

# CUSTOMER PERSONALITY TAXONOMY: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMER DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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**Abstract:** *Development in Nigerian Tourism industry and the emerging shift toward the culture of leisure by most Nigerians have attendant challenges in management of customer satisfaction in hospitality industry. Cultural diversity combined with personality diversity calls for improvement of understanding of interface staff in hospitality based firms to enhance customer satisfaction. This paper presents a theoretical taxonomical analysis of customer personality typologies and further designs a framework of corresponding treatments for managing each identified and isolated personality, for effective customer satisfaction. The paper adopted the "DISC" framework to identifying and isolated four distinct personalities corresponding to: Expressiveness, Assurance, and Compliant personalities. The framework for managing "DISC" is 'FEAS,' corresponding to Firmness, Expressiveness, Assurance, and Straightforwardness. The paper concluded that every unique personality typology demands an appropriate attention to achieve the customer expectation and satisfaction based on his uniqueness. Therefore, 'FEAS' should be adopted to manage 'DISC' in the hospitality industry.*

**Keywords:** *Customer Personality Taxonomy, Customer Personality Diversity Management, Dissonance, Nature of Hospitality Service*

## INTRODUCTION

The diverse nature of people represents the uniqueness of individual personalities. Customers as individuals express or manifest their uniqueness, therefore expect to be treated in a manner that respects their unique dispositions. This is a crucial factor in customer relationship management effectiveness in the hospitality industry. In the hospitality industry, direct service is not only offered to the customer, but the customer also has a prolong stay and interactions with the service providers as the service is consumed.

These characteristics of the hospitality industry have posed a serious challenge to the effectiveness of customer satisfaction management (Adeyemo, 2003, Wagen, 2010; Bankole, 2008). The challenge is not only in identifying the customer personality taxonomies in each separate context, but also in knowing the exact expectation of each personality typology in service delivery. It is also a serious challenge to manage the shift from one customer to another within a given time. For instance, if two customers with diverse personalities meet a front desk officer at the same time, it is most likely and expected that the front desk officer shifts from one interactional pattern to the other, to meet the unique dispositional characteristics of each customer.

The paper draws its conceptual model from Oakley (1966) to further argue that for customer's satisfaction in the

hospitality industry to be achieved, the customer uniqueness must be identified and respected, and service is delivered within the province and broad spectrum of his nature and not just treating him as another human being. With this understanding, we have in this paper extricated the nature of hospitality service, to provide an understanding of the nature of the service delivery and the social nexus that exist between service providers and service consumers in the industry. We also examined the customer personality taxonomy by isolating their basic traits that make them either compatible or incompatible.

However, the foundation of our theoretical taxonomical analysis is that each unique customer typology deserves a special attention that should correspond to the customers' nature and expectation. This is so because we are all human beings, but we have our distinct personalities that determine our predisposition and expectations in any given context (Social Psychology, 2002).

## THE NATURE OF THE HOSPITALITY SERVICE

The concept of hospitality means the provision of care and comfort to people. As a business, the tendency that people need care and comfort even when they are away from

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home has made the provision of care and comfort an ever-growing business activity or sector. Wagen (2010) argues that “providing hospitality means offering a welcoming environment to visitors, and the hospitality industry is without doubt a people industry”. Hospitality is offered to people, who are away from home, some only at a walking distance, others many miles from home. The hospitality industry comprises businesses whose primary activities are the provision of accommodation, selling of beverages for consumption on the premises, provision of food and entertainment (Wagen, 2010; Middleton & Clark, 2008).

Drawing from the foregoing, the hospitality service is quite different from the services offered by other service industry. Being a people industry, the providers and the consumers of the hospitality service have a prolonged physical attachment as the service consumption lasts (Yu, 2001; Schulz, 2012; Rousan, Ramzi, & Badaruddin, 2010). Therefore, it is implied in the argument of Adeyemo (2003) and Wagen (2010) that, for the customers visiting hospitality operations, it is with some caution that we stereotype establishments with different sectors; the service provider delivers personal services to the customers who give instant assessment to the level of utility derived.

Therefore, the understanding and managing of the customer’s personality, satisfaction, and dissonance are crucial issues (Ali, Brookson, Bruce, Eaton, Heller, Johnson, Langdon, & Sleight, 2000; Watt 2007; Middleton & Clarke, 2008; Adeyemo, 2003; Wagen, 2010).

