to create a modern and thought-provoking interview that reflects and collects the most accurate and uncovered details about interviewees emotions and customer experience. The usage of cards formed a more interactive, innovative, modernized, and intimate interview. Emotion cards were implemented to guide the interviews. Card sorting enabled an innovative and modern approach as a research method and as a result helped to understand the customer better because they allowed story telling. It is said that an interview can be strengthened by creating boundary objects and applying "card sorting to understand user needs or storytelling by tangible touchpoint cards". (Stickdorn et al 2018, 22 & 122.)

The cards help the interviewees identify their emotions, dig up the underlying causes, unlock memory recall, develop an awareness and perception to each touchpoint, and lead to a detailed discussion of their journey. The cards were meant to be helpful in the elaboration and analysis of their expectations and investigation to their needs. Therefore, this research method has been created to better understand not only the needs of the interviewees but their feelings too, which led to an in-depth and semi-structured interview. Next the implementation of the cards is covered followed by the results.

#### 4.1.1 Implementation of card sorting

Using the 20 emotions in The Hierarchy of Emotional Value (Figure 2.), each emotion was paired with an emoticon face and definition (Figure 3). The cards were double sided, one with an emoji and the other with a matching emotion and definition. The cards stated on the bottom if the emotion fell into the destroying cluster, attention cluster, recommendation, or advocacy cluster. That is because destroying and attention emotions required more digging to find out the 'why'. In the interviews, the cards were placed emoji face up. The interviewees then had to choose the emojis they felt matched in response to they felt emotionally, in context to the question, almost like texting to a friend. The next figure shows an example of how the cards look.

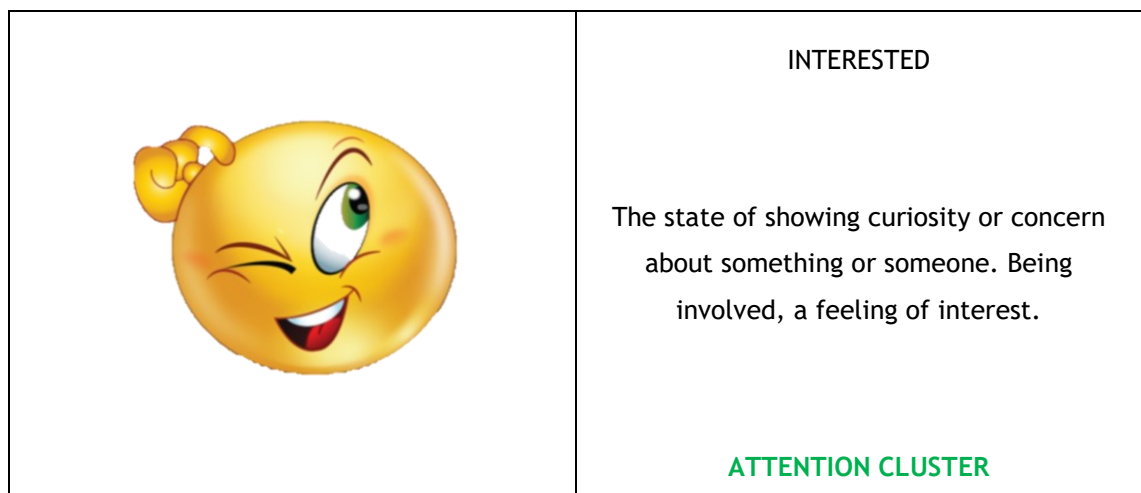


Figure 3: Emotion Card Sorting "Emoji Card"

#### 4.1.2 Results of Card Sorting

The figure above is meant to give readers a visualization of how the cards looked. The cards were printed with the intent that they are two-sided, with the emoji facing up on the table and the name of the emoji with its definition facing down. The definition also included the cluster that the emotion belongs to, because destroying emotions would trigger an additional question. When the cards were introduced, the following was said:

“So, I’m going to introduce you to some cards. They’re the creative guide for the interview and they’re based on a theory that there are 20 emotions that drive or destroy value in a customer experience, there’s 20 face cards with 20 emotions behind them and as a warmup, I’m just going to ask you to choose 1 or more cards after I ask you the next question, this is just a practice. So, can you tell me how are you feeling (in general) right now? Please pick 1 or more faces”. (Interviewer).

