Effect of Personalized Guest Experience on Service Delivery in Star-Rated Hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract

Service delivery in star-rated hotels is a complex process that demands meticulous attention to detail, customer-centricity, and operational efficiency. This study focuses specifically on the effect of personalized guest experience systems on service delivery in star-rated hotels located in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The study employed the General systems theory (GST). A descriptive survey design was utilized, targeting a population of 171 individuals, from which a sample of 131 respondents was drawn, including ICT managers, operation managers, and supervisors. Data were gathered using questionnaires structured on a five-point Likert scale and analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis revealed that personalized guest experience positively affect service delivery in these hotels (β=0.687, p=0.000). The study concluded that The study concluded that personalized guest experience has a statistically significant positive effect on service delivery in star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Enhancing personalized guest experiences is crucial for improving service delivery in the hospitality sector. The study recommends that star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, should prioritize the enhancement of personalized guest experiences as it has a statistically significant positive effect on service delivery. Hotels should also focus on creating high-quality service experiences that promote customer satisfaction, as satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the hotel to others.

Keywords: Effect, Personalized, Guest Experience, Service Delivery, Star-Rated, Hotels, In Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

Introduction

Service delivery in star-rated hotels across the globe is a complex phenomenon that requires an exceptional level of attention to detail, customer focus, and operational efficiency (Ayachit & Chitta, 2022). The hospitality industry's growth has intensified competition among star-rated hotels to provide top-notch services and amenities to guests. For instance, according to Pencarelli (2020), some hotel chains have introduced novel ideas such as robotic concierges

and augmented reality check-in features to differentiate themselves from competitors. In the hospitality industry, customer service is often considered to be the backbone of a hotel's success. Star rated hotels in global countries have always aimed at excellence in this area, providing guests with customized attention and range of amenities to ensure their satisfaction (Walker, 2021).

Star-rated hotels invest in training staff to anticipate and cater to individual guest preferences, which is essential for delivering high-quality service. This personalized attention is often regarded as a hallmark of successful hospitality operations (Chibili, 2019). Providing customized services helps hotels ensure guest satisfaction, which is vital for maintaining a competitive edge in the hospitality industry. Guests are more likely to return and recommend hotels that offer personalized experiences (Walker, 2021). The use of information technology (IT) plays a significant role in enhancing personalized services. Automated systems for check-in, mobile concierge services, and feedback mechanisms allow hotels to tailor their offerings based on guest preferences and past behaviors (Gioko, 2024).

Many guests report dissatisfaction with service delivery, citing issues such as delayed check-ins and poor room service. These inconsistencies can overshadow the benefits of personalized services (Fredrick, 2019). A lack of proper training for hotel staff on utilizing data analytics and IT tools can hinder the ability to deliver personalized experiences effectively. Without adequate training, staff may struggle to meet guests' expectations (Odawa, 2017). While technology has the potential to enhance guest experiences, outdated systems or lack of proper maintenance can lead to inefficiencies that negatively impact service delivery (Masibo, Wanyama & Olangâ, 2021). When IT systems are not properly maintained or updated, it can lead to slow response times, system crashes, and other technical glitches that negatively affect customer experience.

Despite the growth and advancements in information technology, many guests report dissatisfaction with their experiences, primarily due to poor customer service and unmet expectations. Research indicates that over 70% of guests have encountered inadequate service during their stay (Sann et al., 2022). This dissatisfaction has contributed to a decline in tourism activity within the county, as noted by the Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA) in 2022. Immediate action is required from stakeholders to address these pressing issues and revitalize this crucial sector of the economy.

While there is limited research on the impact of information technology (IT) on customer satisfaction specifically within star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, existing studies suggest a positive correlation. For instance, Owuor (2022), found that IT positively impacts customer satisfaction; however, this study was limited to a small sample size and did not explore various technological factors such as personalized guest experience and personalized guest experiences. Therefore, current study sought to establish effect of personalized guest experience on service delivery in star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

Literature Review
Theoretical Framework
General systems theory (GST) was outlined by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968). Its premise is that complex systems share organizing principles which can be discovered and modeled

mathematically (Fröhlich, 2019). Under this theory, a system is regarded as a collection of components that collectively work together to attain a given goal or objective. Systems can either be open or closed (Katrakazas, Pastiadis, Bibas & Koutsouris, 2020). When working with systems, efforts should be made to specify the levels of system. Open systems comprise of inputs and outputs as well as through puts. Systems also do undergo specialization and differentiation. There is high relationship between the system and the environment including dependence (Rasiah, 2019).

The main assumption of systems theory is that a complex system is made up of multiple smaller systems, and it is the interactions between these smaller systems that create a complex system as it is known (Scott, 2019). Systems theory assumes certain underlying concepts and principles can be applied universally in different fields, even if these fields evolved separately (Siegenfeld & Bar-Yam, 2020).

