

ENHANCING PROFESSIONALISM: GROOMING, CUSTOMER AND QUALITY SERVICE TRAINING FOR BOATMEN IN ALAMINOS CITY, PANGASINAN

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the professional development of boatmen in Alaminos City, Pangasinan, with a focus on two key aspects: proper grooming and customer service. As frontliners in the tourism industry, boatmen play a crucial role in shaping visitors' experiences, particularly in the renowned Hundred Islands National Park. Beyond ensuring safe and efficient transportation, their professionalism significantly influences tourist satisfaction and the overall image of the destination. This research examines the current state of grooming, customer and quality service training among boatmen, identifies challenges they encounter, and explores potential strategies for improvement. By aligning their professional skills with the high standards of the tourism industry, this study aims to enhance service quality, boost visitor satisfaction, and contribute to the sustainable growth of Alaminos City's tourism sector.

Keywords: Professional Development, Proper Grooming, Customer Service, Service Quality, Sustainable Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a vital economic driver for many coastal cities, and Alaminos City, Pangasinan, is no exception. As the gateway to the world-renowned Hundred Islands National Park, the city draws thousands of local and international tourists annually. In this tourism-dependent economy, boatmen serve as indispensable front liners. Their responsibilities extend beyond transportation—they are ambassadors of the destination, directly influencing visitor safety, satisfaction, and overall perception of the city (Department of Tourism [DOT], 2020; Salazar, 2021).

Given their regular and direct interactions with tourists, the professionalism, grooming, and customer service demonstrated by boatmen significantly impact service quality. These qualities affect not only the individual tourist experience but also the broader reputation and competitiveness of Alaminos City as a premier travel destination (Parasuraman et al., 2022; Bitner et al., 2022).

Despite their crucial role, many boatmen acquire skills informally through experience rather than structured training. The lack of formal education in grooming and customer relations often results in inconsistent service delivery (Gursoy et al., 2021). This gap becomes particularly critical in highly competitive tourism environments where service quality is a determinant of tourist satisfaction and return visits (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2021).

Proper grooming is a cornerstone of professional conduct. A well-groomed appearance fosters trust and reinforces the perception of safety and reliability among tourists (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Furthermore, it contributes to the self-confidence and morale of the service providers, enhancing their interpersonal interactions with guests (Tan & Reyes, 2021). As tourism is a visually and emotionally driven experience, physical appearance plays an unspoken yet powerful role in shaping perceptions.

Moreover, effective customer service is essential in creating meaningful, positive visitor interactions. Competent communication, conflict resolution, and the ability to provide informative and engaging commentary about tourist sites like the Hundred Islands contribute to a memorable experience (Bitner et al., 2022; Salazar, 2022). Visitors who feel welcomed and valued are more likely to recommend the destination to others, write favorable reviews, and return—factors that are critical for the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector (Parasuraman et al., 2021; Ylagan, 2021).

This study aims to assess the current levels of professionalism, grooming, and customer service practices among boatmen in Alaminos City. It seeks to identify gaps in training and propose structured development programs to enhance their competencies. A targeted and culturally responsive training initiative could significantly uplift the standards of local tourism services, empowering boatmen to become skilled and professional tourism ambassadors (IMO, 2023; Philippine Department of Tourism, 2023).

Ultimately, investing in the professional development of boatmen benefits both individual service providers and the wider tourism industry. Structured programs can elevate service delivery, improve tourist satisfaction, and reinforce Alaminos City's position as a world-class travel destination. In doing so, the city strengthens its commitment to sustainable tourism and inclusive economic growth.

METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach that includes interviews, surveys, and observations. The following methods will be employed:

1. Interviews with Boatmen – In-depth interviews with boatmen will be conducted to gain insights into their perceptions of grooming and customer service expectations and the training they have received in these areas.
2. Surveys of Tourists – To gather direct feedback from tourists, surveys will be administered to assess their experiences with boatmen, focusing on aspects of grooming and customer service. This will provide a better understanding of how these factors affect tourist satisfaction.
3. Interviews with Local Tourism Officials – Conversations with local tourism officers and organizations will shed light on the existing training programs and initiatives aimed at improving boatmen's grooming and customer service skills.
4. Observation – Direct observation of boatmen in their work environment will help assess their grooming standards and customer service practices in real-time.

