CUSTOMER CARE REPRESENTATIVE SERVICE STRATEGIES FOR TOURISTS' COMFORT WHILE VACATIONING IN BALI: A CASE STUDY AT TRAVEL AGENT COMPANY X

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the service strategies implemented by Customer Care Representatives (CCR) to enhance tourists' comfort while vacationing in Bali. High-quality CCR service is a key determinant of positive travel experiences, particularly amid intensifying competition in the tourism industry. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, collecting data through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data were analyzed using a SWOT approach and the TOWS strategy matrix to formulate appropriate strategic actions. The findings indicate that service strengths lie in a personalized approach, effective communication, and the use of technologies such as WhatsApp and Google Translate. Identified weaknesses include limited human resources in foreign-language proficiency and the absence of standardized, uniform service procedures. Opportunities arise from strong inbound tourist interest and advances in digital technology, whereas threats stem from competition with online, platform-based services (OTAs). The resulting TOWS strategies include optimizing service digitalization, conducting regular staff training, and strengthening service SOPs. These strategies demonstrably support smooth trip execution and improve tourists' comfort during their stay in Bali. The study is expected to serve as a reference for tourism industry practitioners—particularly travel agencies—in designing more effective and sustainable service strategies.

Keywords: Customer Care Representative, Satisfaction, Communication, Service.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is understood as a travel activity undertaken by individuals or groups to obtain new experiences outside their place of residence within a defined period, and it is inclusive of all age groups (from children to adults). This definition foregrounds the experiential dimension and the spatio-temporal mobility of tourists as the core of tourism activity (Arjana, 2017). At the same time, tourism typically entails long-distance travel that requires adequate facilities and services delivered by communities, government, and businesses; consequently, service quality becomes a principal determinant of the tourist experience (Rahayu, 2022).

Rising travel interest has diversified preferences into multiple forms—nature, cultural, religious, and recreational tourism, among others—allowing tourists to select experiences that align with their motivations and needs. In Bali, Indonesia's flagship destination, this dynamic is strongly reflected in international arrivals during 2020–2024. Official tables indicate post-pandemic recovery and surges across continents (Asia, Europe, Oceania, the Americas, Africa): for example, Europe rose from 300,264 (2020) to 1,668,849 (2024), and Oceania from 244,227 (2020) to 1,691,351 (2024). Similar patterns appear for Asia (334,247 → 1,789,472) and the Americas (79,010 → 403,312). These data,

explicitly sourced from the Bali Provincial Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2024, provide compelling evidence that recovery has occurred not only at a national aggregate level but also at the destination level (BPS Provinsi Bali, 2024).

At the firm level, Travel Agent X shows an upward trend in international customers from 2022 to 2024—especially from Europe—with total tourists served increasing from 4,577 (2022) to 14,340 (2024). Internal sources reaffirm the company's growing customer trust (Operations Department of Travel Agent X, 2025).

Functionally, a travel agency operates through several key departments. Sales & Marketing designs market-fit packages and maintains loyalty (Ladkin, 2023); Customer Service manages information, inquiries, and complaints—its quality critically shapes satisfaction (Cahyani & Rahmawati, 2021); Operations ensures that logistics (transport, accommodation, activities) run according to plan (O'Connell & Williams, 2016); Finance/Administration manages budgeting and reporting compliance; and Human Resources oversees recruitment, training, and staff well-being (Kotler et al., 2022). Together, these units synergize to deliver a seamless, high-quality travel experience.

Among these functions, the Customer Care Representative (CCR) serves as the frontline bridge between the company and tourists—providing assistance and information, handling special requests and complaints, and ensuring coordination with guides, drivers, and hotels so that service standards are met. Accordingly, the CCR embodies the agency's professionalism and service quality in the eyes of tourists.

Empirically, this study addresses a research gap: prior work on tourism and customer service tends to emphasize digital systems (online reservations, automated services) and CRM for loyalty outcomes, yet comparatively little examines CCR strategies as the front line of direct, personalized interaction—including the use of simple technologies (e.g., WhatsApp, Google Translate) and structured briefings within travel-agency operations at leading destinations like Bali.

To address this gap, the present study explores CCR strategies in personalized approaches, communication with tourists, complaint handling, and on-trip problem solving in Bali. We adopt a qualitative analytical framework enriched by SWOT and the TOWS matrix to formulate responsive, applicable strategies for internal management.