In the hospitality industry, particularly in star-rated hotels, GST can be employed to analyze how different components such as staff interactions, service processes, and guest preferences contribute to the overall guest experience. By viewing the hotel as an open system with inputs (guest needs), processes (service delivery), and outputs (guest satisfaction), hotel managers can better understand how to optimize these interactions. The application of GST allows for a holistic approach to service delivery. It encourages hotels to consider external factors such as cultural influences and economic conditions that affect guest expectations and experiences. By recognizing these interactions, hotels can tailor their services more effectively to meet diverse guest needs.

Despite its advantages, the application of GST in hospitality also faces challenges. The multitude of variables involved in service delivery can make it difficult to identify which factors most significantly impact guest satisfaction. Integrating systems thinking into existing hotel operations may require significant changes in management practices and staff training.

Empirical Literature Review

With personalization of the guest experience, hoteliers not only inspire improved customer service also the implementation of technologies such as virtual assistants, contactless check-ins and automated emailing enables higher operational efficiency with reduced costs and creates new revenue streams for the hotel (Bharwani & Mathews, 2021). Since modern technology empowers businesses to effectively target customers, travelers have started expecting more personalized hotel services. In order to meet guests' expectations, hoteliers need to utilize technology to stand out in a competitive landscape.

Mark, Dhar, Verhoef and Lemon (2024), suggest that holistic customer experience quality comprising product experience, outcome focus, moments-of-truth, and peace-of-mind can provide heritage hotel operators and researchers with a holistic measurement metric provided in the survey questionnaire by design. Customers seek to engage with service brands and interact with service organizations that enable superior experiences. Organizations respond to customers and shape markets by designing and delivering unique experiences that provide them with a competitive advantage and lead to favorable business outcomes (Gligor, Feizabadi, Russo, Maloni & Goldsby, 2020). Technological developments are changing the capabilities of service organizations and systems and transforming the customer experience

(Nobre & Ferreira, 2017). In the future, a customer might simultaneously interact with a service robot, sensors built into the services cape, a mobile application, and a human being, who might be an employee or a friend moreover, changes in society will accelerate developments in the digital, physical, and social realms.

Naumov (2019), argues that despite the global acceptance of technologies in service industries in general and hospitality in particular, it remains difficult to find the right balance between digital and human interactions. In the context of service quality, the implementation of robots and service automation is increasingly important for gaining a competitive advantage, but the provision of more personalized guest experiences remains controversial (Naumov, 2019). The need of service automation has gradually emerged as a result of the customers' demands for efficiency, reliability and speed of service – some of the new variables of how service quality is measured, especially with the popularity of low-cost accommodation and fast food service providers. In order to respond to these demands, a constantly increasing number of hospitality providers continue to invest in technologies to make their service more efficient and reliable (Naumov, 2019).
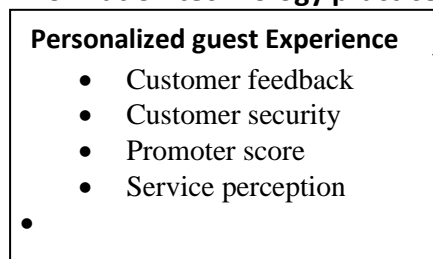
Furthermore, Koc, (2020), indicated that services in the hospitality and tourism industry are a mixture of products and services and hence are not totally tangible or intangible. According to Shi, Cheng, De Vos, Yang, Cao and Witlox (2021), the degree of intangibility is seen in most services and customers cannot utilize them before the purchase or store or save them for future use. This means that both the service provider and customers need to be present as the "services are produced and consumed at the same time", and depending on the mood of the customers or the employees, services can be different at different times.
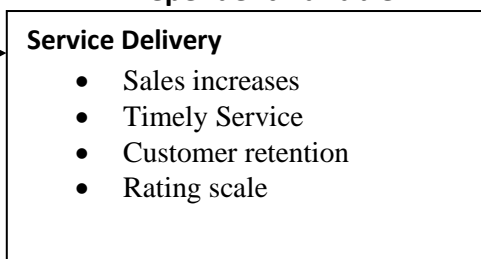
Conceptual Framework
According to the summary of the reviewed literature, there are conceptual, methodological, and contextual gaps that need to be filled. As a result, to fill the identified gaps, this study proposes Figure 1 as its conceptual framework.

Independent Variables
Information technology practices   **Dependent Variable**

Personalized guest Experience	Service Delivery
• Customer feedback • Customer security • Promoter score • Service perception •	• Sales increases • Timely Service • Customer retention • Rating scale

Source: Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2013)

Research Methodology
The research employed a descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design is a research methodology that seeks to systematically collect data to characterize a phenomenon, situation, or population. The research was conducted in star-rated hotels located in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The target population consisted of 12 operations managers, 12 ICT managers, and 147 operations supervisors. The study's sample size consisted of 131

respondents, including 107 supervisors determined using the Yamane formula, along with 12 operations managers and 12 ICT managers. The stratified random sampling method was employed based on the chosen hotels and their configurations. The hotels were categorized based on their star rating. Purposive sampling was employed to select 12 ICT managers and 12 operations managers due to the small and manageable population during data collection (Salvo, Jacoby & Lobo, 2020). The research employed a simple random sampling method to select 107 supervisors from hotels. The research employed questionnaires to gather data from the participants.