This was received well, and the use of card sorting implemented into the interview phase resulted in a thorough interview that left guests feeling seen, welcomed and that they had fun. The next section now discusses the interview theory along with the implementation before going into the results of the interviews.

## 4.2 In-Depth & Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview theory covers two styles of interviews that were utilized. The interviews used and discussed in this section are semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews. First, we will discuss semi-structured interviews, then the in-depth interviews will be discussed.

Used as a qualitative method for data collection, semi-structured interviews can lead to the interviewer motivating the participant into more detail of their answers leading to the rephrasing of questions and adaptations according to the interview situation. Additionally, a semi-structured interview is “intended to achieve clarification and understanding”. (Galletta 2013, 3 & 78.) The interviews were semi-structured because some questions were adjusted and avoided depending on their answers in question 12. If the interviewee pulled only good emotions, there was less to dig compared to destroying emotions being pulled. Therefore, there are two different interview scripts in, interviewee 2 received an additional question. (Appendix 1 & Appendix 2).

In-depth interviews on the other hand, are a qualitative method used for data collection that helps to gain a deeper understanding and connect more intensely with guests because unlike surveys and questionnaires, in-depth interviews are a great way to create an intimate atmosphere, they are mostly done face to face. They are significant because they provide knowledge about needs, wants, encounters, items, worries, procedures as well the interviewees mindset, perspectives, issues, ideas and settings to researchers. (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence & Schneider 2018, 122.)

### 4.2.1 Interview Implementation

The interviews were conducted with two guests, the first interviewee was from Italy and the second interviewee was from Spain. The interviews were conducted at the end of the summer season, in August 2024. They were conducted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor common room of the hostel

because the reception and bar are located on this floor, which naturally attracts more guests. Both interviews were conducted face-to-face as this made the process interactive and social. To attract interviewees, a sign was put up explaining that guests are welcome to take part in an interview. As a result, the interviewees willingly volunteered to sit down at the table near the bar and answer the questions. As well, to make the process of analyzing and collecting the interview data sufficient, the interviews were audiotaped. Audio tapes, photographs, video tapes, mappings and notes are among the many ways to organize interview data. Audio tapes should be transcribed and while it is a “time consuming task” it is necessary to build confidence in data analysis and interpretations. Therefore, transcribing audiotapes and checking transcriptions for accuracy leads to organized data collection. (Galletta 2013, 121). The interviews were replayed, transcribed, and sorted. For the respect of the participants, no names were recorded, so they remain anonymous.

The interview was designed around a range of questions. These themes were formed after the transcription was made. The following figure displays the themes that were discussed in the interviews. The abbreviation CSH stands for CheapSleep Helsinki. The content below will talk readers through the interview process based on its structure in the figure below. (Figure 4).