The central research question is: How do Customer Care Representatives strategize to serve tourists while vacationing in Bali? The study scope focuses on CCR strategies at Travel Agent X in ensuring trip smoothness and tourist comfort in Bali. In terms of contributions, theoretically, the research deepens understanding of CCR strategies within travel-agency contexts; practically, it is useful for students (applied learning), institutions (reference material on travel-agency services), and industry (inputs to maximize tourist comfort)

Customer Care Representative (CCR). CCR is a frontline position tasked with providing direct support, bridging communication, and coordinating the fulfillment of customer needs. Kotler & Keller (2022) emphasize the CCR's focus on problem-solving through effective face-to-face or real-time interaction, while Kumar & Sharma (2021) add that CCRs function as boundary spanners who build long-term relationships through clear communication and swift solutions. From a strategic lens, customer service is a key element of relational marketing (Ginting Suka & Lubis, 2019); communication competence, empathy, and product knowledge are prerequisites for CCR performance (Bastiar, 2010). In the travel-agency context, CCR performance indicators include response SLA (service-level agreement), first-contact resolution (FCR), information accuracy, NPS/CSAT scores, and the proportion of positive e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth).

Comfort Standards. Comfort standards serve as benchmarks of service quality across physical aspects (punctuality, cleanliness, accessibility) and psychological aspects (courtesy, politeness, clarity of information, sense of safety). Tjiptono (2017) asserts that consistent comfort leads to satisfaction, loyalty, and repeat use. In tourism settings, CCRs safeguard comfort standards via clear briefings, pre-trip checklists, real-time updates (e.g., flight delays), and post-trip follow-ups.

Service Strategies.

a. Service Quality. Perceived quality reflects timeliness, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Atmaja, 2018; Setiawan & Frianto, 2021). McColl-Kennedy et al. (2015) stress experiential (emotional–interactive) dimensions that shape value. High service quality strengthens positive relationships and repurchase (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015). In high-contact services, key antecedents of perceived quality are response speed, staff competence, and empathy (Huang et al., 2018)—all of which sit at the core of CCR roles.

b. Complaint Handling. Complaints are strategic inputs for improvement (Hermawati, 2023). Fast, transparent, and solution-oriented recovery increases satisfaction and loyalty (Maxham, 2001) and improves brand image (Larasati & Suryoko, 2020). Clear, responsive recovery communication fosters customer forgiveness (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015). In digital contexts, agile cross-channel responses are essential to mitigate the impact of negative online reviews (Ritonga & Fuady, 2023).

c. Effective Communication. Communication is an encoding–decoding process that aligns meanings between parties (Damayani Pohan & Fitria, 2021). Sound internal communication streamlines organizational coordination (Hidayat, 2021), while open and responsive communication elevates satisfaction and loyalty (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2020). Best practices for CCRs include realistic expectation setting, empathetic scripts, tiered issue management, and consistent status updates.

d. Promotion and e-WOM. Cahyani & Sulistyowati (2021) show that promotion and e-WOM shape purchasing decisions in digital services; in travel agencies, e-WOM activation is executed through post-trip review requests, surprise-and-delight gestures, and professional public responses to complaints—all managed by CCRs.

e. Customer Value and Trust. Perceived value is a trade-off between benefits (convenience, experience) and costs/risks; trust strengthens the quality–loyalty link (Indiani, 2019). In practice, transparent pricing and itineraries, together with a solid recovery track record, signal lower risk and reinforce reuse intentions.

Customer Loyalty. Loyalty is a repeat-purchase commitment despite available alternatives. Retaining customers is more cost-efficient than acquiring new ones (Larasati & Suryoko, 2020). In travel-agency contexts, loyalty is formed through satisfying experiences, trust, and consistent service quality (Zhang & Lee, 2022). Optimizing CCR roles at critical touchpoints along the journey (pre-booking, in-service, and post-service) is key to spinning the loyalty flywheel.

Prior Studies. To reinforce the theoretical base, this study reviews prior work on service quality, CCR roles, communication, pricing, complaint handling, and their effects on satisfaction, purchase decisions, and customer loyalty in tourism/travel-service settings. Overall, earlier findings consistently indicate that service quality and customer experience trigger satisfaction, which then translates into loyalty; meanwhile, trust, complaint handling, and effective communication strengthen or mediate these relationships (Arifin et al., 2022; Indiani, 2019; Nugraha & Malelak, 2020).

a. Arifin et al. (2022) show that superior service and pleasant experiences increase satisfaction with direct implications for loyalty. In travel agencies, this positions CCR responsiveness as a primary driver of customer experience.

b. Indiani (2019) highlights trust as a strategic mediator; quality without trust yields fragile loyalty—hence CCRs must ensure consistency in information and service promises.

