

Service Blueprint and Customer Post-Purchase Behavior of Hotels in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between the multidimensionality of service blueprint and customer post-purchase behavior of hotels in Nigeria. Data generated from 384 participants selected from 16 hotels, in the cities of Aba and Umuahia, were used in testing the hypothesized relationships using Pearson product moment correlation and linear regression. Results showed that the three dimensions of service blueprint used in the study had positive relationships with customer post-purchase behavior. Besides the tips for effective service blueprinting, the study proposes a model of service blueprint for hotels in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Service Design, Service Process, Service Experience, Post-Purchase Behavior.*

INTRODUCTION

Hotels are service-based business ventures that offer leisure activities for sale (www.globalhotel-data.com, 2013). The hospitality industry, where hotels are situated, is growing rapidly (Jamir, 2007), owing to economic growth and advanced standard of living (Lee *et al*, 2012), contributing over 80% of worldwide tourism earnings. This trend is also observable in Nigeria owing to growing penchant of Nigerians for leisure activities (Kalu, 2015). This has led to establishment of many hotels in Nigeria, with over 30,000 rooms, as at 2010 (Esiekpe, 2011).

The existence of these hotels has made the hospitality industry competitive. However, the competition is basically facility-based (Onuoha & Agu, 2016), as these hotels render undifferentiated services (Onuoha & Igwe, 2017). Nevertheless, hotels can differentiate themselves by moving to the realm of customer experience management, creating long-term, emotional bonds with their customers through the co-creation of memorable experiences potentially involving a combination of goods and services (Crossby & Johnson, 2007). The compelling need for creating value through customer experiences suggests a need for innovative methods, techniques, and R & D practices for services (Bitner, Ostrom & Morgan, 2008). One of such techniques is what Shostack (1987) termed service blueprint – a customer-focused approach for service innovation and service improvement.

Realistically, firms-hotels inclusive – cannot wholly eliminate the possibility of negative customer post-purchase experience (Schoefer, 2012). Nevertheless, what distinguishes successful firms from others lies in the efforts the firms make to keep negative post-purchase experience at the lowest ebb (Zeithaml, 1998).

Considerable evidences show that consumers evaluate a firm's offer by comparing their post-purchase experience with their expectations from the firm before the purchase (Hansemark & Albinson, 2004; Angelova & Zekiri, 2011; Yi, 1989; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Consumers who subsequently perceive a gap between their expectations and the quality of service delivered by the firm would exhibit negative post-purchase behavior; otherwise, positive post-purchase behavior is exhibited (Tax & Chandrashekar, 1992; Hansemark & Albinson, 2004; Angelova & Zekiri, 2011; Blodgett *et al*, 1997). Thus, a firm's strategy aimed at reducing the gap between consumers' expectations and the product's performance can have a dramatic impact on consumers' post-purchase behavior (Khan, 2012; Ambler & Kokkinaki, 1997; Ziaie *et al*, 2012; Hnasemark & Albison, 2004). Consequently, service blueprint has been recognized as a critical means of service delivery (Polaine *et al*, 2013), as it brings new insight in evaluating service from the customer's viewpoint (Spraragen & Chan, 2008).

Most consumer researchers have explored the impact of service recovery on post-complaint behavior (Smith *et al.*, 1999; Estelami, 2000; Tax *et al.*, 1998; Hess *et al.*, 2003; Davidow, 2003; Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005; Awa *et al.*, 2015). These studies, as observed by Awa *et al.* (2015), mainly concentrated on what service providers would do to appease consumers after service failure; while less attention has been directed towards an understanding of service blueprinting as antidote to service failure, which consequently makes service recovery strategies less attractive. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine customer evaluation of service blueprint and its implications for customer post-purchase behavior in the context of service delivery in Nigeria's hospitality industry.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The baseline theory for this study was the Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT), also referred to as Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), developed by Richard L. Oliver in a series of two studies in 1977 and 1980 (see Oliver, 1977 & 1980). It is the most popular satisfaction theory (Mattila & O'Neill, 2003). ECT is a cognitive theory which seeks to explain post-purchase or post-adoption satisfaction as a function of expectations, perceived performance and disconfirmation of beliefs (Oliver, 1977 & 1980). The theory explains the judgments or evaluations that a person's makes with respect to a product or service in comparison to the person's original expectations, which culminates in positive or negative post-purchase behaviour (Oliver, 1980; Spreng, Mackenzie & Olshavsky, 1996; Nevo & Wade, 2007).

