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Influence of Customer Service Quality on Determining Customer Satisfaction in Four Star Rated Hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru Cities

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Abstract

Customers and workers in the hospitality business often engage in face-to-face exchanges. Given its competitiveness, significance, and contribution to global GDP, customer satisfaction has remained an essential component of the hospitality industry. The Kenyan hospitality industry has raised the bar on customer satisfaction to guarantee its continued success. This research aimed at the assessment of customer service quality that influence customer satisfaction in hospitality industry in Kenya, focus on 4-star rated hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru cities, a study that involved the use of descriptive survey research design. The study was guided by cognitive dissonance theory. The target population for this study was the 4 star rated hotels both in Kisumu and Nakuru Cities representing a population of 684 and a sample size of 360 respondents comprising of tourists/guests and staff of 4-star rated hotels. The researcher used structured questionnaires to gather data. Maximum likelihood estimation was used to verify the validity of the data and the data collecting tool in order to validate the five service quality attributes—tangibles, empathy, responsiveness, assurance, and reliability of the service—of the SERVQUAL instrument. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics which include mean, standard deviation. The study used simple regression to establish the causal relationships as conceptualized. Pearson correlation was used to test the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Data was presented in tables. The findings indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between service quality on customer satisfaction on 4-star rated hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru cities. Service quality explains 25.1% of the variance in customer satisfaction. The study recommends that hotels management should concentrate on providing high-quality services that will raise the standard of the hotel and the frequency of client visits, as these factors affect client happiness.

Key words: *Four-star Hotels, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Service Quality*

1. Introduction

Customer satisfaction is a critical aspect of the hospitality industry, playing a pivotal role in the success and sustainability of hotels worldwide. The concept of customer satisfaction refers to the overall assessment and contentment of guests with the products, services, and experiences provided by a hotel during their stay. It is a multifaceted measure that encompasses various factors, including the quality of service, ambiance, staff behavior, amenities, and value for money (Lee & Hing 2017).

In the context of Kenya's hospitality industry, the significance of customer satisfaction cannot be overstated. As a rapidly growing tourist destination in East Africa, Kenya has witnessed a surge in the number of domestic and international visitors seeking unique and enriching travel experiences (Kandampully 2002). To cater for this growing demand, 4-star rated hotels in cities like Kisumu and Nakuru have become prominent players in providing accommodation and services to discerning travelers. However, amidst the increasing competition and changing customer expectations, understanding the factors that influence customer satisfaction has become imperative for hotel operators and stakeholders. Identifying and addressing the specific psycho-socio-economic aspects that shape guest contentment can enable hotels to tailor their offerings and enhance the overall guest experience (Lee & Hing 2017).

Therefore, this research seeks to delve into the intricacies of customer satisfaction in Kenya's hospitality industry, with a focus on 4-star rated hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru cities. By examining the psycho-socio-economic factors that impact guest satisfaction, this study aims to shed light on the key drivers and challenges faced by hotels in meeting and exceeding customer expectations. The insights garnered from this research will not only assist hotel management in devising targeted strategies but will also contribute to the broader understanding of how the hospitality sector in Kenya can sustainably enhance customer satisfaction, attract more tourists, and maintain a competitive edge in the regional and global tourism market.

2. Problem Statement

In developing nations, the hotel and tourism sectors account for a sizeable share of national employment and income. Based on statistical evidence, the hotel and tourism business in Kenya accounts for 14% of the country's GDP. Nakuru City is a popular tourist destination in Kenya. Nevertheless, the competitive environment has altered due to security concerns, a decrease in the number of tourists visiting the country, more options, new inventions, and the appearance of substitute products. However, there is little evidence that despite the significant growth of Kenya's hospitality industry and the presence of 4-star rated hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru cities, the hotels are still not operating on full capacity.

There remains a need to explore the customer service quality that influences customer satisfaction in these establishments. Existing statistical evidence such as Central Bank of Kenya Economic survey on Kenyan hotels 2021 suggests that customer satisfaction levels may be subject to fluctuations and challenges within the regions. Analysis of customer reviews and ratings on various online platforms reveals fluctuations in overall satisfaction scores for 4-star hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru. These scores may vary based on different factors, including service quality, room cleanliness, staff behavior, and facilities. In terms of accommodation facilities, there are no 5-star hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru area.