## CUSTOMER PERSONALITY TAXONOMY

Wagen (2010) recounted that, *“When I travel around Australia, I like to stay in bed and breakfast establishments because they have a homely atmosphere. This type of accommodation is generally so much nicer than a motel if you are travelling frequently. However, I have to say that they are all quite different. They vary in terms of standard of accommodation, privacy, peace and quiet, and quality of their breakfasts. In some cases, the level of cleanliness and hygiene leaves a lot to be desired. In this respect, they are just like my own home! The proprietors, too, are different some a little reserved and retiring, others just the opposite. My only really bad experience was with an owner who would not leave me alone. She started talking the moment I arrived and followed me everywhere with a constant barrage of a one-way conversation. I felt that I was fulfilling some deep psychological need for companionship and that boxed in within minutes. Some people might call it just friendly, but it was too much for me.”*

The above experience by Wagen implies that the human society is awash with diverse personalities, therefore,

diverse expectations at any interpersonal contacts (Social Psychology, 2002). This is more so where personal service is delivered, particularly, in the hospitality service industry. Therefore, Jaja’s (2003) contention is that, *“It is important to recognise that if managers are to effectively manage or lead, they must keep in mind that individual difference exist and people behave according to their personality. Hence, employees and customers may need to be managed differently, even under similar work (and service) conditions”*-emphasis in parenthesis is of researcher. The contention of Jaja (2003) rests on the logic that, the more the individual’s personality is understood, the easier it will be to predict how the individual will react to certain organisational or service stimuli (Goleman, 1995; Okaomee, 2011).

Within the broad spectrum of customer personality in hospitality industry, four basic categories are distinguished. This is represented in the “DISC” framework presented in Oakley (2009). The DISC model represents Demanding, Influential, Steady and Complaint personalities. The ‘D’ type customer is recognised by demonstrating when they talk, dress well, service conscious asking for the best service, walk briskly and bold, much focused, dominate discussion when looking for solution etc.

The ‘I’ type customer is notably influential. They are easily identified by; they are extroverts; smile and talk a lot; good appearance with jewelries; familiar with events and like highfaluting titles; try to talk to as many people as possible when they are out; most likely deviate from the subject matter, that are high in the need for affiliation; love interaction, responds well to gestures; react positively to touch; warmly welcome and smile on name basis and want you sit close when explaining or discussing something.

The ‘S’ type customer personality is identified by their steadiness. They are further characterised by patience, relaxed, logical and well structured; they hate when the processes are disorganised; may tolerate your weakness provided you do not affect the stability of his mind, tend to be assured of and solution, very loyal and service oriented, modest, causal and like to wear official uniforms or logo; etc.

The ‘C’ type customer is dominantly a complaint personality. They are easily identified by; they are perfectionists and want everything right at all the time; meticulous by nature and diplomatic in behaviour; they are interested in facts and figures (cross yours Ts and dot your Is); they are very sticking to rules and are quick to point out deviations from the policy; they lack humour; they are intolerant when you discuss outside the issue, particularly on phone; they are conservative; their clothing is usually of good quality; they like to read professional magazines.

## CUSTOMER PERSONALITY DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

The isolated dominant personality types discussed in the previous session presupposes adequate care in choosing appropriate management approaches for each distinct type. Therefore, perception either based on stereotypism or hallow will not only be inadequate, but will also be trialed customer dissatisfaction, therefore loss of patronage. In providing corresponding treatment option for each case, we have used the 'FEAS' model.

For instance, we proposed "firmness" for dealing with a 'Demanding' customer. In body language, firm handshake or grip is necessary because they do not like jellies; maintain eye contact and lean slightly forward, while maintaining a distance; maintain a position of confidence; be attentive and occasionally nod your head; walk briskly if you must do. In speaking, be direct to the point, the tone should portray confidence, clarity and strong; speak slightly faster, with the impression that the solution is possible and the attitude should be of someone ready to help.

The 'Influential' customer deserves quite "expressiveness". In body language, use gesture; use touch because he is personal and reacts to it; he welcome smiles and on name basis; sit next to him when explaining or discussing something

with him; on the phone, smile while discussing. It will get across to him and he loves it; the influential customer likes relationship, and will hate to be hurt. In speaking, be alive and animated when speaking to him, bear a friendly, mild and energised tone; maintain eye contact as the discussion lasts; and be colourful and demonstrative and ask for his opinion; put details in writing and offer him incentive if you want him to take risk.

The "Steady" customer is appropriately managed with "Assurance". This is achieved by commencing discussion on a personal note; feel concerned and sincerely show interest; be logical with your solution; make causal and informal moves; do not ask open ended question as HOW? Give him assurance and time to think through all you have said. Do not promise anything you cannot deliver. Never think that his acceptance of your solution is satisfaction and do not force him into a quick decision.

