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The Role of WhatsApp Business Application in Improving the Service Performance of Front Office Staff of Four Points By Sheraton Hotel Batam

¹ Junita, ²Haufi Sukmamedian, ^{*3}Arina Luthfini Lubis, ⁴Supardi

^{1,2,*3,4}Politeknik Pariwisata Batam, Indonesia

*Correspondence:

a.luthfinilubis@gmail.com

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Abstract

Effective communication is crucial in the hospitality industry, yet there remain gaps in understanding how digital tools influence service quality and guest satisfaction. This study investigates the impact of WhatsApp Business on communication practices and service delivery at Four Points by Sheraton Batam. Utilizing a qualitative research approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews and observations of staff and guest interactions over a three-month period. The research involved five front office staff members, including a supervisor and a former trainee, as well as two guests who had stayed at the hotel. Findings reveal that WhatsApp Business significantly enhances responsiveness, streamlining communication between staff and guests. Staff reported that the application facilitated quicker resolutions of guest requests and complaints, ultimately contributing to a more positive overall experience. Moreover, the study found that effective use of WhatsApp Business improved accessibility, making it easier for guests to voice their needs. While these results are promising, the research also highlights that factors such as staff training, management commitment to customer service, and existing operational protocols play critical roles in determining overall service quality. This study underscores the relevance of integrating digital communication tools within the hospitality sector and provides insights applicable to other service-oriented fields, including school counseling. In conclusion, the adoption of digital tools like WhatsApp Business can substantially elevate guest experiences, aligning with contemporary expectations in the digital age. However, limitations such as a small sample size and the focus on a single hotel indicate the need for further research to explore the long-term effects of digital communication tools in enhancing service quality within the hospitality industry.

Keywords: WhatsApp Business, Hospitality, Communication, Guest Satisfaction, Service Quality

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INTRODUCTION

Service in a service business, including hospitality, has a crucial role in determining the success of the business. Good service not only fulfills customer expectations, but can also improve the business image in the eyes of consumers. In the world of hospitality, excellent service is a term that is often used to refer to the company's efforts in meeting the needs of guests to the maximum. This involves aspects of attitude, attention, and real action from hotel staff in responding to customer needs (Daryanto et al., 2014). The front office, which is the first part that interacts directly with guests, acts as a representation of the hotel as a whole. Front office staff are in charge of providing services from reservation until guests leave the hotel. Therefore, it is important for them to ensure guest satisfaction by communicating effectively and efficiently (Putra, 2022).

In today's digital era, the use of technology has become an integral part of hotel operations. One innovation in front office services is the use of WhatsApp Business application to streamline communication between staff and guests. Research shows that effective communication at the front office plays a crucial role in enhancing the hotel guest experience, creating more personalized and responsive interactions that contribute to guest satisfaction and loyalty (Wulanda et al., 2023). WhatsApp Business, with features such as chatbot, catalog, and broadcast messaging, makes it easier for staff to respond to guests' needs quickly and efficiently. At Four Points by Sheraton Batam, the app is used to serve guests both before they arrive and during their stay. WhatsApp Business also helps staff keep track of their communication history with guests, minimizing errors in conveying information (Nugraha et al., 2022).

This research is limited to analyzing the use of WhatsApp Business by front office staff in improving service quality at Four Points by Sheraton Hotel Batam. The problem boundaries include aspects of using the application in communicating with guests, resolving guest complaints, and the speed of staff response to guest needs. This study does not cover the use of WhatsApp Business in other departments in the hotel, and does not discuss external factors such as technological devices used by guests.

The problem formulations in this study are: (1) How is the role of WhatsApp Business application in improving the service performance of front office staff at Four Points by Sheraton Hotel Batam? (2) How do guests respond to the use of WhatsApp Business as a medium of communication with the hotel? (3) What are the obstacles faced by staff in using WhatsApp Business to serve guests?

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14 The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of WhatsApp Business application in
improving the service performance of front office staff at Four Points by Sheraton Hotel
Batam, evaluate the effectiveness of this application in meeting guest needs, and identify
23 obstacles faced by staff in its use. Through this research, it is expected to gain a deeper
2 understanding of how digital technology can help hotels in improving service quality and
guest satisfaction.