According to many studies conducted in Kenya, there are three two-star hotels with a bed capacity of 140 and four four-star hotels with a bed capacity of 1600. Non-rated small hotels and guest houses are among the other lodging options. The Grand Royal Swiss Hotel, Acacia, and Serena Imperial Hotel are a few of the well-known hotels in the Kisumu area. Hostels and guest homes are alternative accommodations for thrifty travellers. Regarding the quality of the lodging and other hospitality services, the visitors' ratings show that 17% think they are very good, 54% think they are good, 24% think they are average, and 5% think they are terrible. During their visit, the guests also made use of retail establishments, banking institutions, and medical facilities. Although the facilities were rated well by visitors, this region is obviously of lower quality than other well-known tourist spots. We might conclude that this is a feature of the tourism destination life cycle's exploration stage (Butler 1980). This situation can be explained by investors not wanting to take a chance on investments in the region because they are unsure about the destination's ability to maintain tourism and lodging. Thus, it is important to promote local investment.

In light of the aforementioned, it is evident that a comprehensive assessment of the customer service quality influencing customer satisfaction in 4-star hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru is necessary. By addressing these factors, the hospitality industry can work towards improving guest experiences, fostering loyalty, and enhancing its overall competitiveness in the region's burgeoning tourism market.

3. Significance of the Study

In order to create policies, plan, and implement the best hospitality services and strategies in the current competitive market, hotel stakeholders, managers, policy makers, and owners can benefit from having a thorough understanding of the factors that affect customer satisfaction. Clear knowledge on the psycho-socio-economic aspects influencing the customer satisfaction dimension might help achieve this. Policymakers in the commercial and governmental sectors of Kenya's hospitality industry can benefit greatly from the study's results on the variables affecting customer satisfaction so that they may better shape regulations pertaining to the hotel business. It is possible that the mediating function of customers' pleasure in the hospitality sector may be determined with the help of this study, therefore it has significance for future research. Furthermore, academics may utilize this to cite prior works and contribute to the existing knowledge base on the topic of customer satisfaction.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Theoretical Review

4.1.1 Cognitive theory

This theory was developed by Leon Festinger in 1957 to explain human behavior by examining internal mental processes. According to cognitive theory, an individual experiencing dissonance between two contradictory cognitions may attempt to alleviate it by eliminating the dissonant cognition, introducing a new consonant, or decreasing the significance of dissonant recognition with each other. It is therefore a psychological framework that focuses on how individuals acquire, process, store, and use information to understand the world around them. Cognitive theory, in the context of customer satisfaction, focuses on how individuals process information, interpret experiences, and form judgments about their interactions with a service or product (Kariru, & Aloo 2014).

In the context of the study, cognitive theory can provide valuable insights into the cognitive processes that influence customer satisfaction in 4-star hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru. The relevance of this theory is; by understanding how guests perceive their experiences, form judgments, and process information, hotel operators can identify areas of improvement, meet customer expectations, and deliver personalized experiences that enhance overall satisfaction levels. Additionally, cognitive theory's emphasis on emotional influences can guide hotel staff in creating positive emotional experiences that leave a lasting impression on guests, ultimately contributing to their satisfaction and potential loyalty to the hotel brand. This study is majorly anchored on Cognitive theory as it's the most relevant theory.

4.1.2 Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory

The theory of expectation disconfirmation was proposed by Richard L. Oliver in 1980. According to this theory, customer satisfaction is influenced by the extent to which a product or service's actual performance meets, exceeds, or falls short of the customer's expectations. It is one of the most often utilized and quoted ideas in different study involving customer satisfaction, as seen by its prevalence in the aforementioned classical literature. According to this hypothesis, in most cases, customers have a preexisting set of criteria against which they evaluate the quality of a service they have just received. In this sense, disconfirmation relates to the consumer's subjective appraisals of a product's merits, whether such evaluations are favourable or negative.

