



DINING SERVICE QUALITY ON GUEST LOYALTY AT SEVERIN SEA LODGE IN MOMBASA COUNTY, KENYA

Joseph Musyoki Ndunda

Department of Hospitality Management, Gretsia University, Thika,
John Kahuthu Gitau

Department of Hospitality Management, Gretsia University, Thika

Abstract

The hospitality industry is experiencing rapid changes in operations everyday due to changes in customer taste and stiff competition. The hotel industry, in particular, has been so dynamic and management in various hotels have been forced to evaluate their service delivery and come up with ways of improving in every aspect of their services in order to remain competitive. Thus the overall objective of the study was to examine the effects of dining service quality on guest loyalty in Sever in Sea Lodge. Specifically, the study addressed the effects of DINESERV dimensions (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) on guest loyalty. The study adopted a descriptive correlational research design approach and targeted all customers dining in the restaurant. In addition, convenience sampling was used to select the study participants. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from 150 participants. Pearson correlation analysis was used in order to test the study hypotheses. Pearson correlational analysis results revealed reliability as the most significant dimension affecting guest loyalty in the lodge when compared with responsiveness and empathy dimensions. In addition, tangibility and assurance dimensions did not have significant correlations with guest loyalty. The study provided several recommendations to the management of Sever in Sea Lodge hotel. First, the management of the hotel needs to focus on strategies that would ensure reliability in service delivery by developing strategies that would enhance staff capacity to serve better and deliver services as promised, and in a prompt manner which can be achieved through conducting several in-house training. Second, line managers of the hotel need to focus on intangible service and move away from the classical tangible service for the hotel to remain competitive and relevant in the competitive hospitality industry.

Keywords: Assurance, dining service, empathy, guest loyalty, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness

Introduction

The hospitality industry is experiencing rapid changes in operations everyday due to changes in customer taste and stiff competition. The hotel industry, in particular, has been so dynamic and management in various hotels have been forced to evaluate their service delivery and come up with ways of improving in every aspect of their services in order to remain competitive. With the changing customer tastes and quality demand, customer dining experience has put restaurants and hotels under pressure to improve and satisfy service delivery. Because customers are spoiled for choice, they only patronize restaurants and hotels which offer the quality and value for their

money. Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) found that it is service rather than the price that has become key to a hotel's ability to differentiate from its competitors and to gain customer loyalty. According to Polyorat and Sophonsiri (2010), service quality is an important factor to distinguish among competitors, and high level of service quality is a significant goal for hotel and restaurant owners.

Service is intangible part of dining service and thus very sensitive. Therefore, a lot of attention must be paid when offering service to customers. If quality service is offered to customers, there are chances of the customers becoming loyal to the establishment and recommending to other guests, increasing the volume of business and in turn improving revenues and profits. It is therefore important to note that those establishments that offer quality service gain a competitive advantage over other competitors, whereas those establishments which fail to live up to customer expectations decline in their business and may result in the closure of the business.

Researchers have noted that the ability to deliver high-quality service will provide long-term financial viability and sustainable business success (Keiser, 2012). Stevens, Knutson, and Patton (1995) developed an instrument which they termed as DINESERV (Dining Service) for measuring dining service quality in restaurants and its influence on guest loyalty. Researchers have found that satisfaction is a powerful predictor of customers' revisit intention, positive word of mouth and eventual development of loyalty (Kim, Ng, & Kim, 2009; Stevens et al., 1995; Vanniarajan & Meharajan, 2012; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002).

The hospitality industry is a dynamic world. In order to be competitive in an industry characterized by stiff competition and ever-changing customer preferences and tastes, hotels must put more emphasis into creating guest loyalty. The hospitality industry suffers a lot from external forces in the business environment typical to this being seasonality. Guest loyalty ensures continued business and therefore is seen as a tool for enhancing current and future hotel businesses. However, many hotels are struggling in the pursuit of creating and maintaining stronger guest relationships that would eventually lead to stronger ties. The current study, therefore, sought to address this gap by using DINESERV model dimensions (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) to assess the influence on guest loyalty.

Methodology

Research Design

A research design provides a fundamental direction for conducting a study (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 2006). In line with this statement, the study used descriptive cross-sectional survey design in order to describe the relationships between independent variables (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) and the dependent variable (guest loyalty). This design, not only, permits one to analyze inter-relationships among the independent and dependent variables at the time of research but also provides information pertaining the degree of relationship between the variables being studied (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Study Area

The study was conducted in Sever in Sea Lodge hotel - a 4-star hotel in Mombasa along Malindi-Mombasa road. The hotel has been in operation since 1972 and is owned by a Germany family by the name Sever in. The hotel is located about two meters from the Indian Ocean, along Bamburi Beach and it belongs to the Sever in Hotel chain in Kenya and Germany. The hotel has a policy of conserving the environment and this is evident through a look at the garden, green building and water recycling plant which has been in operation since 1992. The hotel is located

12 kilometers north of Mombasa city and 16 kilometers from Moi International Airport in Mombasa. The hotel has three restaurants namely; Kisima restaurant, Bistro restaurant and Imani Dhow restaurant. There are three bars as well in the hotel which include Dispense, Safari, and Swing bar at the seafront. Other facilities in the hotel include a conference room, massage, and gymnasium. Hotel room rates range from \$50 to \$200 per night per person on half board but depending on the season of the year.