c. Rahmandika et al. (2020) find that fair/transparent pricing and reliable service shape perceived value → satisfaction, which must be communicated clearly at CCR touchpoints.

d. Nugraha & Malelak (2020) underscore the need for complaint-handling protocols (SLA, first-contact resolution, proportionate compensation) to close service-failure gaps.

e. Alfianto & Fikriyah (2021): ethical, structured communication (internal–external) strengthens perceived quality; this is highly relevant as CCRs manage cross-vendor information flows.

f. Cahyani & Sulistyowati (2021) demonstrate the role of promotion and e-WOM in driving purchase decisions; for travel agencies, post-trip follow-ups and curated reviews become levers for reputation and acquisition.

Synthesis & research gap. The literature converges on the mechanism quality → satisfaction → loyalty, reinforced by trust, communication, and recovery. However, CCR frontline strategies—which integrate quality signaling (response speed, information accuracy), field coordination (guides, drivers, hotels), and real-time service recovery—remain under-explored at high-traffic destinations like Bali. This study positions CCRs as experience orchestrators who simultaneously integrate operational and relational dimensions.

Conceptual Framework. Travel agencies are service businesses that depend heavily on service quality and experience management. This study conceptualizes the CCR as an orchestrator who integrates: (i) service quality (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles); (ii) effective communication (expectation setting, clarity of information, cross-vendor coordination); (iii) service recovery (SLA, first-contact resolution, compensation); and (iv) e-WOM activation (relevant promotions + review follow-ups). These four pillars drive satisfaction, which builds trust/commitment, ultimately leading to loyalty and repeat use (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Maxham, 2001; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015; Cahyani & Sulistyowati, 2021).

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine in depth the strategies of Customer Care Representatives (CCR) in ensuring trip smoothness and tourist comfort in Bali, using purposive sampling to select key informants (CCR staff, direct supervisors, and relevant partners) until data saturation is reached (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019). Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations at service touchpoints, and documentation (SOPs, chat/call logs, complaint forms), while secondary data were obtained from the literature and company records. Data analysis followed the Miles & Huberman iterative model—data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification—to identify themes, patterns, and relationships among constructs relevant to CCR performance (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Trustworthiness was ensured through source and method triangulation, member checking, an audit trail, and assessments of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in line with qualitative validity guidelines (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018). At the managerial synthesis stage, qualitative findings were mapped into a SWOT analysis and translated into strategic alternatives using the TOWS Matrix to produce operational

recommendations that are sharper and context-specific for the company (Weihrich, 1982; David & David, 2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative study reveals the role of Customer Care Representatives (CCR) as orchestrators of the customer experience across the journey—ranging from the pre-trip stage (consultation and document preparation), through the on-trip stage (itinerary execution and disruption handling), to the post-trip stage (follow-up and e-WOM activation). Across these stages, three strong thematic threads emerge. First, responsiveness combined with empathy proves to be a defining pillar of service quality: CCRs who respond quickly, choose calming wording, and conduct sustained follow-ups can reduce tourists' anxiety in the face of on-the-ground uncertainty (e.g., delayed pick-ups, weather changes, or rescheduling of activities). These findings align with SERVQUAL dimensions that place responsiveness and empathy as the closest drivers of perceived quality—culminating in satisfaction (Atmaja, 2018; Setiawan & Frianto, 2021; Tjiptono, 2017). Second, accuracy and clarity of information—particularly regarding itineraries, vouchers, pick-up windows, and airline/visa rules—act as critical levers for expectation management. When CCRs enforce double-check standards (e.g., reconfirming pick-up times and rooming lists) and issue proactive status updates when changes occur, the distance between expectation and realization (the expectation gap) narrows, thereby reducing the likelihood of negative disconfirmation. It is consistent with the customer experience framework across touchpoints, which emphasizes expectation setting in the pre-trip phase and real-time communication during service delivery (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), as well as the importance of tidy internal communication to ensure consistent execution (Hidayat, 2021). Third, when service disruptions occur, service recovery that is fast, transparent, and solution-oriented—following the sequence "fact-check → solution options → status updates → proportionate compensation"—proves effective in restoring satisfaction and preventing negative spillover into public spaces. This pattern corroborates classic evidence that effective recovery increases satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth, and repurchase intentions (Maxham, 2001), and it shapes brand image and loyalty through perceptions of fairness and response reliability (Larasati & Suryoko, 2020).