3 The practical benefit of this research is to provide recommendations for other hotels
in optimizing the use of communication technology in improving services. In addition, this
research is also expected to provide insight for academics who are interested in studying the
role of technology in the hospitality industry. With the increasing trend of digitalization, the
results of this study are expected to be a reference in improving hotel operational efficiency
and providing a better experience for guests.

5 Service quality is an important factor in creating customer satisfaction (Giovani et al.,
2023) (Morysa & Lubis, 2023). This quality can be seen from several aspects, such as service
procedures, time, costs, products, facilities, and officer competence (Thabroni, 2022). By
utilizing technology such as WhatsApp Business, hotels can improve service efficiency and
ensure that all guest needs are met quickly. The use of WhatsApp Business also supports
hotels' adjustment to changing consumer behavior, where more and more guests are making
reservations and communicating through digital platforms. Previous research shows that
guests generally make hotel room reservations online, which shows the importance of hotel
adaptation to digital technology in maintaining service quality (Krisnayanti et al., 2022).

Four Points by Sheraton Batam, as part of the Marriott International chain, prioritizes
maintaining international service standards. The implementation of the WhatsApp Business
application in front office operations is intended not only to enhance service effectiveness
but also to ensure consistency with these high standards. This study specifically examines
the role of the WhatsApp Business application in improving the responsiveness,
communication efficiency, and overall service performance of the front office staff at Four
Points by Sheraton Batam. It also investigates the challenges faced by the hotel staff in
adapting to and integrating this digital tool into their daily interactions with guests.
Furthermore, the research addresses how the application impacts guest satisfaction and
operational workflows, while exploring potential limitations such as staff adaptability,
training gaps, and the ability to manage high volumes of guest requests through the platform.
These issues are critical to understanding the full scope of the application's influence on
service quality.

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This study is important to understand further how digital technology can affect service quality in the hospitality industry. In addition, this study is expected to be a reference for other hotels in improving services through the use of online communication applications. With the increasing number of tourists in Batam city (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Batam, 2023) With the increasing occupancy rate of star-rated hotel rooms, hotels in Batam, including Four Points by Sheraton, must continue to innovate in providing the best service for their guests.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An application is a program specifically designed by someone or a team to carry out certain tasks to help simplify human work (Ramadhani, 2023). There are three main categories of apps: desktop apps that operate on computers, web apps that require an internet connection, and mobile apps that are used on mobile devices such as smartphones. Every application is created with the aim of fulfilling human needs, but its function is broader than just that. Apps are not only tools for work, but also have various other functions, such as entertainment media (for example, listening to music or playing games), information sources (such as news articles that are available digitally), communication media (for example, instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp), and facilitate daily activities, such as booking online transportation and ticket shopping.

In the hospitality industry, the use of both web and mobile applications is very common to improve operational efficiency and enhance customer experience. Apps allow hotels to promote their services more widely and establish more efficient communication with guests, which in turn can improve service quality. However, before developing an app, it is important to consider the characteristics of the guests who will use it (Safira et al., 2023), to ensure that the app suits their needs and preferences (Raharjo et al., 2019).

Communication, as one of the important elements in service, is defined by David K. Berlo as an instrument that humans use to interact and understand each other, both verbally and nonverbally. Communication also has the main purpose of influencing, informing, educating, and entertaining. According to the communication theory developed by (Hardjana, 2003), the communication process is a reciprocal process involving the exchange of messages through media, and the success of communication is highly dependent on the context and involvement of all parties involved. In the world of service, communication plays an important role to create a good relationship between service

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providers and customers, so that misunderstandings can be minimized and customer satisfaction can be increased.

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Furthermore, in service quality theory, quality is defined as the ability of a product or service to meet customer needs (Thabroni, 2022). In service industries such as hospitality, service quality is very important and is often the difference between a successful business and one that is not. Service quality is measured through several factors such as good communication, credibility, security, understanding of customer needs, and reliability. According to (Lupiyoadi & Hamdani, 2011), Service quality must be measured and improved continuously for businesses to remain competitive in an increasingly tight market. In this study, five front office staff members and two guests served as informants, providing insights into how service quality is impacted by the use of the WhatsApp Business application. For example, managing customer expectations, as highlighted by the informants, plays a key role in maintaining guest satisfaction and loyalty.

