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Customer Engagement as the Key to Customer Loyalty in Saung Apung Harvest City Restaurant

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Abstract: This study aims to determine customer engagement as the key to customer loyalty at Saung Apung Harvest City Restaurant. This study used the Two-Way Symmetrical Model, which emphasizes mutual understanding between organizations and their publics. The research is qualitative, using the Constructivism paradigm, with field data collection conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of the study found that two-way communication between management and customers builds customer engagement in providing information, comments, and suggestions to management for the improvement and enhancement of the restaurant's performance, ambience, and the taste of the food and beverages served. Saung Apung Restaurant is also unique in that it is located quite far from the center of town, with no physical signs indicating its presence, yet customers still choose to visit and enjoy the dishes served at Saung Apung Restaurant. Management also strives to build good relationships with customers to increase loyalty and ensure the growth and sustainability of the restaurant in a highly competitive market.

Keyword: Customer Engagement, Customer Loyalty, Two-Way Communication, Excellence Theory, Customer Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Technological developments have changed various platforms in human life, not only in the way humans communicate and interact, but also in various aspects of human life, including business. The food and beverage business has grown rapidly and continues to increase in terms of quantity and quality. Food businesses are found in many areas, requiring business owners to always be responsive in facing competition (Kaligis et al., 2021). Business competition in Indonesia is very fierce in various industries, one of which is in the culinary field. As a result, restaurants and culinary establishments have become a necessity. Every business must be able to develop innovative business plans to influence the market and capture a large market share. According to Apkripdo's records, the culinary sector has

experienced growth of more than 20% throughout 2018. Business owners are taking advantage of this growth by competing to open cafes and restaurants with unique concepts to attract public attention.

Competition between restaurants is getting fiercer, given that today's lifestyle is more inclined towards modern-concept restaurants. One of the many types of businesses that is growing rapidly is the culinary business. Businesses in the culinary field will continue to grow and develop if this need remains a top priority. The restaurant and cafe business is one of the most popular and growing culinary industries today, especially in Indonesia, particularly in the city of Bogor. Over time, the city of Bogor has grown every year with the addition of new commercial centers, offices, businesses, and educational institutions. The culinary sectors, especially restaurants, are very promising due to increased activity and population, particularly among teenagers and students. One of the main economic pillars of Bogor is the restaurant and eatery industry. Because people's interest in enjoying restaurant-style dining is quite high, the restaurant business is very attractive. The number of restaurants in Bogor City has grown every year. This business has succeeded in increasing the number of eateries and restaurants in the Bogor City area from 2021 to 2022.

A popular restaurant in Bogor Regency is Resto Saung Apung Harvest City. A unique reason why many people prefer to come to Resto Saung Apung Harvest City is because they feel cool when they take photos of their food to post on social media. In addition, the photo spots and internet connection (Wi-Fi) are considerations for today's society when visiting a restaurant such as Saung Apung Harvest City. With the intense competition among restaurants, each restaurant creates its own unique marketing concept to attract customers.

Saung Apung Harvest City Restaurant says that it gets an average of 2,000 customers on weekends and 1,000 on weekdays. Saung Apung Harvest City Tourist Restaurant has been running since 2017 and has lots of tourist attractions. Saung Apung Harvest City Restaurant offers a variety of food offerings and menus, so public relations in the culinary business must be able to champion food product innovation and are required to continuously develop marketing communication strategies to meet consumer needs or preferences, thereby increasing customer loyalty and encouraging repeat visits. To sustain the business, public relations must consistently adhere to the vision, mission, and objectives of the culinary business to compete with other restaurants.