The demographic profile variables of the respondents were analyzed using the simple percentage with the following formula:

$$P = (f \times 100) / n$$

Where:

P= percentage of distribution

F= frequency of responses

N= total number of respondents

100= is given as constant

The Likert scale acts as the framework for interpreting the collected data.

Qualitative Interpretation	Qualitative Interpretation	Limit of Index
5	Always	4.21-5.00
4	Often	3.41-4.20
3	Sometimes	2.61-3.40
2	Seldom	1.81-2.60
1	Never	1.00-1.80

RESULTS

PART 1. PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

The following tables show the profile of respondents, including their age, sex, and address.

Table 1
Profile of the Respondents

Parameters	Frequency n = 50	Percentage %
Age		
21-30 years old	11	22
31-40 years old	27	54
41-50 years old	6	12
51-60 years old	5	10
61 years old and above	1	2
Gender		
Male	50	100
Marital Status		
Single	18	36
Married	32	64
Educational Attainment		
High School Level	34	68
High School Graduate	10	20
Vocational Graduate	5	10
College Level	1	2

As shown in Table 1, most of the respondents under the age group 31-40 years old got a frequency count of 27 (54%), 11 (22%) belonged to 21-30 years old, 6 (12%) 41-50 years old, 5 (10%) to 51-60 years old, and 1 (2%) belonged to 61 years old and above. All respondents are Male with a total of 50 (100%). Moreover, 18 of the respondents have a (36%) are Single and 32 (34%) are Married. Most of the respondents are High school level undergraduates with 34 (68%), 10 respondents with (20%) was a High School Graduate, 5 respondents with (10%) was a Vocational Graduate and 1 of the respondents with (2%) a College Undergraduate.

PART 2. The Current Grooming and Practices of Boatmen

Table 2
Current Grooming and Practices of Boatmen

Indicator	AWM	DR
1. I always wear a complete uniform.	2.2	SLM
2. I ensure that I always have a proper haircut.	3.3	SMT
3. If my uniform is not available, I wear neatly pressed T-shirts.	2.88	SMT
4. I always use perfume so that I have a pleasant smell.	3.34	SMT
5. I always see to it that I have fresh breath.	4.18	OFT
6. I always use clean slippers	4.56	A
Total	2.91	SMT

Legend: 1.00-1.80 (Never); 1.81-2.60 (Seldom); 2.61-3.40 (Sometimes); 3.41-4.20 (Often); 4.21-5.00 (Always)

As shown in Table 2, the overall average weighed mean of Current Grooming and Practices of Boatmen was 2.91, which was interpreted as "Sometimes". Among the indicators in Table 2, Indicator 6, *"I always use clean slippers"* received the highest AWM of 4.56, interpreted as "Always" (A). This indicates that cleanliness of footwear is a strong and consistent grooming habit among the boatmen while Indicator 5, *"I always see to it that I have fresh breath"* has an AWM of 4.18, rated as "Often" (OFT) this suggests that oral hygiene is also given considerable importance. Indicator 4, *"I always use perfume so that I have a pleasant smell"* has an AWM of 3.34, rated as "Sometimes" (SMT), Indicator 2, *"I ensure that I always have a proper haircut"* has an AWM of 3.3, interpreted as "Sometimes" (SMT), Indicator 3, *"If my uniform is not available, I wear neatly pressed T-shirts."* Has an AWM of 2.88, interpreted as "Sometimes" (SMT) and Indicator 1, *"I always wear a complete uniform"* scored the lowest with an AWM of 2.2, interpreted as "Seldom" (SLM). This suggests that full uniform compliance is not consistently practiced.