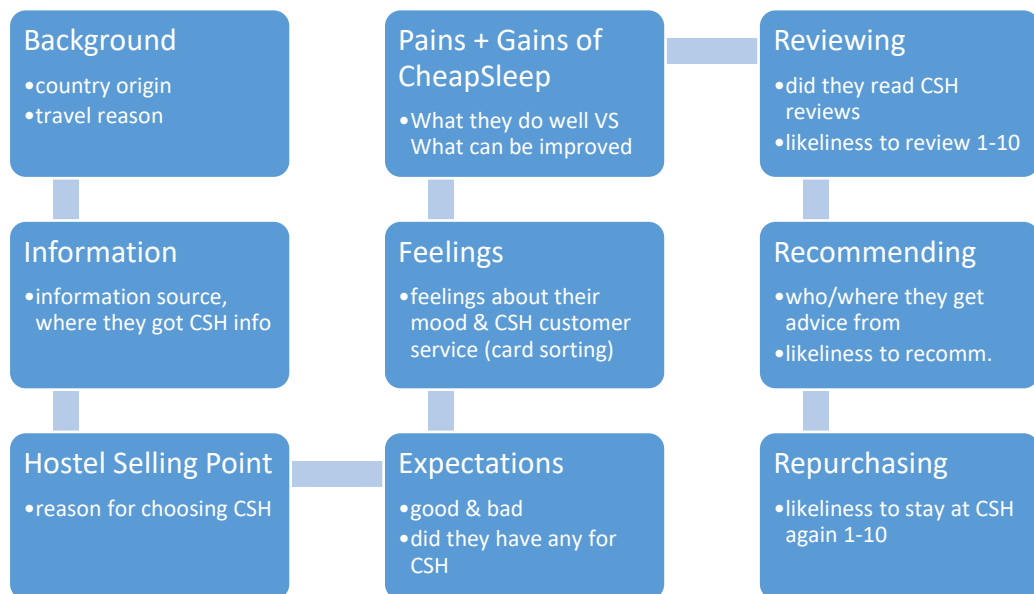


Figure 4: Interview Structure

Figure 4 provides readers with a visualization and idea about the structure of the interview. First, the background questions (Appendix 1 & Appendix 2) were implemented to build rapport and to know the interviewees. These helped get to know them a little by starting out with questions about where they come from, their reason for travelling and if they enjoy Helsinki. They were asked about their mood in general (this was when the cards were introduced). These questions “broke the ice” and fostered a comfortable setting.

The main questions asked where they got information from the hostel, their reason for choosing CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki, if they read reviews, if they formed expectations for the CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki before their visit, and if they had been met. In addition, they were asked how likely on a scale from 1-10 they are to leave a review after a good service experience, versus a bad one. They were asked what forms a good service experience in a hostel in general, and what would form a negative experience. (Question 10, Appendix 1 & 2.) Question 10 formed a perception into the thesis aim, with a purpose to figure out if a good experience in a hostel generally would affect the willingness to review. These questions opened insight into how a good experience in hostels is formed and what the customer expectations were, as meeting customer expectations are a vital piece of the customer experience. (Section 3.3). They were also asked if they needed advice on their trip and if they did, who/where they went to and if they did not ask advice, who/where they would hypothetically go (this formed a perception on how recommendations in travel advice effects the purchase decision).

The interviewees were asked (with the cards) how they felt about the customer experience and service of the hostel. They were asked if the cards were accurate, and why they felt the way they felt. They were asked an additional question when pulling destroying emotions, what could have been done better in the situation. After this, they were asked what CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki does well on, versus what they can improve on. Altogether, this question with the cards formed pains and gains of the customer journey, which were then used to inspire the development ideas discussed later on.

As mentioned, the aim of the thesis is to figure out if emotions affect the interviewees willingness to review, recommend and repurchase the hostel. Therefore, the final questions asked on a scale from 1-10 how likely are they to leave a review, recommend and repurchase from CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki. This then would answer the question about the aim. The next question talks about the key findings from the interviews, which came to a total of 3 key findings or themes. The themes uncovered main takeaways, it also talks about the willingness to review, recommend and repurchase the hostel. The interviews helped to form the development ideas discussed in the section after.

#### 4.2.2 Results of the Interviews

The first common theme from the interviews showcased that interactions with staff members play a key role in guest satisfaction. Since humans make intuitive customers and while positive emotions are wonderful, negative emotions damage a customer experience greatly and that damage can be irreversible. (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence & Schneider 2018, 4.) Staff that goes out of their way to do favours, who are polite and friendly are crucial in CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki's reviews and ratings. In fact, on Booking.com, of guest reviews,

Staff makes up the highest score with a rating of 8.9, out of all categories possible for rating. (Booking.com 2024). This does not come as a surprise, instead this supports the theory about employees affecting the customer experience. It is imperatively true that staff make up a large component of the customer experience because, as mentioned in section 3.1.3, engaged employees feel more confident in the work they do, and often times they are willing to go the extra mile for customers without being asked, in doing so they pass positive emotions onto customers as a result. (Swayze 2023.)