The theory posits that satisfaction is influenced by both expectations and perceived performance by means of a mediational relationship which passes through the disconfirmation construct (Nevo & Wade, 2007), therefore its application to service blueprinting and customer post-purchase behavior is worthwhile, bearing in mind that customers' satisfaction of hotel services is based on their comparison of their expectations and actual performance of the service.

Service Blueprint (SB)

There are different but related definitions of service, as most definitions of a service focus on the fact that services are provided as solutions to customer problems (Gronroos, 1990) or create value (Gummesson, 2002). As defined by O'Flaherty *et al.* (2013, p. 101), service is a

“dynamic set of activities which create value/solve a problem through the lens of the customer”. What services, whether professional, retail, financial, telecommunication, hospitality, healthcare or offerings in conjunction with goods, have in common is an interface with an actual customer whether through technology or interpersonal interactions (Bitner *et al.*, 2008). Services are “higher” products whose purchase does not result in the ownership of any physical object (Okpara, 2012). Also, the purchase of services is influenced by the physical evidence of the service point, and the contact persons (Bitner, 1992). These have, therefore, become challenges that make the sale of services difficult, and have equally underlie the need for an innovation technique like service blueprinting (Bitner *et al.*, 2008).

Service blueprinting is a framework for service delivery invented by Shostack (1982; 1987) and developed further by Kingman-Brundage (1993; 1995; 1996) to visualise expected and or actual service process. Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) define service blueprint as a picture or map that accurately portrays the service system so that the different people involved in its development can understand and deal with it objectively regardless of their roles or individual point of view. It depicts the process of service delivery, roles of customers, roles of service employees, and visible components of service (Boughnim & Yannou, 2005). Service blueprint answers these questions: Who does what? To whom? How often? Under what condition? (Kingman-Brundage, 1989).

A typical service blueprint is made up of five components (Zeithaml, Bitner & Cremler, 2006), as shown in Figure 1.

The strength of service blueprinting lies largely on its ability in creating a visual depiction of the service process that highlights the steps in the process, the points of contact that take place, and the physical evidence that exists, all from a customer's point of view (O'Connor *et al.*, 2015).

Post-Purchase Behavior

Each stage of the buyer decision process is complicated, and marketers need to understand their customers' journey as they construct meaningful campaigns and messages.

These statements are even more important to reckon with in the last stage of the buyer decision process—post-purchase behavior (Ehigie, 2000).

Physical Evidence	All tangible items that customers are exposed to when a service is being delivered, which can influence their quality perceptions.
Customer Actions	All of the steps that customers take as part of the service delivery process.
Onstage/Visible Contact Employee Actions	Line of Interaction Actions of frontline contact employees that occur as part of face-to-face encounter with customers.
Backstage/Invisible Contact Employee Actions	Line of Visibility Non-visible activities that contact employees do so as to prepare to serve customers or that are part of their role responsibilities (e.g. telephone calls).
Support Processes	Line of Internal Interaction All of the activities carried out by individuals and units within the organization who are not contact employees but that need to happen in order for the service to be delivered.

Figure1. Traditional Service Blueprint

Post-purchase behavior is simply defined as the stage of the buyer process where a consumer will take additional action, based purely on his satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Tronvoll, 2007). Post-purchase behavior measures the outcome of consumers’ evaluation of a firm’s offer after use (Hansemark & Albinson, 2004). The evaluation is based on the consumers’ perception of the ability of the offer to solve their problem (Knox *et al*, 2003). Consumers are satisfied if they perceive the product’s performance meets, or even exceeds, their expectations; and are dissatisfied if the contrary occurs (Ehigie, 2000; Khan, 2012; Ziaie *et al*, 2012).