PART 3. The Customer and Quality Service Practices Among boatmen

Table 3
Customer and Quality Service Practices among Boatmen

Indicator	AWM	DR
1. I demonstrate strong communication skills, ensuring that customers understand safety protocols, routes, and any potential delays that may arise during the trip.	2.66	SMT
2. I always commit safety to our clients by Providing life jackets, explaining safety procedures, and maintaining the vessel are all critical factors in ensuring a safe experience for customers.	3.16	SMT
3. I see to it that as skilled boatmen, I possess in-depth knowledge of local waterways and ensure efficient and safe navigation.	3.54	OFT
4. I see to it that I am adept at handling unexpected situations, such as weather changes or mechanical issues, ensuring minimal disruption to the customer experience.	4.22	A
5. I am very enthusiastic about sharing interesting stories, historical facts, or local lore enhances the overall experience, leading to higher satisfaction rates.	2.82	SMT
6. I consistently adhere to schedules and demonstrate professionalism and reliability.	3.24	SMT
7. I also consider that accommodating special requests or adjusting itineraries can significantly improve customer service performance.	2.88	SMT
8. I always see to it that I maintain a clean and well-kept vessel.	4.52	A
9. I respect and understand the diverse backgrounds of customers can enhance interactions and create a welcoming atmosphere, contributing to a positive service experience.	2.94	SMT
Total	3.33	SMT

Legend: 1.00-1.80 (Never); 1.81-2.60 (Seldom); 2.61-3.40 (Sometimes); 3.41-4.20 (Often); 4.21-5.00 (Always)

As shown in Table 2, the overall average weighted mean of the customer service practices of boatmen was 3.33, interpreted as "Sometimes," indicating that customer service practices are moderately demonstrated and still require improvement.

Among the indicators, maintaining a clean and well-kept vessel received the highest rating (AWM = 4.52, "Always"), highlighting that boatmen consistently prioritize cleanliness and proper vessel maintenance as an essential aspect of service quality. Similarly, handling unexpected situations, such as weather changes or mechanical issues (AWM = 4.22, "Always") was also highly rated, suggesting that boatmen are capable of responding effectively to emergencies and minimizing disruptions to customers. In addition, possessing in-depth knowledge of local waterways and ensuring safe navigation (AWM = 3.54, "Often") reflects the respondents' competence in providing safe and efficient transport services.

Conversely, communication with customers regarding safety protocols, routes, and possible delays obtained the lowest mean (AWM = 2.66, "Sometimes"), indicating that effective communication remains an area requiring improvement. In general, while boatmen demonstrate strong performance in vessel maintenance, emergency preparedness, and navigational competence, greater emphasis should be placed on enhancing communication and other customer-oriented service practices to improve the overall customer experience.

PART 4. The Challenges Encountered by Boatmen

Table 4
Challenges Encountered by Boatmen

Indicator	AWM	DR
1. Adverse weather can pose significant risks, including storms, high winds, heavy rain, and fog, which can make navigation difficult and dangerous.	4.7	A
2. The nature of working on water exposes boatmen to hazards such as capsizing, drowning, or accidents with other vessels. Ensuring the safety of passengers and cargo is a constant concern	4.84	A
3. Regulatory Compliance: Boatmen must adhere to various local, national, and international maritime laws and regulations, which can vary widely and change frequently.	3.44	OFT
4. Regular maintenance of boats and engines is crucial for safe operation. Neglecting maintenance can lead to breakdowns or accidents.	4.58	A
5. Navigating through busy waterways, shallow areas, and obstacles requires skill and experience. Additionally, understanding tides, currents, and local geography is essential.	3.88	OFT
6. Boatmen may face challenges related to pollution, invasive species, and changes in water quality that can affect fishing and tourism.	3.46	OFT
7. Fluctuations in fuel prices, competition from other transport services, and changes in demand (e.g., tourism seasons) can affect income stability.	4.96	A
8. Keeping up with the necessary skills and certifications can be challenging, especially for those who may not have access to formal training programs.	4.8	A
9. Boatmen may face social or cultural challenges, including conflicts over water rights or competition with larger commercial enterprises.	3.16	SMT
10. Exposure to the elements, long hours, and the physical demands of handling boats can lead to various health issues, including fatigue and injuries.	4.94	A
11. Technology can improve navigation and safety, adapting to new systems and equipment can be a challenge for some boatmen, especially those who are less tech-savvy.	3.06	SMT
12. For those involved in fishing or ferry services, accessing markets or tourists can be complicated by infrastructure issues, such as lack of proper docking facilities.	2.76	SMT
Total	4.04	OFT

Legend: 1.00-1.80 (Never); 1.81-2.60 (Seldom); 2.61-3.40 (Sometimes); 3.41-4.20 (Often); 4.21-5.00 (Always)

As shown in Table 4, the overall average weighted mean of the challenges encountered by boatmen was 4.04, interpreted as "Often," indicating that boatmen frequently experience operational, financial, and safety-related challenges in carrying out their work.