Furthermore, this theme uncovered that staff are relied on for providing relevant information to guests about what to do and see in Helsinki, places to eat, how to get to the airport and railway station, as well as any inquiries about check out times and other information regarding their stay at the hostel. This supports more of the theory, about customer expectations. Since consumers depend on the employees to accurately inform them about the company, the products they sell, and sufficient product knowledge, customers also want the staff to be knowledgeable, as was discussed in Section 3.3.2. (Villani 2018, 4). Therefore, staff must have knowledge on the street names, bus and tram numbers, train and metro knowledge plus different routes, facilities, restaurants, and bars around the hostel and any landmarks, parks, and attractions in Helsinki. Additionally, receiving quality service from staff is not only a need but an expectation. Staff must be aware of how important they are. A research study found that the top factors leading a positive experience in hospitals came from the interactions made with staff. What made the staff interactions fruitful was the abundance of information, making sure complaints are handled, empathy, politeness, involving patients in making decisions, a good atmosphere and a team that makes patients feel looked after. (Stickdorn et al 2018, 4.)

On another note, staff can also contribute to a bad experience in hostels. Confusion may erupt in the customer journey, and personnel with lack of awareness or understanding of the hostel's surroundings and any other information required by guests would lead to a bad experience. With that being said, the staff largely contributed to the emotions of the guests in CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki, it was revealed that they managed to make their guests feel happy and cared for which are emotions belonging to the advocacy and recommendation clusters, this showcases the formation of value and long-term spending which are catalysts for customer loyalty and brand advocacy. Staff members contribute to good experiences and after a good experience, guests are more than likely to leave a review. The likeliness to review the hostel is solely based on a good experience, which according to the data, they managed to provide. This also shows in the results that an employee experience in fact does affect the customer experience, linking the two together as stated in Section 3.1.1.

The second key finding, and theme found in the interview was that the hostel formed value by providing guests with the ability to make new friends, to socialize, take part in activities

and games and be involved in conversations with other people. These are now all noted as necessities in making guests feel exploratory, happy, and cared for at the hostel. This component often mentioned, suggests that to feel good about their experience, interacting with other people can provide a sense of welcoming, wellbeing and promote socializing.

The hostel received good feedback for their ability in helping people know each other and giving outlets to form friendships. Not only do guests expect that they receive quality treatment from staff, but they also expect to meet new people from the hostel. This concept means that making friends improves the quality of stay and likelihood to recommend, review and repurchase from the hostel. However, due to many cultures forming together in Finland, guests do take note that the Finnish culture has an affect in the confidence of approaching new people, leading to feelings of stress, which can destroy value. In a positive light, there are many opportunities in the hostel because of the game night, activities and events that eliminate this anxiety and provide the outlet to make friends, which is an expectation, gain and contributes to long-term value and spending.

Cleanliness was the third and final theme caught in the analysis of the interviews. Uncleanliness in a hostel contributes to the willingness to leave a negative review. Uncleanliness evidently destroys value, prevents further expenditure, and promotes a bad customer experience in hostels. On Booking.com, cleanliness received a rating of 7.9 (Booking.com 2024), however, each interviewee revealed that the guest's willingness to review, recommend and repurchase from CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki came from not just staff and the social vibe but also the cleanliness. Cleanliness in hostels is also what contributes to a good experience. However, cleanliness does not only stem in the rooms, their guests also look into other facilities such as one, the bathroom and shower, and two, the kitchen. Disorganized and uncleanliness of kitchens can cause a bad experience as well. This is a notable expectation, need and motivator in the customer experience at CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki. Therefore, the results from the interviews reveal that most value and long-term spending at CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki is formed through interactions with staff, meeting new friends and cleanliness. All together they formed long-term value and spending.