This study adopted the three dimensional measures of post-complaint behavior proposed by Davidow (2003) and validated by Awa *et al* (2015) in a Nigeria-based study. They are customer satisfaction; repurchase intentions, and word-of-mouth publicity.

Customer satisfaction is the paramount indicator of a firm’s quality of service (Vavra, 1997). It measures consumers’ state of contentment (Oliver, 2006). According to Kotler and Keller (2009) customer satisfaction is a feeling of pleasure, or disappointment arising from someone who compares a product’s perceived performance (or outcome) against their expectations. It is one of the best indicators for future profit (Satiawan, 2004), as it leads to repeat purchases, loyalty and customer retention (Zairi, 2000).

Repurchase intentions refer to the degree in which a customer prefers a firm’s offering in future in relation to competitors’ (Kotler & Keller, 2009), while word-of-mouth publicity refers to the likelihood of advocacy after a specific post-purchase experience (Christopher *et al*, 2002). These two are influenced by satisfaction. Satisfied customers are likely to repurchase the

same product (Kelley *et al*, 1993; La Barbera & Mazursky, 1983) as well as share their experiences with others (Angelova & Zekiri, 2011), including potential buyers and competitors’ customers (Awa *et al*, 2011). Thus, repurchase intentions and word-of-mouth publicity is salient consequences of satisfaction/dissatisfaction paradigm (Oliver, 1996).

Study Framework and Hypotheses

Based on the foundation developed by Shostack (1982; 1987) and Kingman – Brundage (1993; 1995; 1996), a number of authors had suggested certain dimensions of service blueprint, including service process, customer experience, and service development and design (Bitner *et al*, 2007); service experience and service process (Berry *et al*, 2002); service design and service experience (Polaine *et al*, 2013); customer service experience (Patricio *et al*, 2008). Gleaning from the foregoing, figure 2 shows the dimensions of service blueprint used in this study, as well as the proposed relationships, and three testable hypotheses.

Service Design

Service design is the activity of planning and organizing people, infrastructure, and communication and material components of a service in order to improve its quality and the interaction between service provider and customers (Shostack, 1984). The purpose of service design methodologies is to design according to the needs of customers or participants, so that the service is user-friendly, competitive and relevant to the customers (Leville, Downs & Reason, 2008).

Organizations that are most successful in providing satisfying services keep their service development processes from being *ad hoc* (de Jong & Vermeulen, 2003).

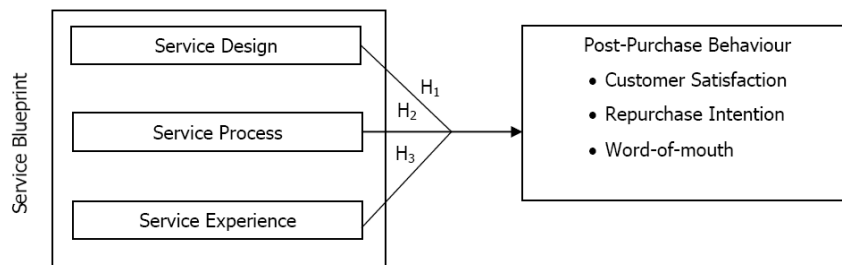


Figure 2. Research Framework

Thus, satisfying services are prepared systematically through a set of planned stages from the establishment of clear objectives, to idea generation, to concept development, service design, prototyping, service launch, and customer feedback (Bitner *et al*, 2007).

As services are becoming commoditized (Gilmore & Pine, 1998), service design is then becoming a vehicle through which memorable service experiences is provided (Norman, 2004). A well designed service that is pleasing to experience can provide the firm with a key point of differentiation from competitors (Bitner *et al*, 2008), and is more likely to result in favorable service quality and brand image evaluations, which both have influence on customer satisfaction, loyalty and repatronage (Eduardsson & Oleson, 1996; Stuart, 2006).