As in this study, communication strategies are carried out by public relations to maintain customer loyalty at Resto Saung Apung Harvest City. Customer loyalty is a customer's commitment to continue purchasing products or using services from a company consistently, even when there are competitive offers from competitors. This loyalty is created from positive customer experiences, sustained satisfaction, and strong emotional ties to the brand or company. Loyal customers tend to provide long-term benefits for the company, as they not only continue to make purchases but also have the potential to recommend products to others. The role of public relations in building and maintaining customer loyalty is crucial. With the right PR strategy, a company can build strong relationships, ensure a positive reputation, manage feedback, and create experiences that keep customers loyal. The implementation of this strategy is a task for Public Relations to continuously combine their strengths in order to attract customers and maintain customer loyalty. Based on this background, the authors want to know how Customer Relations Restaurant Saung Apung Harvest City Cileungsi maintains customer loyalty.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive approach with qualitative research. Qualitative methods aim to understand social phenomena through descriptive data collection, such as interviews and observations, in order to obtain holistic and in-depth data. Descriptive research seeks to

explain findings, particularly weaknesses related to sales communication methods, through analysis, interpretation, and observation. This approach also aims to describe existing social realities to produce conclusions that are relevant and data-oriented. According to Samatan (2018), qualitative research is suitable for use in certain situations, such as when the research problem is still vague, to understand complex social interactions, develop theories, or verify the validity of social data. In this study, the qualitative method was considered appropriate because it could explore in-depth information about Customer Relations activities at Restaurant Saung Apung Harvest City in maintaining customer loyalty. The data collection techniques used included direct observation, interviews with key informants, documentation, and the selection of representative informants. Observations were conducted by observing activities at the research location, while interviews were conducted to obtain information directly from informants, including customers and management. Documentation is used to supplement data, while informant selection is aimed at obtaining relevant data from credible sources. Data analysis is carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data is reduced to select relevant elements, presented in narrative or diagram form, and concluded based on findings in the field. Data validity is ensured through triangulation techniques, including source, technique, and time triangulation, to verify and strengthen the research results. This research was conducted at Restaurant Saung Apung Harvest City, Perum Harvest City, Cileungsi, Bogor Regency, West Java, from October 2024 to January 2025. The researchers planned the research activities, from preparation and implementation to reporting of the results, within that time frame.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Customer Relations Management Strategy at Saung Apung Harvest City Restaurant, Cileungsi

The Customer Relations Strategy implemented by Restaurant Saung Apung is a crucial element in supporting the success of the culinary business. Based on the results of the study, this strategy not only provides service, but also builds long-term, sustainable relationships with customers. The core elements of this strategy include friendly customer service, consistent food quality, attractive menu innovations, and a pleasant atmosphere. Odem, Supervisor at Saung Apung, explains that a friendly and responsive service strategy, food quality, atmosphere, and menu innovation are important steps in increasing customer satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits. He emphasized, "By implementing this strategy, Saung Apung strives to build long-term relationships with customers, increase satisfaction, and encourage repeat visits." This statement indicates that Saung Apung understands customer needs and comfort as its top priority. In addition to direct interaction, this strategy also includes evaluating customer experiences for continuous improvement. Odem added that Saung Apung focuses on food quality, speed of service, a comfortable atmosphere, and menu innovation to increase customer loyalty. This is evidenced by positive customer experiences, as expressed by Tri Yuniarti, a customer who stated, "Consistent food quality, friendly service, and professionalism are the main factors in my preference for this restaurant."

This study also explores how SWOT analysis is used as a management strategy at Saung Apung Harvest City Cileungsi. The natural atmosphere is one of the restaurant's main strengths, where open spaces surrounded by plants and ponds create a comfortable dining experience for families. In addition, the varied menu and complete facilities, such as a children's play area and fishing spot, also increase its appeal. However, Odem also revealed several weaknesses, such as dependence on the weather and a lack of aggressive promotion, which can limit the reach of new customers. He mentioned that collaboration with food delivery platforms, such as GoFood, is one opportunity to expand the market.

However, the threat of fierce competition and changing consumer preferences still needs to be anticipated. Many similar restaurants in the Cileungsi area offer similar concepts, so innovation in menus and concepts is important to remain relevant. Observations show that a natural atmosphere and menu variety are effective promotional strategies, but external threats such as bad weather and healthy diet trends also require adaptation.

In addition, in the digital era, Saung Apung has begun developing an online food ordering application to improve operational efficiency and expand its market reach. According to Odem, "This application allows restaurants to serve more customers, even when seating is full, while helping to expand the market." The system is also planned to be upgraded with a self-order feature, where customers can order food directly through devices provided at the table or via their mobile phones. This initiative demonstrates how Saung Apung is adapting to technological developments to provide the best service to customers.