Additionally, each interviewee was asked their willingness to review, recommend and repurchase from CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki. As a result, reviewing received 10, recommendation received 10 and repurchasing received 8. This insight was the most valuable, because of the aim and purpose but also as there was the notion before the interview phase that destroying cluster emotions would evoke a bad customer experience overall, and affect reviewing, repurchasing, and recommendation rates. This was not the case however, and the results came as a shock because when talking about their emotions during their experience one of the interviewees said they are 10 times out of 10 likely to review and recommend the hostel. This was shocking because earlier when asked about how they felt about their

experience at CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki, aside from happy, they chose irritated and disappointment. These two emotions are in the destroying cluster. They were irritated and disappointed about the service because another guest used their towel and they were not given complimentary drying, and since the rooms were a bit cooler it took long for the towel to dry.

The interviewee stated that being given a complimentary towel, drying or having a communal drying area would have made the experience a better one, this was in response to an additional question added to their interview asking what could have been done differently due to the emotion being a destroying cluster. (Question 13, Appendix 2.) This is quite significant because more information in the interview revealed a similar archetype. The laundry room and the quality of the machines contribute to what is done well at CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki. The idea that the laundry room is clean and has new machines contributed to the overall satisfaction in the customer experience. However, it should be noted that guests would prefer to have the option to dry their clothes by air and be given complimentary towels when mistakes happen. This idea is discussed further in the next section, where the insights from the interviews provided the opportunity to form development ideas, based on the emotions in the guest's customer experience. Before this, the main takeaway of the results and what answers the aim of the thesis (which was to discover if emotions impact a guest's willingness to repurchase, review and recommend the hostel) is that they do. Eliciting positive emotions nearly ensures the certainty that guests are willing to repurchase, review and recommend the hostel. By recommending and reviewing their positive experience they received from the staff, social vibe and cleanliness, the guests provide CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki with more loyal customers and brand advocates.

The other takeaway from this research was the use of card-sorting. The card-sorting was a special, modern, brilliant, innovative, and unique way to create an in-depth interview. They were 100% accurate from definition, to emoji, and completely aided in memory recall, storytelling and helping the guests feel heard and seen about their experiences and feelings in their journey. They enabled the validation of feelings and as a result the interviewees were more open to talk, share and elaborate on their experience as they got in tune with their feelings, psychologically. In total, there were 20 cards with 20 emotions representing the emotions in The Hierarchy of Emotional Value (Figure 2). On the front of the card there was an emoji, and, on the back, there was a definition, so they got an idea of what they were feeling. It was important to figure out why guests picked the emotions they did and if they chose a destroying cluster emotion, they were asked what could have been done better in that situation. This ultimately revealed pains and gains of the guests. The feedback about the cards is as says "this is very accurate because when I look at this picture, I thought it was also happiness but when you take a look at what it means, psychologically, you get that your brain receives a lot more things than what it sees, and I see now I feel stressed".

That concludes the results of the interviews, and the success of not only the hostel but the emoji cards as part of the interview process. Now, the next section will discuss the development ideas based on the emotions and pains uncovered in the experience followed by a conclusion to the thesis.

## 5 Development Ideas

Both interviewees stated they enjoyed making friends and the opportunity to socialize in the hostel. Suggesting that guests enjoy the activities available to them in the hostel, as they promote social interaction and human connection. These activities make guests feel happy and exploratory. The events team received recognition and was a major factor leading into the willingness to repurchase, recommend and review. Guests feel happy and interested when they are in the hostel, due to the amount of arcade games, activities, and space to socialize. However, the culture in Finland makes it intimidating for guests from other cultures to try and make new friends. Since guests like to feel involved, welcomed and feel connected with one another, the first development idea suggests that CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki keeps up with its Saturday Party Nights, and other events in the hostel. This can prevent negative experiences from forming and create an inclusive environment. Additionally, this will motivate them to hang out in common rooms and make friends. The goal of the hostel is to come to CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki, feel the social vibe and leave with friends. The game nights have been a noted success so they should continue with game nights or an alternative that gets guests to interact, purchase bar products and enjoy other aspects of the hostel such as the common rooms. For example, Bingo nights, raffles, contests, movie nights, holiday themed events and scavenger hunts are recommendations to implement. Since both interviewees stated that they like CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki because they make friends, holding some friendship speed dates and activities where guests can make friendship bracelets or a polaroid where guests can take pictures together, sign them and place with a pin, or inside a communal photo album near the reception, could help to catch the essence of social interaction and human connection.

