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The Strategic Contribution of Telephone Operators in Shaping Corporate Image and Supporting Service Delivery at Fugo Hotel Samarinda

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Abstract

Telephone operators are a key element influencing hotel service quality, as they function as a strategic information distribution center, including information on hotel products and nearby tourist destinations. However, in practice, telephone operators face various complexities, such as high call volumes, diverse guest requests, limited response time, and the need to consistently maintain friendliness and professionalism. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth the dynamics of the telephone operator's role in the context of hotel services. The findings reveal that telephone operators do not merely act as communication intermediaries but also serve as invisible frontliners who convey service image through voice-based interactions that shape guests' initial perceptions. The study further highlights a shift in their role from administrative functions toward a more strategic position in supporting service quality. Theoretically, this research offers novelty by conceptualizing telephone operators as voice-based brand ambassadors and key actors in guest experience management. Therefore, telephone operators can be positioned as "faceless ambassadors" who significantly contribute to building corporate image and determining overall guest satisfaction.

Keywords: *Telephone Operator; Role; Hotel; Service.*

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world. It differs significantly from other sectors, such as the clothing and agricultural industries, as the hospitality industry primarily operates by delivering services. The hospitality industry offers a unique form of service, emphasizing the ability to meet and fulfill customer expectations through excellent service delivery (Al-Hawari & Alananzeh, 2021). This industry encompasses a wide range of sectors, including accommodation, restaurants, events, parks, transportation, and other tourism-related activities. The fulfillment of customer expectations directly influences customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the tourism industry plays a crucial role as a source of revenue for regions and countries. The development of tourism areas is driven by population growth, increasing economic needs, and the availability of local tourism potential, which encourages communities to innovate by creating new tourist destinations (Rachmad, Yoseph et al., 2022).

The Front Office Department is a key division within a hotel that directly interacts with guests and is often referred to as the "selling rooms" department. It serves as the point of first and last impression, making service quality a critical factor in shaping guests' overall experiences. In addition to creating first impressions, the front office functions as the "heart" of the hotel, as all guest-related information and communication originate and are distributed through this department to other sections. At FUGO Hotel Samarinda, the Front Office Department is led by a Front Office Manager who supervises Front Desk Agents. Within this department, one essential section is the telephone operator (Adnyana, 2023).

Theoretically, within hospitality management and service communication studies, the front office including telephone operators is positioned as a strategic element that contributes to shaping first impressions, managing information flow, and supporting service quality and guest satisfaction (Kim & Wang, 2022). Telephone operators are viewed as a communication hub, responsible not only for conveying information but also for filtering, managing, and distributing messages accurately to ensure smooth hotel operations and high service standards.

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Telephone operators play a vital role in hotel service, as they provide essential information such as hotel products, nearby tourist attractions, and guest amenities and supplies required by guests staying at FUGO Hotel Samarinda. They are also required to possess strong product knowledge, proper telephone communication skills, and proficiency in English (Rawung et al., 2023). In addition to serving as an information center, telephone operators also function as information gatekeepers. They are responsible for sorting incoming information, determining message priorities, and ensuring that information is forwarded to the appropriate parties. This filtering process is essential to prevent miscommunication, avoid operational disruptions, and maintain the confidentiality of guest and management data (Adityan & Agustina, 2023). Errors in filtering or delivering information may lead to interdepartmental misunderstandings, service delays, and decreased guest satisfaction.

In practice, telephone operators face various challenges, including high call volumes, diverse guest requests, time constraints, and the continuous demand to maintain friendliness and professionalism. Therefore, they are required to have strong communication skills, a solid understanding of hotel operations, and the ability to make quick and accurate decisions in handling information. However, despite their strategic role in theory, a significant gap exists in practice, particularly at FUGO Hotel Samarinda. Telephone operators are often narrowly perceived as merely technical staff responsible for receiving and connecting calls. This limited perception leads to the underutilization of their strategic role in information management and service delivery. Additionally, disproportionate workloads, limited operational flexibility, and additional responsibilities beyond their primary duties can disrupt their focus, reducing the effectiveness of information filtering and distribution.

This condition highlights a discrepancy between theoretical perspectives—which position telephone operators as strategic actors in service systems—and practical realities that tend to marginalize their role. As a result, issues such as delayed information delivery, interdepartmental miscommunication, and increased guest complaints may arise, ultimately affecting overall service quality.

Based on field observations, telephone operators are still often perceived as merely call handlers, resulting in their limited recognition as strategic contributors within the hotel communication system. Therefore, this study is both academically and practically significant. From an academic perspective, there is a lack of research that specifically examines telephone operators as strategic actors in hospitality communication and service management. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a new perspective that positions telephone operators not only as technical staff but also as integral components of guest experience management and corporate image formation.