Service, according to (Kotler et al., 2017), Service is any form of interaction or activity aimed at meeting the needs of others. Service can be divided into two types, namely high contact service and low contact service. In the hospitality industry, high contact service involves intense interaction between staff and guests, while low contact service tends to involve more limited interaction. Nevertheless, both types of service must still pay attention to important elements such as responsiveness, reliability, and empathy towards customers, so that the customer experience can still meet or even exceed their expectations.

In terms of front office staff, according to Harsono, staff are employees who are responsible for running operations in each department. Front office staff, for example, have an important role in maintaining good relations with guests, providing the information needed, as well as ensuring the guest experience at the hotel runs smoothly. Their responsibilities and roles often determine the image of the hotel in the eyes of customers. Therefore, staff competency development (Supardi et al., 2024) through training and periodic performance evaluation (Parhusip et al., 2023) become a strategic step for the company in improving service quality (Lubis et al., 2024) and customer satisfaction. However, the good image of a hotel is not only determined by the quality of service, but also by the high level of sanitation of the hotel (Fakhri et al., 2024) as well as the right branding strategy designed by the marketing team (Amalia et al., 2023).

METHOD

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The research design used in this study is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive research aims to describe the phenomenon or reality that occurs in depth and detail. In this study, a qualitative design was chosen because the researcher intends to uncover individual experiences and understandings regarding the application of WhatsApp Business application in front office services. Data collection will be done through in-depth interviews and documentation analysis. This technique is considered effective to provide a comprehensive picture of how WhatsApp Business technology plays a role in improving service quality at Four Points By Sheraton Hotel Batam.

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The data sources in this research are divided into two types, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data is obtained directly from the source, namely front office staff and guests who have stayed at Four Points By Sheraton Hotel Batam. Data collection was done through interviews and observations. This technique allows researchers to gain direct insight into the implementation of the WhatsApp Business application and the service standards applied at the hotel. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from various relevant documents or sources, such as company history, operational standards, guest reviews, as well as other supporting data that provide context regarding the service quality of front office staff (Kusumarini, 2021).

The population of this study includes all front office staff and guests who have used the services at Four Points By Sheraton Hotel Batam. The population selection was done specifically to accurately describe the use of WhatsApp Business in guest services. Given the relatively small number of front office staff, which is only five people, this study used purposive sampling technique, where all staff were used as respondents. The sample was also drawn from guests who had interacted with the front office staff through WhatsApp Business application, and they were randomly selected based on their availability and willingness to participate (Puti, 2024).

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The data collection techniques used in this research are semi-structured interviews and documentation. Interviews will be conducted with front office staff, who will be asked about the use of WhatsApp Business, the service standards applied, and the impact of this technology on service quality. The interview questions are structured in accordance with the research objectives, so as to bring up relevant data related to the implementation of WhatsApp Business at the hotel. In addition, secondary data was collected through documentation from the hotel's website and guest reviews to strengthen the research results (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2010).

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Data obtained from interviews and documentation will be analyzed using a narrative analysis approach. According to (Faizin & Haerussalaeh, 2020), Narrative analysis is the study of individual lives told in the form of stories and experiences. This approach was chosen because it makes it easier for researchers to process qualitative data, especially in understanding the impact of using WhatsApp Business on the guest service experience. The analysis process includes coding the data based on themes that emerged from the interviews, analyzing the relationship between the use of WhatsApp Business and improved service quality, and concluding how the application affects guest satisfaction and front office staff performance. By analyzing the level of guest satisfaction, the management can formulate appropriate strategies to improve the overall quality of the guest experience (Nurliza et al., 2024).

To ensure the validity of the research, triangulation techniques were used, namely verifying data from various sources, such as interviews, observation, and documentation. Reliability was maintained by consistency in data collection procedures, as well as involving a third party as a peer reviewer to assess the suitability of the analysis with the data that had been collected (Muslimin et al., 2024).

This study has several assumptions, one of which is that all front office staff interviewed have sufficient experience in using WhatsApp Business, and that guests interviewed are willing to give their opinions honestly. However, this study also has limitations, such as the limited number of staff and the potential for subjective bias from the respondents.