A lack of laundry drying space caused disappointment and irritation. These emotions from the destroying cluster diminish value and promote short-term spending, they may also cause an unwillingness to repurchase. This is fairly unknown, however, because this thesis contains only two interviews, but in this case, there was no effect taken notice of in regard to if destroying emotions cause an unwillingness to review, repurchase and recommend.

Back to the point, it is suggested to have some laundry racks available in the rooms or clothing-lines attached to the ceiling in the laundry room. This is because if a guest has an uncomfortable experience with somebody else using their towel, it will help the situation to

have a few free-standing laundry racks, extra hangers, or clothing lines with pins available. This also would not require electricity to run. What the hostel could do is tear down the wall between the laundry room and the old reception on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and expand the laundry room to allow more space. Here they could easily implement the free-standing clothing racks on the floor and clothing lines with pins to hang from the ceiling, even laundry racks, or hangers hung from the side of the wall would help for more space. In another case, in the colder seasons or when the AC is high, the rooms are colder so it is harder for clothes to dry, this solution would also prevent water damage in the dorms due to dripping laundry.

Finally, it is recommended to the CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki management team, that they actively go out of the way to talk to their guests about their experience and feelings. This is because the guests already want to socialize, and this would be a good way for the management to interact with and get in touch face-to-face on what guests are feeling. Doing this would foster and elicit feelings of being cared for and happy. They could even look into offering free breakfast when stocks are close to their best before date, in exchange for completing a simple survey. They could include the 3 questions that were asked in the interviews.

- On a scale from 1 to 10 how likely are you to recommend CheapSleep Helsinki?
- On a scale from 1 to 10 how likely are you to stay with CheapSleep again?
- On a scale from 1 to 10 how likely are you to review CheapSleep Helsinki after your stay?

They can also add to the questions, why. This would provide additional information and serve as a good opportunity for guests to explain their experience and feelings if they would like. A survey like this is important in understanding how their guests feel. Alternatively, CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki could invest in a HappyOrNot scale. It would be kept beside the reception on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor or in the 4<sup>th</sup> floor common room. This would be more efficient in tracking emotions than a survey. HappyOrNot offers its feedback systems in the US, Japan, and Finland, among other nations. Given that Finland leads the globe in happiness, this statistic piqued interest, and prompted statistical studies on customer satisfaction in Finland. HappyOrNot examined 3.5 million customer feedback responses between March 1, 2021, and March 13, 2022. They ranked Finland's 19 regions from most to least satisfied customers. Åland had the happiest customers at 96.6%, while Southwest Finland had the least satisfied at 85.7%. (HappyOrNot 2022.) On the HappyOrNot screen, there are 4 different faces going from happy to sad. After check-out, buyers can select one of the faces, to "rate" their customer experience. The faces are much easier to use in terms of emotion recognition which then provides a more accurate metric for how customers feel about their experience. While this does not provide a timeline of emotions for each touchpoint, it rather encompasses the entire

journey. Finally, the next section concludes this thesis. It provides readers on an overview of the topics read amongst this thesis.

## 6 Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to investigate how emotions affect the customer experience. The thesis's aim was to discover the emotions evoked throughout CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki's customer experience, as well as effect these feelings have in determining the likeliness of guests reviewing, recommending, and repurchasing CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki. Clearly, the study in this thesis revealed that emotions do play a significant impact on the customer experience. It also suggests that for CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki to produce more revenue, form value, loyal customers, and brand advocates, they must focus on eliciting good feelings throughout the customer journey.