Strategies for Maintaining Customer Loyalty

Maintaining customer loyalty is a crucial aspect of the operations of Saung Apung Harvest City Cileungsi Restaurant. This study identified various strategies implemented by management to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty are maintained. The main focus of these strategies is on improving service quality and creating memorable experiences for customers. One important element that is a major concern is optimizing food and service quality. Food quality is the foundation for building customer loyalty, ensuring that the food served is always delicious, healthy, and consistent. Restaurant management understands that serving high-quality food is a form of appreciation for customers. In addition, friendly and professional service is also a key factor in maintaining customer loyalty. Restaurant staff are trained to always be polite, responsive, and quick to respond to customer needs and complaints. This is reinforced by a statement from Mr. Odem, the Supervisor, who said that the restaurant always strives to maintain the quality of its ingredients by using fresh, high-quality ingredients. Careful cooking techniques are also a major focus in order to create a satisfying culinary experience. In addition, the restaurant's atmosphere is designed to enhance comfort, with an aesthetic interior design and rustic music playing in the background.

Friendly service is a top priority, with special training for staff to ensure they are able to provide appropriate menu recommendations and respond politely to every customer need. Service efficiency is also optimized, including through the use of technology such as internal communication devices (HT) to ensure real-time menu availability. In addition, management regularly conducts evaluations to improve service quality, involving customers in providing reviews of their experiences. Feedback received is analyzed in depth to identify areas for improvement. Interviews with Mr. Odem also showed that regular evaluations of customer experience are an integral part of the restaurant's strategy. These evaluations are conducted through satisfaction surveys and informal interviews with loyal customers, which provide valuable insights for service improvement.

This evaluation process reflects management's commitment to providing an optimal dining experience. In addition to food quality and service, the restaurant atmosphere is also an important factor in creating customer loyalty. Direct observation shows that the atmosphere at Saung Apung is designed to make customers feel comfortable. The neat room layout, modern traditional decoration, and the calm and natural Saung Apung environment provide significant added value. The combination of a comfortable atmosphere, quality food, and friendly service makes Saung Apung Harvest City Cileungsi Restaurant the top choice for customers.

Analysis of Customer Loyalty at Saung Apung Restaurant

Customer loyalty is a crucial element that determines the long-term success of a restaurant, including Saung Apung. Research showed that Saung Apung built customer loyalty through loyalty programs, such as discounts on certain occasions, for example on public holidays, as well as special promotions customized to customer needs. Restaurant supervisor, Mr. Odem, emphasizes that discounts not only increase visits but also create positive relationships with customers who feel valued. Another strategy implemented is price analysis that takes into account market prices, customer comfort, and restaurant facilities, with the aim of building long-term relationships with customers.

In addition, Saung Apung continues to optimize the quality of its services and products to meet customer expectations. According to Mr. Odem, customer satisfaction is reflected in positive feedback regarding food and service, which strengthens the emotional connection between the restaurant and its customers. Friendly, fast, and responsive service is one of the key factors in creating a pleasant experience. Customer support, as expressed by Mrs. Tri Yuniarti, shows that food quality,

restaurant atmosphere, and staff friendliness play a major role in influencing loyalty and customer engagement. The restaurant's comfortable atmosphere and attractive interior decoration are also major attractions. Supporting facilities, such as adequate parking and affordable parking rates, also leave a positive impression on visitors. According to customers like Mr. Yoto, these factors make the restaurant an ideal place to relax with family. In certain situations, mistakes with the food can occur, but how the staff handles the issue often determines whether customers will be back.

Saung Apung has also developed an effective complaint handling system as part of its strategy to increase customer loyalty. The initial approach is to listen carefully to complaints, followed by concrete solutions such as replacing the food that is the cause of the complaint, reflecting the restaurant's commitment to customer satisfaction. This strategy not only demonstrates professionalism but also reinforces positive perceptions of the Saung Apung brand.

Overall, the combination of product quality, a comfortable atmosphere, adequate facilities, friendly service, and good complaint handling forms a strong foundation for building customer loyalty at Saung Apung. By continuing to improve these elements, the restaurant can retain loyal customers while attracting new visitors.