At the operational level, cross-vendor coordination (guides, drivers, hotels, activity operators) emerges as a determinant of process reliability. Practices such as daily briefings, double confirmation for changes, and consolidating service documents into a single source of truth (SSOT) minimize process variance and reduce handover errors. These findings strengthen the position of CCRs as relational boundary spanners who not only resolve immediate issues but also build long-term trust through consistent interaction (Kumar & Sharma, 2021). After the trip, brief post-trip follow-ups serve dual functions: closing the service loop (when minor issues remain) and encouraging positive reviews on relevant channels as social proof for prospective customers. It aligns with evidence that promotion and e-WOM influence purchasing decisions in digital services; when review prompts are delivered timely and ethically, acquisition potential increases while simultaneously creating a learning loop for continuous improvement (Cahyani & Sulistyowati, 2021).

At a causal level, the findings repeatedly point to the pathway: service quality—particularly responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and accuracy—drives satisfaction, while trust—built through consistent communication and recovery—mediates the link toward loyalty. This pathway is consistent with empirical evidence in travel services that emphasizes quality → satisfaction →

loyalty, with trust as an amplifier (Arifin et al., 2022; Indiani, 2019). In parallel, price transparency and clear expectation management improve perceived value—especially when costs/risks are communicated candidly by CCRs—thus increasing intentions to reuse the service (Rahmandika et al., 2020). Altogether, these patterns underscore that CCRs are not merely problem solvers but experience orchestrators who manage quality signals (speed, empathy, accuracy), ensure execution consistency (coordination), and restore trust (recovery) to drive repeat use and recommendations.

This discussion connects field findings with theoretical frameworks and prior evidence. First, the dominance of responsiveness–empathy in shaping tourists' real-time experience reaffirms SERVQUAL (responsiveness and empathy) as the most salient levers in high-contact services. In travel—replete with timing uncertainty, traffic conditions, and third-party dependencies—a difference of five to ten minutes in response time and the tone of messages can determine whether an issue escalates or is resolved at the first contact. Indonesian service literature shows both dimensions correlate with satisfaction and intent to return (Atmaja, 2018; Setiawan & Frianto, 2021), while service-marketing references position them as indicators of psychological comfort that moderate quality perceptions (Tjiptono, 2017). Second, accuracy and clarity of information—from the pre-trip brief to status updates—function as expectation managers. Expectancy–disconfirmation theory posits that satisfaction increases when performance exceeds expectations; in travel services, "performance" is substantially determined by the clarity of promises and the consistency of execution communicated by CCRs (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Coherent internal communication (between CCRs, operations, and vendors) is crucial to suppress miscommunication (Hidayat, 2021).

Third, when failures occur, service recovery becomes a decisive moment of truth. A standardized sequence that is fast, transparent, and solution-oriented (SLA targets, option decision trees, periodic status updates, and proportionate compensation) not only reduces disappointment but also empirically triggers positive WOM and loyalty rebound (Maxham, 2001). Its impact extends beyond short-term utility to long-term image and trust (Larasati & Suryoko, 2020). In the digital era, recovery must also be omnichannel—chat, WhatsApp, email, and social media—because unattended complaints can quickly become damaging public opinion; prompt and ethical public responses mitigate reputational risk while signaling accountability (Cahyani & Sulistyowati, 2021). Fourth, cross-vendor coordination shows that experience quality depends not only on one-to-one CCR–tourist interactions but on the orchestration of the service ecosystem. Positioning CCRs as a single point of contact that unifies operational information smooths handovers; this aligns with relationship-marketing views that consistent interaction quality cultivates trust and commitment, two pillars that pave the way to loyalty (Indiani, 2019; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Finally, post-service e-WOM activation—conducted timely and without coercion—extends the effects of positive experiences into the social arena, strengthens prospective customers' conversion, and provides empirical feedback for internal improvement (Cahyani & Sulistyowati, 2021).

From an integrative perspective, these findings reinforce a well-established causal chain in Indonesian literature: service quality (responsiveness–empathy–accuracy–reliability) → satisfaction → loyalty, with trust as a mediator born of consistent communication and recovery (Arifin et al., 2022; Indiani, 2019). The findings also align with modern management views that position CCRs as the human connector amid service automation and digital tools; human–technology collaboration scales speed without sacrificing the empathetic touch required in critical moments (Kumar & Sharma, 2021). In other words, an effective playbook for Travel Agent X is hybrid: data-driven SOPs (SLA, SSOT, decision trees) powered by CCRs' empathetic competence.