The assumption in question proposes Expectancy Theory to guide the never-ending task of seeking out ways to make customers happy. The four-star hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru Counties will be able to not only attract new customers, but also retain existing ones, thanks to the assessment of the psychological, social, and economic factors that influence customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry, which will be based on the disconfirming theory.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

Below is a conceptual framework that illustrates the relationship between customer service quality and its influence on customer satisfaction in 4-star hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru cities. The framework was designed to guide the study's data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The main components of the conceptual framework were as follows:

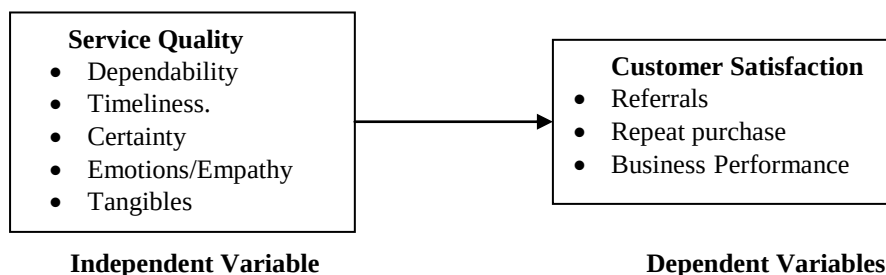


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

5. Research Methodology

Descriptive research survey was used in this study to gather information about the population under investigation. Quantitative technique was used for both data collection and analysis .and using questionnaires data will be presented using frequencies and percentages. Structured questionnaires were the primary tool used to collect data; they were designed with the components of the variables in mind and will be used to gather information from a sizable representative sample, allowing the findings to be generalized to the entire community. The data was analyzed and the results used to affirm or disapprove research questions and used to draw inferences from entire population.

The study's target demographic consisted of hotel visitors, who, based on the Economic Survey 2021, number 684 in the cities of Kisumu and Nakuru. The area of stay was a crucial component of the population because of the nature of the investigation. This was recorded and is shown in table 1. At the time of data collection, the questionnaires were easily given out to visitors, hotel employees, and managers.

Table1: Target Population –Kisumu and Nakuru

4 –Star rated Hotels	Management/staff	Guests
Kisumu		
Acacia	12	60
Ciala Resort	20	40
Grand Royal Swiss	30	20
Sarova Imperial	16	30
Nakuru		
Sarova Woodlands	20	80
Sarova Lion Hill	40	100
Viena Woods Hotel	30	96
The Alps Hotel	20	70
Total	188	496

This study adopted the formula developed by Yamane 1967 to determine the sample size.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where,

n = Sample Size
N = Population of the Study
e = Margin of error

$$n = \frac{684}{1 + 684 (0.05)^2}$$

$$= 252$$

The formula yielded a sample of 252 from our target population of guests and staff. However, as recommended by Israel (1992), the sample size also is often increased by 30% to compensate for nonresponse. Hence the actual study sample size was as calculated below;

Tabulated sample size (Yamane) representing 70%	= 252
Additional 30% for non-response	= 108
Actual sample size for the study (252x100/70)	= 360

Table 2: Sample Size –Kisumu and Nakuru

4 –Star rated Hotels	Management/staff	Guests	Sample size
Kisumu			
Acacia	6	32	38
Ciala Resort	10	21	31
Grand Royal Swiss	16	11	27
Sarova Imperial	8	16	24
Nakuru			
Sarova Woodlands	10	42	52
Sarova Lion Hill	21	53	74
Viena Woods Hotel	16	51	67
The Alps Hotel	10	37	47
Total	97	263	360

Source: Researcher, 2023

This study made use of primary data. A standardized questionnaire was used to gather the data. A section measuring the psycho-socioeconomic elements impacting customer satisfaction was added to the questionnaires. There were three sections to the questionnaires. The responders had to provide their demographic data in the first section. This section was meant to give information on the kind of customer. In the subsequent section, participants were asked to rank the degree to which they think the listed criteria affect customer satisfaction. In the third section of the survey, participants were asked to score how satisfied they were with the hotel's services on a Likert scale that went from 1 to 5.

The customers who completed filling the questionnaires were requested to drop them at the hotel's reception. The period of two weeks was deemed appropriate in giving the respondents time to fill the questionnaires. Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was utilized to apply descriptive statistical techniques to the data, including mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution. Furthermore, kurtosis and skewness were calculated. The findings were displayed as graphs, tables, pie charts, percentages, and frequencies.

The Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the strength of the relationships between different variables as conceptualized, at a 95% confidence level. The correlation coefficient *r* of 0.1- 0.29 was deemed weak, 0.3- 0.59, moderate and 0.6 and above was deemed strong.

To establish the causal relationships as conceptualized, inferential statistical method was used to test first, the influence of the independent variable (customer service quality) on the dependent variable (customer satisfaction) on 4-star hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru cities.