H₁: There is a significant relationship between service design and customer post-purchase behavior

Service Process

One of the most distinctive characteristics of services is their *process* nature (Gronvoos, 2000) as services are dynamic, unfolding over a period of time through a sequence or combination of events and steps (Bitner *et al*, 2008). Service process, therefore, refers to a chain or combination of activities that allows the service to function effectively (John & Storey, 1998). A service process that is coordinated and managed as a whole, over time, produces value for the customer (Bitner *et al*, 2008). This value, thus, becomes a critical factor for customer positive judgment of the service encounter (Danaher & Mattsson, 1994), as well as object of favorable word-of-mouth (Singh, 1991).

H₂: There is a significant relationship between service process and customer post-purchase behavior

Service Experience

Service experience refers to “the cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions associated with a specific service extent” (Padgett & Allen, 1997). This definition represents a time-

bounded progression of related interactions involving the customer and other people and or technology in the production and consumption of a service (Bitner *et al*, 2008). Service experience is the key to differentiating one’s offering from those of competitors and escaping commoditization in an increasingly crowded competitive market place (Gilmore & Pine, 1998).

Designing and managing the customer experience effectively requires presenting a series of clues that function holistically to meet or exceed customer expectations (Carbone & Haeckel, 1994). The total customer experience, as influenced by the clues, evokes perceptions of service quality, which in turn, influences preferences and loyalty (Haeckel, Carbone & berry, 2003). Delivering customer value through distinctive, memorable service experiences is more likely to lead to favorable customer post-purchase behavior (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Thus, successful experiences are those that the customer finds unique, memorable and sustainable over time, and would like to repeat, build upon and enthusiastically promotes via word-of-mouth (Pullman & Gross, 2004).

H₃: There is a significant relationship between service experience and customer post-purchase behavior.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Abia State, South-East, Nigeria. National Population Commission (NPC) and National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) put the current projected population of Abia State at 3,622,900 (Nigeria Tribune, December 30, 2016). For a population of 1,000,000 and above, a sample size of 384 is adequate (Sekeran, 2003). Thus, data used in testing the hypothesized relationships were generated from 384 customers of 16 hotels in two major cities of the State – Aba and Umuahia – using questionnaire, at 24:1 ratio. However, customers selected for questionnaire administration were those available in their hotel rooms or seen at the reception, checking in or out of the hotels, as at the time the questionnaire was shared. This is referred to as

Service Blueprint and Customer Post-Purchase Behavior of Hotels in Nigeria

convenience sampling technique (Ezejelue *et al*, 2008).

The 24-item questionnaire – 15 for service blueprint and 9 for post-purchase behavior – structured on 5-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” (5) to “strongly disagree” (1) was pre-tested on 15 customers in Apricot Hotel, Umuahia, in order to confirm its simplicity and consistency. The Cronbach test result, as shown in Table 1, surpassed Nunnally and Bernstein’s (1994) benchmark of 0.7, thus confirming the reliability of the research instrument.

Table2. Correlations between Service Blueprint and Customer Post-Purchase Behavior (N=384)

		1	2	3	4
Service Design	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1			
Service Process	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.909** .000	1		
Service Experience	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.950** .000	.825** .000	1	
Post-Purchase Behaviour	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.836** .000	.777** .000	.795** .000	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The influence of service blueprint on customer post-purchase behavior of hotels was investigated using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient as shown in Table 2. There was a positive influence of service design, service

Table3. Results of Regression Analysis

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	t-test	Sig	Decision
Constant	3.09	4.562	0.000	
Service design	0.719	10.941	0.000**	Accept H ₁
Service process	0.745	4.817	0.000**	Accept H ₂
Service experience	0.693	5.478	0.000**	Accept H ₃

Model Summary: $R = 0.684$; $R^2 = 0.382$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.377$; F - value = 61.742**; std error of estimate = 0.067. **Note:** ** $p \leq 0.05$

A linear regression model was used to explore the relationship between dependent variable and independent variable (predictor). It was used to predict customer post-purchase behavior. As shown in Table 3, the R² value of service blueprint was 0.382.