Analysis of Customer Relations Strategy at Saung Apung Restaurant

The strategy implemented by Restaurant Saung Apung Harvest City Cileungsi in building and maintaining relationships with customers aims to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. The customer relationship management approach implemented by this restaurant focuses on product quality and intense interaction with customers, creating a pleasant and memorable dining experience. The restaurant supervisor, Mr. Odem, emphasizes that good product quality is what customers remember and encourages repeat purchases. The restaurant is also open to customer criticism and feedback as a basis for evaluating service improvements.

Interaction with customers is an important element in this restaurant's customer relations strategy. Social media such as Facebook is used to obtain reviews and feedback on the menu. In addition, restaurant staff actively provide menu recommendations based on popularity and previous reviews, demonstrating their proactive approach to listening to customers. This was revealed by Mr. Odem, who stated that through direct interaction and social media, the restaurant strives to improve the dining experience for customers, encourage repeat visits, and ensure that customer preferences are met.

Good communication is also a key focus for Restaurant Saung Apung. Information about new menus is shared via social media, while reservations can be made by phone for the convenience of customers. In this way, the restaurant ensures that customers receive the information they need and feel valued, which in turn increases the likelihood of repeat visits. In a survey conducted, these measures were appreciated by customers for creating a positive brand image in their eyes. According to Mr. Odem, introducing a unique restaurant concept that is different from others has also succeeded in attracting new customers. To maintain customer loyalty, the restaurant regularly evaluates its products and services. Purchase patterns are analyzed to adjust offers and loyalty programs. In addition, criticism and suggestions from customers are used to improve services and menus. Commitment to product and service quality is demonstrated through continuous monitoring to ensure adequate standards. Mr. Odem emphasized that this approach is important for increasing satisfaction and building long-term relationships with customers. Direct observation shows that the strategies implemented are not just theory, but are also effectively implemented in daily operations. Restaurant staff are trained to provide menu recommendations and are open to customer feedback. Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that Restaurant Saung Apung Harvest City Cileungsi has succeeded in creating a positive customer experience through its commitment to quality, effective communication, and responsiveness to feedback, all of which contribute to increased customer loyalty and solid long-term relationships.

Discussion

Analysis Based on Two-Way Symmetrical

The Two-Way Symmetrical communication strategy is implemented by Resto Saung Apung Harvest City with a focus on balanced interaction between the restaurant and customers. This approach emphasizes the importance of two-way communication, where restaurants not only convey information but also listen to feedback from customers. With this model, customer loyalty can be enhanced through constructive dialogue, which includes Word of Mouth, rejection of other brands, and repeat purchases. This approach contributes to the creation of long-term, mutually beneficial relationships while strengthening the restaurant's image and appeal, especially in serving family events.

As a favorite destination for family events, Saung Apung Harvest City combines complete facilities, a natural atmosphere, and friendly service. Restaurant supervisor, Mr. Odem, explains that factors such as the fishing area, children's playground, and attractive photo spots are the main attractions. In addition, the comfortable and fresh atmosphere supports family togetherness, coupled with a varied menu, including famous and affordable seafood dishes. The spacious dining area allows customers to enjoy family gatherings without feeling cramped, while the friendly service from the staff provides a pleasant dining experience.

Similar opinions were expressed by customers such as Mrs. Tri Yuniarti, a housewife, who cited product quality, friendly service, and facilities such as the children's play area as the main reasons for her visits. She also highlighted the affordable prices, with menus ranging from Rp5,000 to Rp100,000. This strengthens Saung Apung's position as a superior choice compared to its competitors. Additionally, Mr. Yoto, a civil servant, considers the speed of service and menu variety as the main reasons for his family's visits, despite the long distance. He also noted that recommendations from colleagues influenced his decision to try this restaurant. The food menu is one of the key factors in building customer loyalty.

Dishes such as Grilled Kuwe, Grilled Bawal, and Honey Grilled Shrimp are highly recommended for their delicious and rich flavors. Restaurant supervisor, Mr. Odem, emphasizes that this variety of Indonesian menus is designed to meet the diverse tastes of customers, creating a special dining experience in a natural and comfortable atmosphere.