Simple linear regression was used to test direct relationships between two variables, using the model indicated below;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e$$

Whereby;

Y – Is Customer Satisfaction

β_0 – is a Constant

β_1 – coefficient

X_1 – is customer service quality

e – Is the error term

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Using descriptive statistical methods, the researcher sought to understand respondents' opinion using a five-point Likert scale to generate minimum and maximum values, means and standard deviations. (Where: 1= Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 =Undecided; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree).

6.1.1 Service Quality

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which service quality is delivered in the hotel to enhance customer satisfaction and the results are as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Service Quality

	Mean	Std. Dev.
B1: The Hotel's physical facilities are visually appealing.	4.10	.961
B2: When you have a problem, the hotel shows a sincere interest in solving it.	4.01	.878
B3: The behavior of hotel employees instills confidence in customers.	3.88	1.022
B4: The hotel employees understand your specific needs.	3.93	1.009
B5: The Hotel's employees are neat appearing	3.82	1.060
B6: You feel safe in your transactions with the hotel.	4.01	.871
B7: Hotels services and menus are available at the right place	2.93	1.296
B8: Hotel staff give prompt service to customers	3.00	1.199
B9: Hotel staff are always available to serve customers anytime	3.29	1.124
B10: Customers are always certain of getting prompt services from our hotel	3.16	1.225
B11: The hotel has the customers best interests at heart	3.47	1.203
B12: The hotel staff understand the specific needs and preferences of their customers	3.59	1.185

Source: Researcher, 2023

The result in table 3 indicated that to a great extent, the hotel's physical facilities are visually appealing (Mean = 4.10, SD = .961). Most respondents further agreed when you have a problem, the hotel shows a sincere interest in solving it. (Mean = 4.01, SD = .878). Majority of the respondents agreed to the statement 'the behavior of hotel employees instills confidence in customers.' (Mean = 3.88, SD = 1.022). The hotel employees also understand customers specific needs (mean = 3.93, SD = 1.009) also the hotel's employees are neat appearing (Mean = 3.82, SD = 1.060). The findings also revealed that customers feel safe in their transactions with the hotel (Mean = 4.01, SD = .871).

Respondents also were in agreement that hotels services and menus are available at the right place (Mean = 2.93, SD = 1.296). In the same breath, it was noted that hotel staff give prompt service to customers (mean = 3.00, SD = 1.199). In addition, hotel staff are always available to serve customers anytime (Mean = 3.29, SD = 1.124). The findings also found out that customers are always certain of getting prompt services from our hotel (Mean = 3.16, SD = 1.225). The hotel also has the customers best interests at heart (Mean = 3.47, SD = 1.203). Most 4-star hotel staff understand the specific needs and preferences of their customers (Mean = 3.59, SD = 1.185). The average mean of 3.60 for service quality shows a greater use of this strategy among 4-star hotels. The values on service quality standard deviation were greater than 1. This suggests that the components in the dataset have varying degrees of dispersion around the mean.

The study findings concur with that of Lam, Zhang, & Baum, (2019) who discovered that there was a connection between quality of service, guest satisfaction, and loyalty which are separate but connected. According to Kim & Kim, (2017), customer satisfaction is directly correlated with factors like professionalism, service attitude, efficiency, and amenities. The findings further agree with Kim, Lee & Jang (2010), who alluded that customers' contentment and discontent are mostly determined by their perceptions of the quality of the product or service they received.

6.1.2 Customer Satisfaction

Respondents were asked different questions with an aim to ascertain customer satisfaction. Their responses were rated on a 5 points Likert-scale in which they either stated strongly disagreed, disagreed, undecided, agreed or strongly agreed. The were generated in table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Customer Satisfaction

	Mean	Std. Dev.
F1:Understanding guest specific needs	4.12	.749
F2:The hotel has individualized attention	3.88	1.016
F3:There is safety and security	3.85	.865
F4:The hotel has consistency of service	4.03	.879
F5:There's flexibility of employees	4.10	.710
F6:Convenient operating hours	4.12	.730
F7:There's Prompt attention to guest's requests	4.23	.753
F8: The hotel has gotten numerous referrals from customers who have enjoyed our services	4.33	.473
F9: Customers always do repeat purchase for hotel's products and services	4.24	.601