The sample and data collection

To comply with the study objectives and statistically test the research hypotheses, survey data were obtained from one hundred and fifty (150) customers dining in the hotel's restaurants. The data collection was carried out between May and November 2016. Before the survey was administered, the English version of the question was translated to German to help the majority of the guests who are from Germany to understand the questions for ease when answering.

The survey was self-completed designed with closed-ended questions and comprised of two sections – A and B. Section A was used to collect data on participants' bio-data such as gender and age. Section B consists of information on the influence of DINESERV dimensions on guest loyalty. All questions in Section B are designed to measure the independent variables (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) and the dependent variable (guest loyalty). All constructs that were used to measure the variables are based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The researcher explained the academic purpose of the study to the human resource manager of Sever in Seal Lodge hotel before the survey was administered. The questionnaires were then administered to dining customers during dinner time and specifically after service with a full explanation of the goals of the study. A total of 150 self-administered questionnaires were distributed. After discarding unusable responses, 130 useful responses were coded for analysis accounting for 86.7 percent response rate.

Reliability analysis

In order to assess the internal consistency of the constructs used in the study, six different Cronbach's Alpha statistics were computed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Tangibility	8	0.681
Reliability	5	0.747
Responsiveness	3	0.762
Assurance	6	0.765
Empathy	5	0.673
Guest Loyalty	4	0.703

From Table 1, all constructs returned Cronbach's Alpha coefficient greater than the minimum (0.70) indicating that there were strong correlations amongst the scales' inter-items. Thus, all constructs were reliable and any further analysis could be conducted.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS 20.0 software program. Data was processed before any analysis could be completed. Preliminary data analysis consisted of coding and data transformations. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze various quantitative data. Descriptive statistics including the frequency analysis mean, and standard deviations were used in order to clarify and describe the characteristics of the variables of interest in a situation (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The frequent analysis reviewed the sample characteristics. Correlation analysis was performed to analyze the strength of the relationships between predictor variables (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) and outcome variable (guest loyalty) in line with the study hypotheses. The coefficient of correlation (r) was used to establish the strength of the association between two variables in the study. In the present study, five different correlation coefficients were computed. In addition, the coefficient of determination (r^2) was used to determine the total variation in the dependent variable (guest loyalty) that is as a result of the variation in each independent variable.

Results

Sample characteristics

The demographic profiles showed that little over one-half (55.6 percent) of the participants were male. Almost 75 percent of the participants were between 20 and 40 in age. About 64 percent of the participants had a university education and 27.3 percent of the participants had a college qualification. With regard to marital status, about 52 percent of the participants were married, and others were single. Additionally, about 55 percent of all participants had visited the hotel for more than one time.

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Descriptive statistics of the study constructs are presented in Table 2. As indicated, all the means were above 3.00 indicating that participants agreed with all items of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and guest loyalty. The less than 1 standard deviations across all the constructs demonstrated that participant responses were close to respective means.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD
Tangibility	4.25	.874
Reliability	4.02	.825
Responsiveness	4.01	.768
Assurance	4.28	.793
Empathy	4.10	.708
Guest Loyalty	3.96	.985

Correlation Results

To achieve the study objectives, five separate null hypotheses. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to test the strength of the association exhibited by the study independent variables and the dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 4.3. Correlations between variables are significant at 5% level. This means that correlation coefficients (r) with p -values less than or equal to .05 would demonstrate strong empirical evidence that the null hypotheses were not true given sample data. On the contrary, correlations with p -values above .05 would support the null hypotheses.

Table 3. Correlations

Construct	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>-value
Tangibility	.063	.687
Reliability	.651**	.000
Responsiveness	.506*	.000
Assurance	.248	.109
Empathy	.587*	.000

Note: *significant at $\alpha = 0.01$; **significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

The correlation results indicated in Table 3 revealed a very weak positive correlation between tangibility and guest loyalty in the Severin Sea Lodge hotel. However, this relationship was not significant ($r = .063, p > 0.05$). Therefore, data collected did not provide enough evidence to reject H_{01} , thus it was maintained. The results could be attributed to the fact that tangible service is the least customers can expect from a hospitality establishment and therefore would expect to receive a more latent service. It could also mean that guests are valuing the intangible service than the tangible one.

Reliability had a significantly strong positive correlation with guest loyalty ($r = .651, p < 0.01$). These findings indicated that reliable service has a strong positive influence on guest loyalty and hence, H_{02} was rejected. The coefficient of determination (r^2) was 0.424 indicating that about 42.4% of the variation in guest loyalty in Sever in Sea Lodge hotel could be accounted by variation in reliability. These findings underlined the importance of service reliability where customers value their time and would want to receive the service as promised by the service provider. They would even be satisfied with a service that is prompt and error-free.