For the 'Complaint' type customer, we proposed straightforwardness. In body language, do not stand or try to touch or get too close. Maintain eye contact to engage him, and use little or no hand gestures. He is highly courteous, so do nothing to imply you are taking advantage of him. In speaking, because he wants action, all your tone and volume should suggest that the facts are ready and your action should be slow and deliberate.

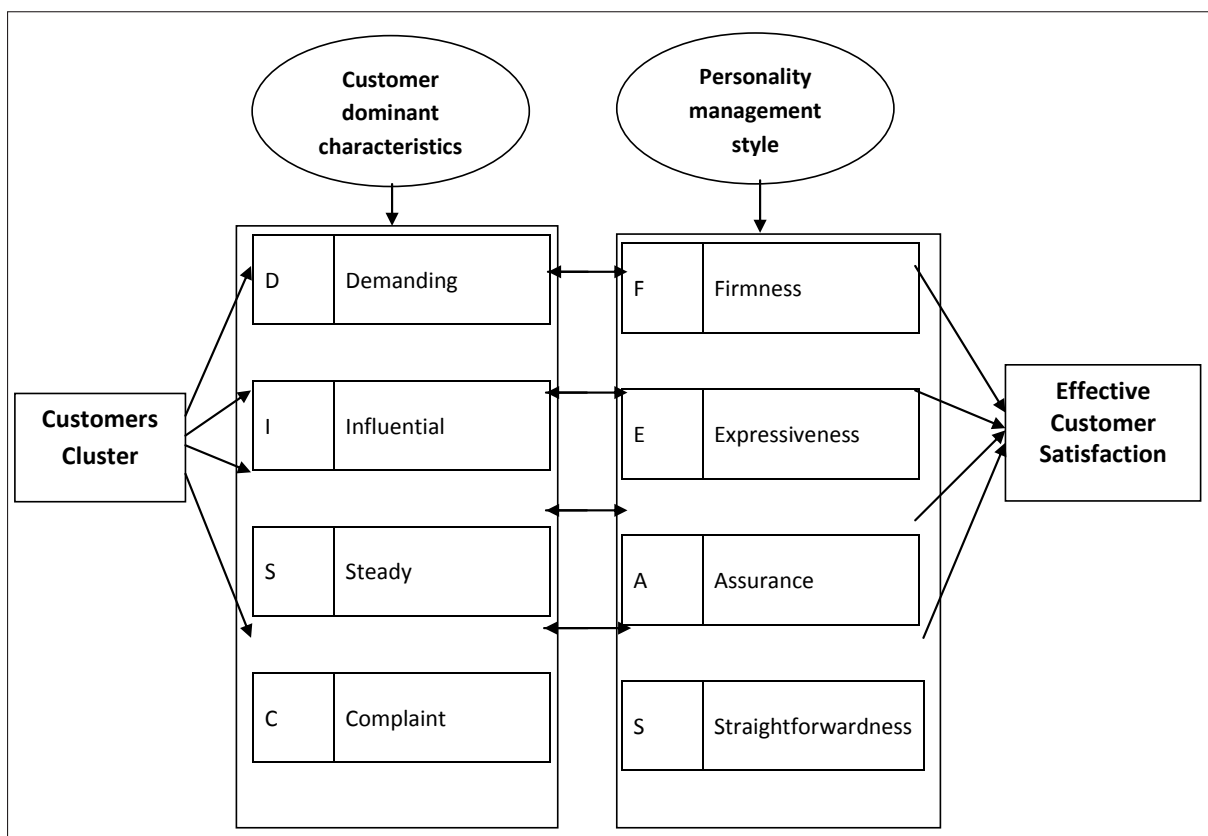


Fig. 1: A Heuristic Model for Customer Personality Management in Hospitality firms

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

From the analytical framework presented in this paper, we concluded that diverse customer personality typologies can only be effectively managed to achieve the desired customer satisfaction, if the customers' uniqueness are identified and respected. For the 'DISC' Model adopted, we recommended the 'FEAS' framework as adequate and appropriate for effective customer satisfaction to reduce dissonance. The implication of this conclusion is that front-desk officer should be alert to identify the unique attribute of each customer and deliver service in consonance with his personality demands. Thus in the implementation of broad organisational policies, the policy in use should correspond to the given situation which may not be appropriately addressed in the espoused theory. Therefore, 'FEAS' should be adopted to manage 'DISC' in the hospitality industry.

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