Source: Researcher, 2023

Table 4 indicates that the hotels understood specific customer needs (Mean = 4.12, SD = .749), as well as giving individualized attention (Mean = 3.88, SD = 1.016). Customers were also satisfied in terms there is safety and security (Mean = 3.85, SD = .865). Further findings revealed that the hotel has consistency of service (Mean = 4.03, SD = .879). In addition, There's flexibility of employees (Mean = 4.10, SD = .710). As well, the hotels have convenient operating hours (Mean = 4.12, SD = .730). Further, respondents agreed that there's Prompt attention to guest's requests (Mean = 4.23, SD = .753). The hotel has also gotten numerous referrals from customers who have enjoyed their services (Mean = 4.33, SD = .473). Most respondents also agreed customers always do repeat purchase for hotel's products and services (Mean = 4.24, SD = .601).

Overall, the items on customer satisfaction gave an average mean of 4.12 implying that service quality is important in influencing customer satisfaction. The standard deviation for all indicators were less than 1 except (F2: The hotel has individualized attention, 1.016) indicating less variation in the responses.

6.2 Inferential Statistics

6.2.1 Correlation Analysis

This section displays the results of the study variables' correlation analysis using Pearson's product-moment correlation. The degree of a linear relationship between two variables is indicated by the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, or *r*.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Statistic

		Service Quality
Service Quality	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	271
Customer Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	271

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson correlation results in the table 5 showed that service quality has a moderate, positive and significant relationship with customer satisfaction with a Pearson Correlation coefficient of $r = .501$ which is significant at $p < 0.01$.

6.2.2 Regression Analysis

The study was designed to evaluate the role of customer service quality on determining customer satisfaction in 4-star rated hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru cities.

Simple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 + X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Table 6 shows the model summary results:

Table 6: Model Summary of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.501 ^a	.251	.249	.37159	1.412

a. Predictors: (Constant), Service Quality

b. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

Results from table 6 shows a moderate and significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction outcome, implying that service quality explain 25.1% (R^2 was 0.251) of the changes in service quality in 4-star rated hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru cities. Table 7 shows the Anova results:

Table 7: ANOVA of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12.473	1	12.473	90.331	.000 ^b
	Residual	37.144	269	.138		
	Total	49.617	270			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Service Quality

Results from table 7 show that $P < 0.05$, indicating that the model is fit. This also implies that null hypothesis is rejected. Hence service quality has statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction in 4-star rated hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru cities.

Regression coefficients were generated as indicated in table 8.

Table 8: Regression Coefficient of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.247	.118		19.009	.000
	Service Quality	.326	.034	.501	9.504	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

The coefficient of estimate in table 8 show that service quality was positive and significant basing on $\beta_1 = 0.501$ (p-value 0.000 which is less than $p < 0.05$). This implies that for every unit change in service quality, there was a resultant 0.501 change in customer satisfaction. Further, a t-test value = 9.504 affirms that service quality is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction since its effect is 9 times relative to its standard error. Based on the above results the results derived the following simple linear regression model as shown below.

$$Y = 2.247 + 0.326X_1 + \varepsilon$$

These findings concur with previous findings by Kim & Kim, (2017) who recommended that happy customers are more likely to pay a premium for a service, to repurchase that service, and to suggest that service to others. Hence, customer satisfaction with hotels has been the topic of much research. In a similar vein, Zhang, & Baum, (2019) recommended that it is crucial for hotel staff to focus more on ensuring consistent, high-quality service by investing in the development of their own skills and knowledge.

Ladhari, (2017) concluded that an organization's ability to compete in the market is directly tied to the satisfaction of its consumers. As a result of the positive effects that pleased clients might have on a business, many enterprises work tirelessly to guarantee their patrons' contentment.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to determine the relationship among service quality and customer satisfaction on 4-star hotels in Kisumu and Nakuru cities. The study was anchored on Cognitive theory. Data was collected from eight 4-star rated hotels in in Kisumu and Nakuru counties to test the conceptual model in this study empirically.

In conclusion, there is a strong and significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Service quality explains 25.1% of the variance on customer satisfaction.

The findings of this study contribute to the knowledge in the realm of tourism (hotel industry). The results of the hypothesis tested, contribute to the knowledge based on how Service quality can be explored to optimize customer satisfaction. The study recommends that hotels management structures service provision around service quality. These factors optimize customers making frequent visits and hence high customer satisfaction.

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