From a practical standpoint, the increasing complexity of hotel services demands effective, fast, and accurate communication systems. As the frontline of communication, telephone operators play a crucial role in ensuring coordination between departments and maintaining quality interactions with guests. When this role is not optimized, it may lead to operational disruptions and decreased guest satisfaction.

Furthermore, the urgency of this research is reinforced by the need for hotels to enhance competitiveness through service excellence. In an increasingly competitive hospitality industry, optimizing the role of telephone operators as information centers and gatekeepers can serve as a strategic approach to improving overall service quality. Therefore, this study is relevant in providing both theoretical contributions and practical recommendations for more effective and service-oriented hotel management.

METHOD

The Role of Telephone Operators

According to Brown's theory (as cited in Siahaan & Gusnadi, 2024), telephone operators play a crucial role in ensuring effective communication between guests and hotel staff. They are responsible for receiving and directing calls, answering inquiries, and handling guest requests or complaints promptly and efficiently. Brown emphasizes the importance of telephone operators in maintaining a smooth flow of communication within the hotel.

Telephone operators serve as the first point of contact between guests and the hotel; therefore, the way they handle calls can significantly impact the hotel's image and the level of guest satisfaction. Anderson further highlights that the quality of the initial interaction via telephone can influence guests'

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overall perception of the hotel. Thus, the role of telephone operators extends beyond merely connecting calls; they also play a vital role in shaping the hotel's image and enhancing guest satisfaction.

Telephone Operator Services for Guests

Telephone operators are required to have comprehensive knowledge of the hotel's products and facilities. This is essential to ensure that they can clearly and accurately respond to guests' inquiries regarding hotel services. In addition, telephone operators play an important role in building the hotel's image, as they are often among the first staff members to provide communication-based services to guests (Pratama & Sari, 2024).

The services provided by telephone operators typically include handling guest requests, providing wake-up call services, receiving and forwarding guest complaints to the relevant departments, and assisting guests with general information such as room Wi-Fi passwords (Septiyanti et al., 2026). These responsibilities highlight the importance of telephone operators in delivering efficient service and maintaining guest satisfaction.

Duties and Responsibilities of Telephone Operators

The primary duty of a telephone operator is to provide prompt, courteous, and professional service to all parties requiring telephone assistance, both within and outside the hotel. In addition, the duties and responsibilities of a telephone operator include the following: Being responsible for all incoming and outgoing calls; if a delay is unavoidable, it must be minimized to prevent guests from waiting too long.

Supporting the hotel's communication system to ensure smooth operational flow. Receiving telephone messages from guests and ensuring proper follow-up until completion. Handling wake-up call services in accordance with guest requests. Making paging announcements for guests when necessary. Memorizing important telephone numbers, especially for emergency situations such as fire incidents. Having thorough knowledge of extension numbers of hotel executives or department heads, hotel facilities, daily events and functions, and other services provided by the hotel. Monitoring music and video programs according to the schedule. Possessing comprehensive knowledge of the telephone system and the ability to operate all related equipment. Maintaining cleanliness and organization of the operator room. Using the standardized "hotel voice" when initiating conversations with guests.

Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This approach is considered appropriate for exploring participants' experiences, perspectives, and meanings related to the role of telephone operators. The descriptive qualitative method aims to provide a clear and accurate depiction of the conditions and issues observed in the field. According to Sugiyono (2022), qualitative research is conducted in natural settings where the researcher acts as the key instrument, data collection is carried out through triangulation, data analysis is inductive, and the findings emphasize meaning rather than generalization.

To ensure data validity, this study applies triangulation techniques, specifically source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is conducted by collecting data from various informants directly involved in hotel communication and service processes, including telephone operators, front office staff, and the front office manager. This approach aims to examine the consistency of information regarding the roles, challenges, and contributions of telephone operators in supporting service delivery and information management.

Technique triangulation is implemented through multiple data collection methods, namely in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews are used to explore participants' experiences and perspectives, observations are conducted to directly examine the activities of telephone operators in handling calls and managing information, and documentation such as standard operating procedures (SOPs) and internal reports is utilized to support and verify the collected data. The use of multiple techniques enhances the reliability and credibility of the research findings.

According to Bogdan and Biklen, as cited in Sugiyono (2022), descriptive qualitative research is a method of data collection in the form of words or images rather than numerical data. The collected data are analyzed and then described in a way that makes them easy to understand. This approach emphasizes meaning and interpretation over quantification. In this study, the descriptive qualitative

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method is used to describe, explain, and interpret existing conditions. The data were collected through **in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation**, allowing the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the results of the study conducted at FUGO Hotel Samarinda through interviews, observation, and documentation, several findings were identified regarding the role of telephone operators in supporting hotel services. First, telephone operators function as an information center, providing essential information to guests, such as hotel products and facilities, information about nearby tourist destinations, and fulfilling guest needs such as guest amenities and guest supplies. In this role, operators are required to have extensive product knowledge and strong communication skills to ensure that information is delivered clearly, accurately, and professionally.