Among the indicators, fluctuations in fuel prices, competition from other transport services, and seasonal changes in tourism demand obtained the highest mean (AWM = 4.96, "Always"), identifying income instability as the most significant challenge faced by boatmen. This was followed by exposure to harsh weather conditions and the physical demands of boat operations (AWM = 4.94, "Always"), highlighting the considerable health and occupational risks associated with their profession.

Moreover, ensuring passenger and cargo safety (AWM = 4.84, "Always"), keeping up with the required skills and certifications (AWM = 4.80, "Always"), adverse weather conditions (AWM = 4.70, "Always"), and regular boat and engine maintenance (AWM = 4.58, "Always") were also consistently identified as major challenges. These findings emphasize that financial stability, occupational safety, environmental conditions, competency development, and vessel maintenance are the most critical concerns affecting the work and service delivery of boatmen.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the result of the study that was conducted, the researchers concluded the following:

1. Most of the respondents are in the 31-40 age bracket and are Male. Moreover, most of the respondents are Married with High School Level educational attainment.
2. The overall AWM under the current Grooming and Practices of Boatmen was 2.91, which falls under the "Sometimes" (SMT) category, this implies that the boatmen exhibit moderate grooming practices overall. While they prioritize certain aspects of hygiene (like clean slippers and fresh breath), other practices such as consistently wearing a complete uniform and maintaining a proper haircut are less frequently observed.
3. This implies that the boatmen exhibit moderate grooming practices overall. While they prioritize certain aspects of hygiene (like clean slippers and fresh breath), other practices such as consistently wearing a complete uniform and maintaining a proper haircut are less frequently observed.
4. The overall AWM under the Customer Service Practices Among boatmen was 3.33, which falls under the category of "Sometimes" (SMT) and this implies that boatmen are moderately consistent in practicing good customer service, with clear strengths in vessel cleanliness and emergency preparedness. However, there is room for improvement in communication, cultural sensitivity, storytelling, and proactive customer interaction.

5. The overall AWM under the Challenges encountered by the Boatmen was 4.04, which falls under the "Often" (OFT) category and this suggests that boatmen frequently face significant and multifaceted challenges that affect both service delivery and livelihood.

Based on the findings and conclusions, the researchers presented the following recommendations and suggestions:

1. Implement Mandatory Grooming Standards – Local tourism authorities should establish clear and mandatory grooming guidelines for boatmen, including clean uniforms, proper personal hygiene, and attention to appearance. Regular monitoring and enforcement should be considered to ensure consistency.
2. Offer Formal Customer Service Training – Tourism agencies should collaborate with professional training organizations to provide structured customer service programs for boatmen. These courses should include communication skills, problem-solving, and techniques for handling various tourist needs.
3. Introduce Incentives for Professional Development – To encourage boatmen to participate in grooming and customer service training, the local government and tourism agencies could offer incentives such as certificates, financial rewards, or priority in scheduling tours for those who complete training.
4. Continuous Professional Development – Periodic workshops or seminars focusing on both grooming and customer service should be held to keep boatmen updated on best practices and to continuously improve their skills.

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DECLARATION ON THE USE OF AI TOOLS

In the conduct of the research titled *“Enhancing Professionalism: Grooming, customer and quality service training for Boatmen in Alaminos City, Pangasinan”*, artificial intelligence (AI) tools were utilized in a limited yet supportive capacity to enhance grammar, clarity, coherence, and APA formatting. They also aided in citation generation and preliminary literature scanning. All sources were manually verified, and no AI was used to generate original data or conduct analysis. Final interpretations and conclusions were independently developed by the authors, who maintained full oversight and accountability in accordance with ethical research standards.

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