Managerial Implications. The most urgent managerial implication is the standardization of response performance across channels—setting SLA targets (e.g., <5 minutes for in-trip issues), providing empathetic scripts and follow-up checklists so that communication quality is consistent and first-contact resolution improves. Next, maintain disciplined information accuracy through an SSOT for service documents (itinerary–voucher–emergency contacts) and a double-confirmation procedure for any change. On recovery, reinforce the recovery playbook with compensation decision trees, scheduled status updates, and a clear escalation ladder—practices shown to lift satisfaction and WOM (Maxham, 2001). For vendor coordination, implement concise, structured daily briefings along with contingency checklists (traffic, weather, overbooking) to reduce process variance. Finally, design e-WOM activation via polite, timely post-trip follow-ups, paired with a feedback-screening system for continuous improvement (Cahyani & Sulistyowati, 2021). As a whole, this policy package is consistent with the quality → satisfaction → trust/loyalty pathway evidenced in the literature (Arifin et al., 2022; Heykal et al., 2024; Indiani, 2019; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Limitations. The main limitation of this study lies in its contextual scope—a single company within a single flagship destination—which may constrain transferability. In practice, other destinations' dynamics (e.g., stronger seasonality or different vendor structures) may alter the service-risk profile. Future studies are recommended to: (1) combine qualitative findings with a quantitative survey to test causal paths (e.g., SEM: responsiveness/empathy → satisfaction → trust → loyalty); (2) run recovery experiments (varying response speed/type of compensation) to causally estimate impacts on WOM; and (3) evaluate AI–CCR collaboration for complaint triage to boost speed without compromising empathy (Kumar & Sharma, 2021). Even so, the present findings already provide rich operational insights to improve CCR performance directly.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Customer Care Representatives (CCR) act as experience orchestrators across all stages of the customer journey—pre-trip, in-service, and post-trip—and are pivotal to achieving satisfaction, trust, and loyalty at Travel Agent X. The thematic mapping consistently surfaced five mutually reinforcing performance pillars: (1) responsiveness coupled with empathy, (2) accuracy and clarity of information, (3) fast, transparent, solution-oriented service recovery, (4) tight cross-vendor coordination, and (5) post-service e-WOM activation. Together, these pillars form a service value chain that narrows the gap between expectations and outcomes, curbs escalation, and transforms service incidents into moments that restore trust.

Substantively, the findings affirm a robust causal path in tourism contexts: service quality (especially responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and information accuracy) → satisfaction → trust/commitment → loyalty and reuse intentions. CCRs are shown to be more than mere troubleshooters; they function as experience orchestrators who manage quality signals (response speed, empathetic tone, and accurate information), ensure execution consistency via vendor coordination and a single source of truth for documents, and conduct playbook-based recovery (fact-checking → solution options → status updates → proportionate compensation) that stimulates positive word-of-mouth. After service delivery, targeted post-trip follow-ups accelerate social proof and create a feedback loop for continuous improvement.

The most urgent managerial implications are: (i) standardizing channel-wide SLA response targets alongside empathetic scripts to ensure uniform interaction quality and raise first-contact resolution; (ii) enforcing information accuracy through an SSOT and a double-confirmation

procedure for any changes; (iii) strengthening the recovery playbook (including compensation decision trees, scheduled status updates, and a clear escalation ladder); (iv) instituting disciplined daily cross-vendor briefings with contingency checklists; and (v) designing timely, courteous, and ethical e-WOM activation. This policy package aligns with field evidence and provides an operational pathway to improve CSAT/NPS, reduce process variance, and increase the share of positive reviews and repeat use.

Theoretically, the study contributes by centering CCR as a strategic nexus that unites signal–experience–recovery in a high-traffic destination (Bali), addressing a research gap that has often privileged automation/CRM over human-to-human frontline strategy. Methodologically, the qualitative approach enables close tracing of real mechanisms at the levels of process and customer emotion—elements that frequently escape purely quantitative gauges.

The main limitation concerns contextual scope (a single company/single destination), which may constrain transferability; thus, validation across different products, segments, and vendor ecosystems is needed. Future research should: (1) test the quality → satisfaction → trust → loyalty model quantitatively (e.g., SEM) with CCR-specific operational indicators; (2) run service-recovery experiments (varying response speed/compensation type) to estimate causal effects on WOM; and (3) evaluate AI–CCR collaboration for complaint triage that boosts speed without sacrificing empathy. In sum, empowering CCRs through standardized processes that are both human-centered and precise is key to creating tourist experiences that are reliable, delightful, and sustainable for customers—and value-accretive for the firm.

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