Second, telephone operators perform the role of information gatekeepers. They are responsible for filtering incoming calls, determining the urgency of information, and forwarding it to the appropriate departments. This function plays a crucial role in maintaining smooth communication flow between departments and preventing miscommunication that could disrupt hotel operations. Third, telephone operators act as invisible frontliners in hotel services. Although they do not engage in face-to-face interactions, their voice, tone, and communication style significantly influence guests' first impressions of service quality. This indicates that operators contribute substantially to shaping the hotel's image.

Fourth, in practice, telephone operators also serve as voice-based brand ambassadors, where every telephone interaction reflects the hotel's service standards and professionalism. Their friendly, responsive, and solution-oriented attitudes have a direct impact on guest satisfaction. Based on the research findings and observations conducted at Fugo Hotel Samarinda, several key attitudes are essential to ensure effective telephone service. These include being **considerate**, which reflects friendliness, helpfulness, and the ability to understand the caller's emotions; **controlled**, which refers to maintaining composure and consistently providing assistance in resolving callers' problems; and **creative**, which involves the ability to identify effective and appropriate ways to handle various call situations. In addition, telephone operators are expected to demonstrate a **contagious** attitude by showing enthusiasm, positivity, and a pleasant tone that can positively influence callers. They must also exhibit caring behavior by paying attention, actively listening, and accurately noting customer concerns. Furthermore, a high level of commitment is required, indicating a strong sense of responsibility and dedication to the organization. Lastly, operators should be confident, displaying assurance in handling problems without underestimating their own capabilities. Collectively, these attitudes contribute significantly to enhancing service quality and shaping positive guest perceptions of the hotel.

Attitude in communication plays a crucial role in ensuring that interactions are both effective and efficient, particularly in maintaining the hotel's professional image. Telephone operators are required to demonstrate a positive attitude, which includes openness to others' ideas, opinions, and feelings by listening attentively without interrupting guests. They must also show empathy by understanding the caller's perspective and using polite and respectful language, while avoiding harsh expressions or offensive words. In addition, enthusiasm is essential, as it reflects genuine interest in the conversation and encourages operators to ask relevant questions in order to obtain more detailed information.

Furthermore, an active attitude is necessary to support effective communication. This involves maintaining full attention during interactions and avoiding distractions such as gadgets or unrelated activities. Operators are also expected to engage in appropriate questioning to clarify information and demonstrate attentiveness to guest needs. Providing constructive feedback without discouraging the caller is equally important, as well as using positive body language such as maintaining eye contact, smiling, and nodding to reinforce engagement, even in situations where communication is not face to face.

In addition, telephone operators must exhibit an assertive attitude, characterized by the ability to deliver messages clearly and concisely without unnecessary complexity. They should express opinions and respond to guest needs firmly yet politely, avoiding both passive and aggressive communication styles. Confidence is also essential, as it reflects professionalism and helps build trust during interactions.

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Lastly, an ethical attitude is fundamental in ensuring service integrity. This includes honesty in delivering accurate information without manipulation, fairness in treating all guests equally without discrimination or favoritism, and maintaining confidentiality by safeguarding guest information. Collectively, these attitudes contribute significantly to effective communication practices and play a vital role in enhancing service quality and preserving the hotel's image.

However, the study also identified several challenges faced by telephone operators that may hinder their performance. These challenges include the high volume of calls that must be handled simultaneously, the diversity of guest requests requiring prompt and accurate responses, and limited staffing, particularly during peak hours. In addition, telephone operators are often assigned tasks beyond their primary responsibilities, which can disrupt their focus in managing communication effectively. These conditions ultimately affect the optimal performance of telephone operators, especially in carrying out their role as information filters and distributors.

Furthermore, the findings reveal a gap between theoretical expectations and practical implementation. Theoretically, telephone operators are expected to concentrate on communication management functions; however, in practice, they are frequently burdened with additional operational duties. This discrepancy indicates that the strategic role of telephone operators has not yet been fully optimized within the hotel's service system.

Discussion

Telephone operators are the first point of interaction between customers or guests and the hotel, making their role strategically important in shaping initial perceptions of service quality. Their voice, friendliness, and professionalism directly influence how guests evaluate the company within the first moments of communication. Strategically, they hold control over public perception in the early seconds of interaction. According to Maulida & Rifai (2025), even minor errors in tone of voice or lack of information can damage a brand image that has been built through significant marketing investment, often within a single phone call. Unlike text messages or emails, telephone communication allows for emotional nuances and vocal tone that can foster stronger relationships with customers. Their ability to actively listen and demonstrate empathy is essential in handling complaints or urgent needs.