Responsiveness had a significantly positive correlation with guest loyalty ($r = 0.506, p < 0.05$). These findings show that responsive service has a strong positive influence on guest loyalty and hence, H_{03} was not supported. The coefficient of determination (r^2) was 0.256 which indicated that approximately 25.6% of the variation in guest loyalty could be explained by variation in responsiveness. These findings reveal that a hotel with the right number and qualified staff members is able to provide prompt and quick service and gives extra effort to handle guests' special requests. This would eventually lead to guest loyalty. Loyal guests stay with the establishment even in leaner times and hence ensure continued profitability.

In addition, assurance did not have a significant correlation with job satisfaction ($r = 0.248, p = 0.109$). This finding indicates that there was appositive relationship between assurance and guest loyalty albeit insignificant. Thus, H_{04} was supported. The insignificance could mean that assurance can be explained from the lens of reliability and responsiveness. That is, when a hotel serves reliable and responsive service, assurance is guaranteed.

The findings presented in Table 3 also revealed a strong positive significant relationship between empathy and guest loyalty ($r = 0.587, p < 0.05$). These findings indicated that empathy had a positive impact on guest loyalty and hence, H_{05} was rejected. The coefficient of determination (r^2) was 0.345. This indicates that about 34.5% of the variation in guest loyalty could be accounted by variation in empathy.

Conclusions

On the basis of the major findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Tangibility is not a key determinant of guest loyalty. It is possible that guests expect more than tangible service.
- Reliability is the most significant determinant of guest loyalty in Severin Sea Lodge when compared with responsiveness and empathy.
- It is possible that when a hotel offers reliable and responsive service, assurance is guaranteed. This can explain the insignificant results of the relationship between assurance and guest loyalty.

Managerial implications

The study findings have several implications to management of Sever in Sea Lodge hotel. First, the management of the hotel needs to focus on strategies that would ensure reliability in service delivery. To that end, line managers of the hotel need to develop strategies that would enhance staff capacity to serve and deliver services as promised, and in a prompt manner. This can be achieved by conducting several in-house trainings. Second, line managers of the hotel need to refocus on intangible service and move away from the traditional tangible service. The results of the study show that intangible service is a key determinant of guest loyalty. The least expectations of guests in the current era are in the tangible service. Guests are nowadays aware of what they want – and that is not just aesthetic buildings and décor, but service that is responsive and reliable. Indeed, this is so in the current era where customers are exposed to great information.

Limitations and further research

On the basis of the study limitations, several areas can be addressed by future research. Foremost, the fieldwork of the study was in Sever in Sea Lodge hotel in Mombasa. This means that results are only applicable to the hotel. Further research needs to be conducted incorporating other hotels in Mombasa County, the country and beyond. Results of such a study could offer good grounds for generalizations. In addition, the study looked into the effect of DINESERV model dimensions. This does not mean, these are the only determinants of guest loyalty. There is a need to conduct future research that would look into other antecedents of guest loyalty. For example, a study can be conducted using other service models such as DINESCAPE. Furthermore, the study did not test the effect of any mediator or a moderator. For example, the study did not examine whether guest loyalty is as a direct influence of DINESERV dimensions or comes as an indirect product through satisfaction. Thus, there is a need for further research that would look into the mediation effect of guest satisfaction and the moderation effect of customers' socio-demographic characteristics such as age, the frequency of visit, marital status, gender, level of income, and level of education completed.

References

- Hair, J.F. Jr, Anderson, R.E., Tatham, R.L. & Black, W.C. (2006). *Multivariate Data Analysis with Readings* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Kandampully & Suhartanto (2000). Customer loyalty in the hotel industry: the role of customer satisfaction and image. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 12(6), 346 – 351.

- Kim, W.G., Ng, C.Y.N. & Kim, Y. (2009). Influence of institutional DINESERV on customer satisfaction, return intention and word-of-mouth. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28(1),10–17.
- Knutson & Patton (1995). DINESERV: A Toll for Measuring Service Quality in Restaurant. *Cornell Hotel Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 36,56- 60.
- Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (2003). *Social Science*. Applied Research & Training Services. Nairobi: Kenya
- Polyorat, K., Sophonsiri, S. (2010). The influence of service quality dimensions on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in chain restaurant context: a Thai case. *Journal of Global Business and Technology*, 6(2), 64-76.
- Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2010). *Research methods for business: A skill building approaches* (5th ed.). West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Stevens, Knutson & Patton (1995). DINESERV: A tool for measuring service quality in restaurants.
- Vanniarajan, R. & Meharajan, T. (2012). DINESERV: a tool for measuring service quality in restaurants. *Journal of Marketing and Communication*, 8(2), 4–11.
- Yuksel, A., & Yuksel, F. (2002). Measurement of tourist satisfaction with restaurant services: a segment-based approach. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 9 (1), 52-68.