This indicates that the predictor variables in the model explained about 38.2% variations of customer post-purchase behavior. Thus, customer post-purchase behavior is fairly driven by service blueprint. The regression model ($Y = 3.09 + 0.719X_1 + 0.745X_2 + 0.693X_3$) significantly improved the ability to predict customer post-purchase behavior. The F - value ($F = 61.742$, $p < 0.05$) was significant, showing good model fit.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The β values of the dimensions of service blueprint had positive relationship with customer post-

Table1. Reliability Coefficient of Study Variables

Cronbach’s Alpha	Cronbach’s Alpha based on Standardized items	No of Items
.878	.884	24

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Pearson product moment correlation and linear regression were used to establish the relationship between service blueprint (independent variable) and customer post-purchase behavior (dependent variable).

process and service experience on post-purchase behavior as shown by their respective r values of 0.836, 0.777 and 0.795. This indicates that the adoption of service blueprint in hotels leads to positive customer post-purchase behavior.

purchase behavior, as shown in Table 3. From the Table, the t -values associated with β -values were significant (t -values > 0.05), thus service blueprint as the predictor was making a significant contribution to the model.

The predicted relationship between service design and customer post-purchase behavior was significant ($\beta = 0.719$, $p < 0.05$), which suggests the acceptance of H₁ that service design has significant influence on customer post-purchase behavior. This indicates that for each unit increase in service design, there is 0.719 units increase in customer post-purchase behavior of hotels. This finding concurs with Norman (2004), Bitner *et al* (2008) and Stuart (2006) that service design is a means through which customer satisfaction, loyalty and repatronage are achieved.

The interaction between service process and customer post-purchase behavior was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.745$, $p < 0.05$), thereby suggesting the acceptance of H₂ that service process has significant influence on customer post-purchase behaviour. The implication of this finding is that for each unit increase in service process, there is 0.745 units increase in customer post-purchase behavior of hotels. This finding agrees with extant studies that service process produces value for customers (Bitner *et al*, 2008) upon which they judge the service provider positively (Danaher & Mattsson, 1994) and spread such judgment to others (Singh, 1991). The interaction between service experience and customer post-purchase behavior was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.693$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests accepting H₃ that service experience has significant influence on customer post-purchase behavior. This indicates that for each unit increase in service experience, there is 0.693 units increase in customer post-purchase behavior. This finding is in line with the finding of Meyer and Schwager (2007) that memorable service experience mostly leads to favorable customer post-purchase behavior. The finding further agrees with Pullman and Gross (2004) that customers are likely to repurchase a firm whose service experience is memorable, and are willing to promote such experience via word-of-mouth.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper attempts to extend the theoretical base of service delivery by developing a framework of service blueprint, with three dimensions, from literature. The reliability of the dimensions of service blueprint was statistically confirmed, and the hypothesized relationships in the framework tested using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and linear regression. All the hypothesized relationships were supported at $p < 0.05$. The adoption of service blueprint enables hotels to provide customer-based services that guarantee satisfaction, repurchase of the service and willingness of letting others know about the services.

By modeling service blueprint for hotels (see figure 3 in the appendix), this paper contributes to the theoretical and methodological discourse within the context of service delivery in general, and hospitality industry in particular.

The model, as shown in figure 3, clearly shows the actions of hotel customers, both what they do that involves employees and other actions that customers engage in as part of the service

delivery process (for example, sleeping, eating food from room services). The purpose of the model is to capture the entire customer experience from the customer's point of view in the blueprint. Front desk employees who check in customers are performing an onstage action as are employees who deliver room service to customers. Employees who deliver service might also engage in backstage activities such as helping prepare the food and arranging the tray prior to delivering it to customers. There are also important support processes including the reservation and registration systems that affect the customer experience. Although presented only in a brief conceptual form here, any support processes that impact the customer experience could be described in detail. As shown in the model, hotels clearly have considerable physical evidence that customers are exposed to that can impact their quality perceptions.

From a practical perspective, hotels are advised to adopt service blueprinting in assessing and improving their existing services. With this, everyone could see their critical role(s) on the blueprint and logical changes and improvements ensued. Also, inputs should be gathered from both business customer and employees on how to improve the core service. To achieve this, interactions with customers and visible/invisible contact employees are inevitable.