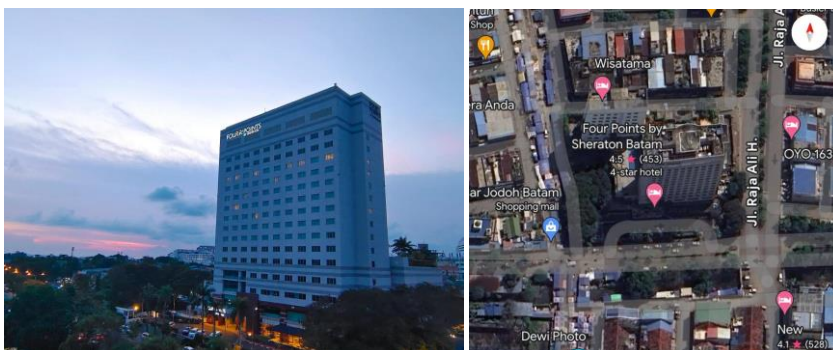


Figure 1. Hotel Front View and Hotel Map

The research will be conducted at Four Points By Sheraton Hotel Batam located in Nagoya, Batam. The research schedule will be adjusted to the time availability of staff and

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guests to be interviewed, as well as to the process of collecting documentation data from the hotel and guest review sites (Abubakar, 2021).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Four Points by Sheraton Batam Hotel has a long history before officially becoming part of Marriott International in 2020. The building that currently houses the hotel was originally established as the Melia Panorama Hotel in 1995. The complex consists of 16 hotel floors, 10 apartment floors and 4 podium floors. In addition, there is another building that was originally planned to be a shopping center, but currently functions as a meeting room. In 2004, Melia Panorama's management contract expired and the hotel management changed under the name Panorama Regency. In 2014, the hotel underwent another name change to Allium Hotel. However, in 2019, Allium Hotel Batam closed abruptly for renovation, and in 2020 it reopened under the name Four Points by Sheraton Batam.



Figure 2. Lobby Hotel

Four Points by Sheraton Batam is strategically located at Panorama Nagoya Complex, Sungai Jodoh, Batu Ampar, Batam. Previous research proves that location plays a crucial role in influencing guests' decision to stay (Winny et al., 2024), where accessibility and convenience of location are often key factors in the selection of accommodation (Setiawan et al., 2023). The hotel offers 218 guest rooms, including 1 Presidential Suite and 26 apartment units. The design and ambience of this hotel carries a modern feel, complete with various facilities that are in accordance with four-star hotel standards. Facilities include a restaurant, bar, swimming pool, fitness center, 6 meeting rooms, laundry service, and more. The hotel offers one main room type, the deluxe type, with two bed size variations: twin and king. Another difference is the view offered, which is city view and back view. Room

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amenities include a TV, high-speed Wi-Fi, sofa, bathroom, work desk, mini bar, 24-hour in-room dining and turndown service.

The hotel also has several food and beverage outlets ready to cater to guests' needs. Evolution, the main outlet, is open daily and serves international dishes. Grab & Go is an outlet that offers a variety of snacks and refreshments, often used as a breakfast or light dinner spot. The Lounge serves a wide selection of cocktails and snacks, while the Pool Bar, as the name suggests, offers food and drinks for guests who wish to relax around the pool. The facilities and services available at Four Points by Sheraton Batam are designed to provide guests with a comfortable and high-quality stay, in line with the standards set by Marriott International.

In this research, the selected respondents are front office staff and guests who have stayed at Four Points by Sheraton Hotel Batam. The front office staff who became the interviewees consisted of the front office supervisor, who is responsible for supervising and managing the performance of the front office staff, as well as the former front office trainee. In addition, the researcher also interviewed two guests who had stayed at the hotel. The data obtained from this interview is primary data used as a basis for evaluating and analyzing the service quality of front office staff in using the WhatsApp Business application as a medium of communication with guests.