The theoretical framework of this thesis links the customer experience with employee experience. A satisfied, well-trained employee whose needs are met is more willing to go the extra mile, which influences how they treat customers. Taking care of employees gives purpose and meaning to an employee's 'what' and forms a healthier work culture. Getting close and personal through employee rounding fosters relationship building between employers and employees. In today's world, employees should have access to flexible and mental health benefits and provide adequate technology to human resource employees, to aid their work tasks and create an easier workday.

The role of emotions plays hard in the customer experience and scoring a winning customer experience requires empathy, and for companies to avoid triggering social justice issues concerning racism, identity issues, biases, prejudices, and stereotypes for example. When these are not monitored, it can elicit brand cancellation and with the rise of cancel culture, social media is on fire taking companies reputations and value down due to the disfiguration of customer values, this then affects brand image and customer loyalty. All of these put together help to avoid eliciting negative emotions, commonly found in the destroying cluster of The Hierarchy of Emotional Value, which indicates that there are 20 emotions in the customer experience that drive long term spending and value or destroy value and form short-term spending.

Customer expectations are shifting all the time due to trends. With the rise of AI, and technology, companies must take note. They should understand that most empathy is formed through human interactions with customers. Personalizing their journeys to fit their needs creates a customer that feels prioritized, and creating an integrated experience which is easily accessible, and easy to navigate their information in one place, brings a seamless

journey. Companies should also make their websites clear and cohesive for customers' expectations to be met.

The methodologies chosen were proven to be a good choice. Interviews with the addition of emotion cards produced amazing key findings and helped to feel connected with guests. The results from the interviews show that most value and long-term spending is formed through interactions with staff, meeting new friends and cleanliness. They made their guests feel happy, cared for and exploratory. Additionally, the results reveal that guests are more willing to review, recommend and repurchase after a good experience, rather than a bad one. As well, regardless of destroying emotions elicited from The Hierarchy of Emotional Value (Figure 2) an interviewee was still 10 times willing to review and recommend the hostel. The results helped to form development ideas, and these were the overall output of this thesis.

The development ideas suggest to CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki that they should frequently interact closely with guests face to face to ask them how they feel. They should also look into conducting surveys about the guests' feelings and willingness to review, repurchase and recommend the hostel, and ask why. They should also keep up with events, games, and activities to keep guests interacting with one another and promote socializing. In addition, CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki can further manage the emotions of their guests by investing in and deploying a HappyOrNot machine in the hostel. The 4<sup>th</sup> floor reception is not being used, so they should consider connecting it to the laundry room to create more space and promote a sustainable, ecofriendly drying space with not only a washing and drying machine, which they have, but adding in free-standing drying racks, and clothing lines with pins to ensure that guests do not leave the hostel with wet clothes and towels, since in the wintertime the rooms get colder making the drying process of articles harder, and some guests prefer to dry their clothes by air.

Upon the client receiving the thesis, development ideas and the interview results, the management team of CheapSleep Hostel Helsinki provided feedback into what the aim of this thesis has done for their brand and the significance it has in working life. The client has stated that they were not aware about the displeasure of drying space, and that guests would like the option to dry their clothes by air. The goal of the hostel has always been to give a social vibe, so the client is very glad that the interviewees were happy with the events and activities available to them and will consider adding more opportunities to their guests to socialize. The client makes use of this thesis. The outcome will be reviewed and discussed with the rest of the management team, to see if they are able to implement the development ideas into the future. Overall, this thesis goes to show that emotions play a keen role in reviewing, recommending, spending, and most importantly, that emotions do impact the customer experience.

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## Appendix 1: Interviewee 1

## OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Where are you from?
2. Are you enjoying Helsinki? Why/Why Not
3. What is your reason for being in Helsinki?

**\*Card Introduction\***

“So, I’m going to introduce you to some cards here they’re the creative guide for the interview and they’re based on a theory that there are 20 emotions that drive or destroy value in a customer experience, there’s 20 face cards with 20 emotions behind them and as a warmup I’m going to ask this next question”

4. How are you feeling in general right now? Please pick 1 or more faces

## MAIN QUESTIONS

5. When you began to plan your stay in Helsinki, what made you choose CheapSleep Helsinki?
6. Where did you find information about CheapSleep before your reservation?
7. Did you have expectations for CheapSleep?
  - a. What expectations did you have?
  - b. Have your expectations been met? Why/Why Not
8. Did you ask anyone for advice on this trip?