In addition, direct observation shows that the orderly design of the venue, with its lesehan area, provides comfort and closeness to nature. The friendly service from the staff reflects the real implementation of a two-way symmetrical approach, where customer feedback and needs are given serious attention. This strategy not only increases customer satisfaction but also ensures a mutually beneficial relationship between the restaurant and its customers. Overall, the implementation of the Excellence Theory Two-Way Symmetrical model at Resto Saung Apung Harvest City has proven effective in maintaining customer loyalty and attracting new visitors. By focusing on balanced interaction and responsiveness to customer needs, the restaurant has successfully improved service quality while securing its position as the top choice for families to enjoy dining together in a warm and comfortable atmosphere.

Analysis Based on the Customer Relation Model

Customer Relations is part of the Public Relations activities carried out by companies in establishing relationships with customers. Restaurant Saung Apung Harvest City, which its sustainability depends on customers, emphasizes the importance of good relationships with customers to survive in increasingly fierce business competition. This restaurant has implemented a community relations strategy according to Ruslan (2010) to implement community relations functions through a persuasive and educational approach. Saung Apung Restaurant creates two-way communication by disseminating information from the company to the public in an informative manner and using a persuasive approach to build mutual understanding, appreciation, comprehension, and tolerance. Through this two-way communication, Saung Apung Restaurant strives to establish long-term relationships with customers, enabling the company to understand and meet customer needs. This creates harmonious relationships that result in customer loyalty. Saung Apung Restaurant also applies the concept of customer relations as defined by Suhandi & Shandi (2008), which includes the ability to show loyalty in building good relationships with consumers. The main objectives of this approach are to increase sales, introduce product quality, and take an effective approach to consumers. This strategy aims to create a mutually beneficial relationship, provide satisfactory service, and help resolve consumer issues. In this process, the company emphasizes the importance of staff appearance, which should be polite and neat, accompanied by honesty and friendliness in service. Through this approach, Saung Apung Restaurant is able to attract consumers and facilitate purchasing decisions for the products offered. The implementation of the customer relations model at Saung Apung Restaurant Harvest City Cileungsi has proven to be effective in increasing sales. Analysis shows that a strong relationship between customers and the restaurant not only retains old customers but also attracts new ones. Good customer relations are a key element in creating satisfaction and loyalty. This restaurant realizes the importance of innovation in building closer interactions with customers, including paying attention to product quality that not only meets customer expectations but also provides a special culinary experience. With this step, customers feel valued and are more likely to make repeat purchases.

In an interview with Mr. Odem, Supervisor at Saung Apung Restaurant, he emphasized the importance of product quality and openness to criticism and customer feedback. According to him, by serving high-quality food that customers like, restaurants can increase customer loyalty. The restaurant also welcomes criticism and feedback as material for evaluation to improve service quality. Observations show that customers are greeted with warm smiles and prompt service. Customers are also given the opportunity to fill out feedback forms after their meal, which not only helps collect data but also gives customers the feeling that their voices are heard and valued. This step reflects the implementation of a

consistent customer relations model, encouraging service quality improvement and customer satisfaction.

Saung Apung Restaurant actively uses various communication media to introduce product quality to customers, one of which is through social media such as Facebook. On this platform, customers provide reviews and menu recommendations, which are then used as important references for the restaurant to improve product quality. Mr. Odem explained that restaurant management often interacts with customers through social media to enhance the dining experience. In addition, restaurant staff actively provide menu suggestions based on popularity and previous customer reviews. This strategy not only introduces product quality but also creates a friendly, interactive atmosphere between staff and customers. Observations at the location show that staff actively visit customers' tables, ask about their satisfaction with the dishes served, and offer the latest menu recommendations. This demonstrates the staff's commitment to introducing product quality while building more personal relationships with customers to encourage repeat visits. Saung Apung Harvest City Cileungsi Restaurant also collaborates with property agents such as Harvest City, exchanging promotional banners. Saung Apung Restaurant promotional banners are displayed in Harvest City's housing marketing, and vice versa. This strategy is part of the restaurant's efforts to maintain interaction with customers in order to retain loyalty while continuously improving service quality.