Table 1. Participant Description

No	Name	Department/Guest	Length of Work/Length of Stay
1	Billy Sanno Christian	Front office Supervisor	2 years working
2	Viona Felinda	Ex-trainee front office	6 months of work
3	Hana Wijaya	Guest	2 days stay
4	Hendri	Guest	1 day stay

Based on the formulation of the problem that has been determined, this research raises several questions to support and answer problems related to the quality of service of front office staff through the use of WhatsApp Business. To obtain relevant data, the researcher conducted interviews and observations with front office staff and guests who have stayed at Four Points by Sheraton Hotel Batam.

The data obtained through interviews covered a number of aspects related to the use of WhatsApp Business in this hotel. Billy Sanno Christian, front office supervisor at Four Points by Sheraton Batam, explained that the use of WhatsApp Business for front office services has started since the opening of the hotel on October 8, 2020. This is also supported by information from Viona Felinda, a former front office trainee, who stated that the use of

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the application has been implemented since the hotel started operating in 2020. Thus, it can be concluded that WhatsApp Business has been an integral part of the hotel's operations since its inception.

Furthermore, both Billy and Viona agree that WhatsApp Business is very helpful in speeding up responses to guests. With the app on every front office staff's computer, communication with guests becomes more efficient, and staff can respond immediately to guest requests or questions. In this context, Billy emphasized the importance of WhatsApp Business as a means to improve interaction with guests, which is not only limited to information requests, but also to handle complaints quickly and effectively. Viona added that the use of WhatsApp Business creates a sense of closeness between guests and hotel staff, making guests feel more cared for and valued.

Billy also stated that WhatsApp Business significantly increases guest satisfaction, mainly due to the quick and timely response. Viona pointed out that the app allows front office staff to directly inform guests about room availability or the status of their requests. This indicates that WhatsApp Business does not only serve as a communication tool, but also as a platform that can enhance the guest experience.

Concrete examples of the use of WhatsApp Business in solving problems were also given by both informants. Billy recounted an experience when a guest who was outside the hotel asked for something to be sent to his room via WhatsApp, which was immediately handled by the staff. Viona gave another example, namely when the hotel found a guest's item that was left behind (lost and found), staff can immediately contact the guest via WhatsApp as the guest's contact information is already stored in the system. This speed and effectiveness in handling requests or issues is crucial, especially in the hospitality industry where guest satisfaction is a top priority. Research shows that one effective way to improve skills in handling complaints is through the provision of proper on-the-job training, which helps employees be better prepared to deal with difficult situations and provide satisfactory solutions for guests (Putri et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the two guests interviewed, Hana Wijaya and Hendri, also gave positive views regarding the use of WhatsApp Business during their stay at Four Points by Sheraton Batam. They felt that communication through the app was much faster and efficient compared to other communication methods such as telephone or email. Hana added that the hotel staff's response through WhatsApp Business was very quick and informative, thus improving the quality of service they received during their stay. Hendri also noted that the

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speed in providing information made him more comfortable in making decisions, such as selecting the desired room.

Regarding the challenges in using WhatsApp Business, neither Billy nor Viona identified any significant obstacles in using the app. Instead, they emphasized that the app has made it easier to communicate with guests. However, it is important to note that while they did not face any major challenges, challenges such as high message volume during peak hours could be a concern. Nonetheless, one guest, Hendri, made a suggestion to add more staff to answer messages on WhatsApp Bisnis during peak seasons, given that during these times the service can slow down a bit due to high demand.

Overall, the data obtained from these interviews shows that the use of WhatsApp Business at Four Points by Sheraton Batam has had a positive impact on the speed of response, guest satisfaction, and operational efficiency at the front office. With the increasing demand for fast and responsive service in the digital age, the implementation of applications such as WhatsApp Business is becoming increasingly relevant in improving guest experience. This research is expected to make a positive contribution to the development of service strategies in the hospitality industry, as well as a reference for other hotels in utilizing technology to improve interactions with guests.

Based on the observations made by the researcher to a number of employees and guests at Four Points by Sheraton Hotel Batam, it can be concluded that the front office staff showed an adequate level of responsiveness and agility in communicating with guests through WhatsApp Business application. The positive responses given by guests regarding their satisfaction with the service provided by the front office staff significantly reflects that the use of WhatsApp Business application has met the service standards in the hospitality industry. Furthermore, this method of communication has proven to be very effective and efficient for both parties, both for the guests and for the hotel staff themselves.