YES- Who or Where did you go to?
9. Did you look at the reviews? (Why or Why Not?)

YES- What information can you remember?
10. On a scale from 1-10 how likely are you to leave a review after a good customer experience?
  - a. What makes a service good (In your opinion)?

11. On a scale from 1-10 how likely are you to leave a review after a bad customer experience?

a. What makes a service bad (In your opinion)?

**Reintroduction to cards**

12. How do you feel about the quality of service you've received here at CheapSleep? Pick 1 or more cards

The card you chose is \_ and the definition is: \_\_\_ Would you say that this accurate and matches how you feel about the quality of service? (Repeat for each card)

13. What kind of thoughts are you receiving through your head about the experience overall? What do you think?

**FOR DESTROYING CLUSTER EMOTIONS**

No Destroying Emotions drawn

**CLOSING QUESTIONS**

14. What does CheapSleep do well?

15. Can CheapSleep improve on anything?

16. On a scale from 1-10 how likely are you to recommend CheapSleep Helsinki?

17. On a scale from 1-10 how likely are you to stay with CheapSleep Helsinki again?

18. Reviews help CheapSleep learn about your experience, they actively look at reviews and follow through proactively, on a scale from 1-10 How likely are you to leave a review to CheapSleep after your visit?

## Appendix 2: Interviewee 2

## OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Where are you from?
2. Are you enjoying Helsinki? Why/Why Not
3. What is your reason for being in Helsinki?

**\*Card Introduction\***

“So, I’m going to introduce you to some cards here they’re the creative guide for the interview and they’re based on a theory that there are 20 emotions that drive or destroy value in a customer experience, there’s 20 face cards with 20 emotions behind them and as a warmup I’m going to ask this next question”

4. How are you feeling in general right now? Please pick 1 or more faces

## MAIN QUESTIONS

5. When you began to plan your stay in Helsinki, what made you choose CheapSleep Helsinki?
6. Where did you find information about CheapSleep before your reservation?
7. Did you have expectations for CheapSleep?
  - a. What expectations did you have?
  - b. Have your expectations been met? Why/Why Not
8. Did you ask anyone for advice on this trip?

NO- If you needed it, where would you typically get advice about your travels?
9. Did you look at the reviews? (Why or Why Not?)
10. On a scale from 1-10 how likely are you to leave a review after a good customer experience?
  - a. What makes a service good (In your opinion)?

11. On a scale from 1-10 how likely are you to leave a review after a bad customer experience?

a. What makes a service bad (In your opinion)?

**Reintroduction to cards**

12. How do you feel about the quality of service you've received here at CheapSleep? Pick 1 or more cards

The card you chose is \_ and the definition is: \_\_\_\_ Would you say that this accurate? (Repeat for each card)

1. Can I ask why?

**FOR DESTROYING CLUSTER EMOTIONS**

13. What could have been done differently to make you feel better in this situation?

**CLOSING QUESTIONS**

14. What does CheapSleep do well?

15. Can CheapSleep improve on anything?

16. On a scale from 1-10 how likely are you to recommend CheapSleep Helsinki?

17. On a scale from 1-10 how likely are you to stay with CheapSleep Helsinki again?

18. Reviews help CheapSleep learn about your experience, they actively look at reviews and follow through proactively, on a scale from 1-10 How likely are you to leave a review to CheapSleep after your visit?

## Employee Roundings Questions

# Personal vs Professional

- How's your family?
- Where are you going on vacation this summer?
- What's going well today?
- Tell me something about yourself I didn't already know?
- Are there roadblocks that are keeping you from doing your best work?

- Name something positive happening at work today?
- What training could we offer that would assist you in carrying out your job?
- What equipment or supplies would help you do a better job?
- Tell me about a coworker who has done something you would define as excellent.