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APPENDIX

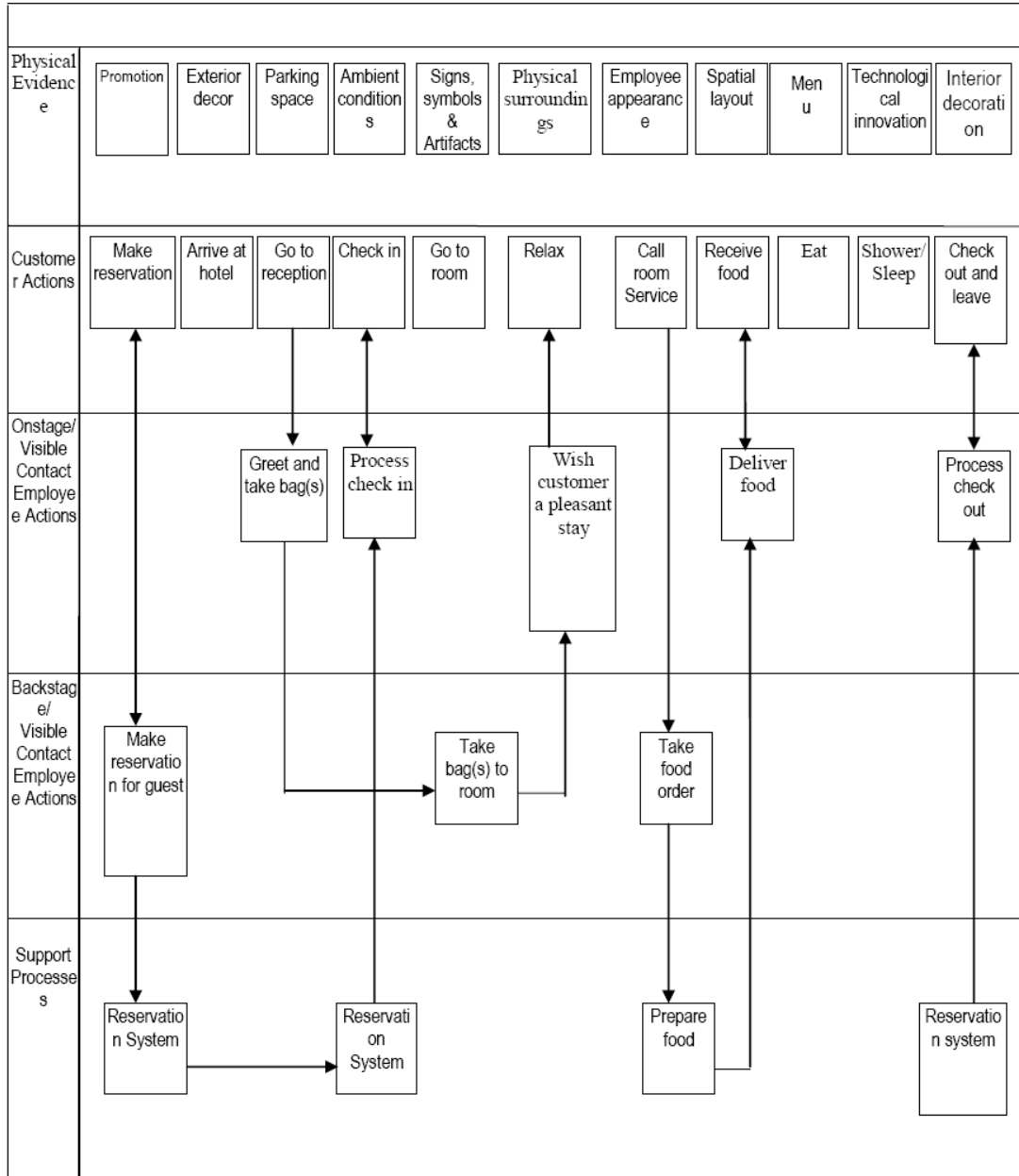


Figure3. Service Blueprint for Overnight Hotel Stay Service

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