By maintaining and continuously improving the high standards of service quality implemented to date, Four Points by Sheraton Batam can enhance its reputation for delivering exceptional service aligned with its 4-star rating. This study aims to evaluate how the use of the WhatsApp Business application contributes to achieving these standards by improving responsiveness, communication efficiency, and guest satisfaction. Additionally, it seeks to identify challenges in integrating this digital tool into front office operations and to provide actionable recommendations for sustaining service excellence. Through this approach, Four Points by Sheraton Batam can further solidify its position within the globally

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recognized Marriott International network while adapting to evolving guest expectations in the digital age.

Key Findings

This study examines the impact of WhatsApp Business on front office service quality at Four Points by Sheraton Batam. Key findings show that the use of WhatsApp Business has significantly improved response time, guest satisfaction, and operational efficiency in communication. Staff and guests reported that WhatsApp Business improved the quality of interactions, enabling quick resolution of queries and complaints.

These findings highlight the transformational role of WhatsApp Business in hotel operations. The ability to communicate quickly with guests not only improves service quality but also creates a sense of personal connectedness. This is especially important in the hospitality industry, where guest satisfaction is paramount. The integration of WhatsApp Business into hotel communications has simplified the process, making it easier for staff to manage requests and for guests to receive information in a timely manner.

17 The results of this study are in line with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of efficient communication in enhancing customer experience in hospitality environments. Previous studies have shown that effective communication channels lead to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty (Weningtyas & Suseno, 2012). The positive experiences reported by staff and guests at Four Points by Sheraton Batam reinforce the hypothesis that digital communication tools can have a significant impact on service delivery in hotels.

29 Similar studies have shown that the adoption of messaging apps in hotel management contributes to improved service efficiency and guest interaction (Nada & Suharto, 2024). The findings from Four Points by Sheraton Batam support this statement, showing that the implementation of WhatsApp Business has similarities with other hotels that successfully utilize technology to improve guest services.

While these findings are generally positive, it is important to highlight the novel insights uncovered by this research. Specifically, the study demonstrates that the integration of WhatsApp Business uniquely enhances real-time communication and operational efficiency in the hospitality context, setting it apart from traditional methods such as phone or email. This immediacy not only improves guest satisfaction but also fosters a personalized connection between guests and staff, which has not been extensively

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explored in previous studies. Furthermore, the absence of significant challenges reported by staff suggests that the successful adoption of digital tools can be attributed to a well-established culture of communication within the hotel, rather than just the application itself. This finding underscores the interplay between technology adoption and organizational readiness. From a broader perspective, the research contributes to understanding how effective digital communication can redefine service quality in hospitality, paralleling its critical role in other service-oriented industries like healthcare, where patient satisfaction relies heavily on clear and empathetic communication.

There are limitations to this study, including the small sample size and focus on a single hotel, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, reliance on self-reported data by staff and guests may introduce bias. Therefore, future research should consider a wider range of hotels and include quantitative measures to more robustly assess the impact of WhatsApp Business. Further research could also explore the long-term effects of Business WhatsApp on guest loyalty and retention, as well as hotel management perspectives regarding the integration of digital communication tools and how these tools can be optimized for greater efficiency and guest satisfaction. Overall, the findings from Four Points by Sheraton Batam reveal that the use of WhatsApp Business has positively influenced service quality, resulting in increased guest satisfaction and operational efficiency. By integrating technology into their communication strategy, hotels can significantly improve the guest experience, in line with contemporary expectations in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the use of WhatsApp Business significantly improves service quality at Four Points by Sheraton Batam, which has a positive impact on guest satisfaction and operational efficiency. This finding is important as it highlights the role of modern communication technologies in the hospitality industry, where effective communication is key to meeting increasingly high guest expectations. In the context of previous research, these results are in line with findings suggesting that digital communication tools can improve customer interaction and engagement.

As such, this study contributes to a better understanding of how technology can be integrated into customer service strategies. The implications of these results include opportunities for hotel management and school counselors to use digital tools to improve communication, responsiveness, and satisfaction. Further research is needed to explore the

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long-term impact of these communication tools in creating customer loyalty and operational efficiency. By placing these findings in a realistic and relevant framework, we can recognize the importance of this research in the development of better service strategies in the digital age.

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