This statement illustrates how communication plays an important role in building strong customer relationships at Restaurant Saung Apung. Active communication between staff and customers is the main foundation that can increase customer satisfaction, where staff are trained to provide menu recommendations that suit individual customer preferences. In addition, customer feedback is used for continuous improvement, which demonstrates the restaurant's commitment to improving service quality. Saung Apung also collaborates with property agencies such as Harvest City in cross-promotion strategies, which help expand its marketing reach. Through direct observation, it can be seen that active communication, staff training, and the restaurant's strategic location contribute to customer satisfaction. Product innovations, such as adding new menu items every month, also demonstrate how the restaurant keeps customers coming back. In addition, the restaurant's comfortable and natural atmosphere, coupled with the use of technology such as reservation apps and digital ordering systems, further enhances the customer experience. Continuous communication with customers through social media and telephone platforms is also key to maintaining customer loyalty. The restaurant maintains good relationships with customers before and after their visits, by continuously gathering feedback from customers to improve service and product quality. This approach not only enhances the customer experience but also strengthens the restaurant's brand image, setting it apart from other restaurants. With an effective and sustainable communication strategy, Saung Apung has succeeded in attracting and retaining customers, which ultimately drives the growth and success of their business.

Analysis Based on Source Triangulation

Triangulation of sources was used in this study to verify data through interviews with experts, namely Syifa Azura, a public relations professional working at PT Bank Mandiri. This approach was important to gain a deeper understanding of the public relations strategies implemented by Restaurant Saung Apung Harvest City in building its reputation and customer loyalty, which included interviews with sources, direct observation, and examination of relevant documents. Based on the interview with Syifa, it was revealed that Saung Apung's main strategy is to focus on service and product quality. According to Syifa, maintaining quality is an important element in building a positive image for the restaurant. This focus is not only an operational strategy, but also a long-term investment in the

restaurant's reputation that must be supported by effective communication and good relationships with customers and the media to increase the restaurant's visibility. Syifa also observed that the restaurant staff always greet customers with smiles and are ready to serve, reflecting a high level of professionalism. This shows the importance of integrating service quality and public relations practices in maintaining customer satisfaction and a positive image of the restaurant.

Furthermore, Syifa emphasized that good service is a long-term investment that can increase the restaurant's visibility and attract more new customers. This was evident from the fast and effective service she witnessed firsthand during her visit, which lent additional credibility to the important role of service in public relations strategies. Syifa also highlighted the importance of maintaining long-term relationships with customers through pleasant experiences and good communication, as well as engagement with the community to create a sustainable positive image. Observations in the field also reinforced Syifa's statement about the quality of the restaurant's atmosphere and cleanliness, which contributed to a positive impression on customers. The quality of a restaurant can be seen from two aspects: external quality, such as atmosphere and cleanliness, and internal quality, which is related to the interaction between staff and management. Syifa also assessed that discounts can be an effective strategy in attracting customers, but they must be integrated with a broader PR strategy so that customers are not only attracted to the price but also to the quality and experience offered by the restaurant. In addition, regular product evaluations allow restaurants to adjust their offerings according to market needs and increase customer satisfaction. This shows that Saung Apung's well-integrated public relations strategy, which prioritizes service, product quality, and effective communication, has succeeded in building customer reputation and loyalty. This triangulation of sources shows the importance of combining quality service, appropriate PR, and innovation in maintaining the restaurant's reputation.

CONCLUSION

Customer engagement can be achieved by companies through two-way communication between management and customers, conducted directly or through various media channels. One of the strategies implemented by Saung Apung Restaurant is to build good relationships with customers, giving them the opportunity to participate more by providing feedback, especially on comfort, food and beverage taste, photo spots with family, more affordable prices, and customer-satisfying service.

This approach reinforces the restaurant's positive image and reputation. Public relations practitioners emphasize the importance of maintaining adequate service as a long-term investment that affects reputation. A strategy of fast, friendly, and professional service contributes to a positive customer experience and promotes the restaurant to new visitors. Thus, the communication and customer relations strategies implemented not only increase loyalty and satisfaction but also ensure the restaurant's growth and competitiveness in a competitive market.

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