From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with the concept of service encounter or moment of truth, where initial interactions play a decisive role in determining customer satisfaction and corporate image. The voice, intonation, friendliness, and professionalism of telephone operators significantly influence guest perceptions during the early stages of communication. As emphasized by Maulida & Rifai (2025), small mistakes in tone or unpreparedness in providing information can negatively impact brand image even within a single interaction. Compared to text-based communication, telephone interactions carry emotional dimensions that enable the development of rapport through empathy, active listening, and vocal expression.

Telephone operators also function as gatekeepers. They ensure that key personnel, such as managers or directors, only receive relevant and urgent calls, thereby improving organizational productivity by minimizing unnecessary interruptions. A key finding of this study is the reinforcement of the operator's role as an information gatekeeper. From the perspective of gatekeeping theory in communication studies, a gatekeeper is an actor who controls the flow of information by selecting, filtering, and distributing messages to appropriate recipients. In the context of hotel operations, telephone operators perform this role by prioritizing calls, filtering incoming information, and ensuring that only essential and urgent messages are forwarded to relevant parties, such as managers or department heads (Verma & Gustafson, 2024). This role is strategic as it enhances organizational efficiency, reduces communication disruptions, and supports effective decision-making. Additionally, competent operators contribute to maintaining interdepartmental coordination, ensuring that service delivery processes run efficiently (Putri & Hidayat, 2025).

However, the findings also reveal a significant gap between theoretical expectations and practical realities. Theoretically, telephone operators are expected to focus on communication functions, handling calls responsively, accurately, and professionally. In practice, however, they are often assigned additional responsibilities beyond their primary role. While this role expansion may support hotel operations, it can potentially disrupt their core function as information gatekeepers. This issue becomes more pronounced during peak periods such as check-in and check-out, when workloads increase while staffing remains limited.

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Another operational challenge is the high volume of continuous incoming calls, coupled with a limited number of operators. Although the system allows calls to be redirected to the front office, this solution is not always effective, especially when front office staff are also experiencing high workloads. As a result, delays in information delivery and handling guest requests may occur, which can ultimately reduce customer satisfaction and loyalty. On the other hand, this study also identifies adaptive strategies employed by operators, such as conducting follow-up calls to reconfirm guest needs. This reflects efforts to maintain service quality despite existing limitations.

In the context of technological advancements, the presence of human telephone operators remains strategically important. Although chatbots and artificial intelligence are increasingly utilized, they cannot fully replace the emotional and personal aspects of service interactions. Adha et al. (2020) emphasize that the human touch in handling complex customer issues serves as a competitive advantage in maintaining customer loyalty. Responsive, friendly, and solution-oriented operators can create a positive overall impression of the organization. Conversely, poor telephone service may lead to negative perceptions of the hotel's professionalism (Li & Song, 2023).

Thus, this study contributes theoretically by strengthening and expanding the understanding of telephone operators as communication gatekeepers and voice-based brand ambassadors, while also highlighting the gap between their ideal role and practical implementation. This gap indicates the need for role realignment, improved workload management, and enhanced operator competencies to optimize their strategic function in supporting service quality and guest satisfaction. In the era of widespread chatbot and AI usage, the presence of human operators becomes a competitive advantage. Providing personalized interaction and emotional solutions to complex customer problems is a powerful customer retention strategy that cannot be fully replaced by machines (Rahmawati & Handayani, 2023). If an operator responds quickly, politely, and effectively, customers are likely to assume that all departments within the organization maintain similarly high standards. Conversely, rude or slow responses may create the impression that the organization is unprofessional and poorly managed.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of management and hospitality studies, telephone operators play a role that goes far beyond a technical function as communication intermediaries. They represent the initial embodiment of a hotel's service quality standards, where their voice, tone, and friendliness shape the crucial first impression that determines guests' perceptions of the hotel's professionalism and class. This underscores that the quality of initial interactions is an integral part of service management strategy and organizational image building.

From a management standpoint, the role of telephone operators as gatekeepers and communication hubs demonstrates their strategic contribution in maintaining the effectiveness of information flow, improving operational efficiency, and supporting accurate decision-making. Their ability to de-escalate guest complaints before forwarding them to the relevant departments also reflects an essential function in customer relationship management (CRM), contributing to customer retention and the prevention of reputational damage.

In the context of the hospitality industry, the presence of competent human operators serves as a competitive advantage amid the advancement of automation technologies such as interactive voice response (IVR). The personal touch, empathy, and interpersonal communication skills possessed by human operators cannot be fully replaced by technology, thereby strengthening the hotel's image as a service-oriented organization that values long-term relationships with its guests.

Therefore, telephone operators can be positioned as "faceless ambassadors" who hold a strategic role in shaping guest satisfaction and the overall perception of the hotel's professionalism. Accordingly, more optimal management is required through competency development, role clarity, and managerial support to maximize their contribution to service quality and the hotel's competitive advantage.

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