A pilot study was conducted in Nakuru County, which was not part of the main study but shares similar characteristics with Uasin Gishu County. A pilot study was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the research instruments used in the study. The researcher distributed 13 questionnaires to participants, constituting 10% of the sample size (Connelly, 2008). The gathered data were purified, encoded, administered, and analyzed using SPSS software version 25. Data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Data were analyzed inferentially using the regression model presented below:

$y = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \varepsilon_i$ Equation One
Y denotes service provision in star-rated hotels within Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.
α denotes a constant.
β_1 denotes the slope, indicating the extent to which service delivery, as the dependent variable, changes with a one-unit increase in the independent variable.
X_1 denotes a personalized guest experience
ε denotes the error term

The analyzed data was presented as frequency tables.
The primary ethical concerns include informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, anonymity, and the researcher's accountability. The study's purpose was elucidated to the participants, followed by the solicitation of consent from the respondents. The participants possessed the right to withdraw from the study at any moment. Confidentiality pertains to the accord among individuals that restricts external access to private information. The researcher consequently secured consent from the requisite authorities, including a letter from NACOSTI, as well as from the respondents prior to gathering information from them. The researcher ensured that respondents were informed of the intended use of the data and that the information collected would remain confidential.

Results
Response Rate
The study presented the response rate of the respondents. This resulted from the presented questionnaires for the survey. Table 1 presented the results.

Table 1
Response Rate

	Number	Percentages
Responded	119	90.8
Not responded	12	9.2
Administered questionnaires	**131**	**100**

Source: Field Data (2024)

The study results in Table 1 indicated that 131 questionnaires were distributed to participants, of which 119 were returned. The response rate was 90.8 percent. The questionnaire achieved a response rate exceeding 60%, deemed satisfactory by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003).

Effect of Personalized Guest Experience on Service Delivery in Star-Rated Hotels
The study sought to examine the effect of personalized guest experience on service delivery in star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Table 2 present the study results.

Table 2
Personalized Guest Experience on Service Delivery in Star-Rated Hotels

Statement		SA	A	UN	D	SD	Mean	Std.
1. Hotel collects and analyses customer feedback to improve service delivery.	F	43	43	22	8	3	3.97	1.025
	%	36.1	36.1	18.5	6.7	2.5		
2. Hotel ensures the security of customer data and property.	F	47	50	10	9	3	4.08	1.005
	%	39.5	42.0	8.4	7.6	2.5		
3. Customers are promoters of the hotel by recommending the hotel to others.	F	33	50	23	10	3	3.84	1.008
	%	27.7	42.0	19.3	8.4	2.5		
4. Customers perceive the hotel's service to be of high quality.	F	35	48	19	13	4	3.82	1.081
	%	29.4	40.3	16.0	10.9	3.4		

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 2 showed that 86(72.2%) of the respondents agreed that hotel collects and analyses customer feedback to improve service delivery. However, 11(9.2%) of the respondents disagreed that hotel collects and analyses customer feedback to improve service delivery. Further, the study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation, the respondents agree that hotel collects and analyses customer feedback to improve service delivery (Mean=3.97, Std. dev=1.025). these findings agreed with Park, Kang, Choi and Han, (2020) shows that the feedback reviews of re-visitors tend to contain more words in a sentence and also reveal more positive/negative sentiments than those of one-time visitors. Another 97(81.5%) of the respondents agreed that hotel ensures the security of customer data and property. On the other hand, 12(10.1%) of the respondents disagreed hotel ensures the security of customer data and property. Further the study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation, the respondents agree that hotel ensures the security of customer data and property (Mean=4.08, Std. dev=1.005). According to Sahu and Gutub,

(2022) to protect personal information disclosure for the visitors, an information hiding technique has been proposed by utilizing the least significant bits (LSBs) of each pixel of grayscale image adopting XOR features of the host image (HI) pixels.

The study findings further indicated that 83(69.7%) of the respondents agreed that customers are promoters of the hotel by recommending the hotel to others. However, 13(10.9%) of the respondents disagreed that customers are promoters of the hotel by recommending the hotel to others. Further the study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation that respondents agree that customers are promoters of the hotel by recommending the hotel to others (Mean=3.84, Std. dev=1.008). These findings are consistent with the study done by Agag, Khashan, Colmekcioglu, Almamy, Alharbi, Eid and Abdelmoety (2020), indicate that WASS influence positively on perceived website trust and negatively on consumers' concerns. The findings finally indicated that 83(69.7%) of the respondents agreed that customers perceive the hotel's service to be of high quality. However, 17(14.3%) of the respondents disagreed that customers perceive the hotel's service to be of high quality. Further the study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation that the respondents agreed that customers perceive the hotel's service to be of high quality (Mean=3.82, Std. dev=1.081). The study done by Malik, Akhtar, Raziq and Ahmad, (2020) identify variances in the expectations, perceptions, satisfaction and loyalty across the customers' demographics. Customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between perceived service quality and customer loyalty, and fully mediates the relationship between perceived price fairness and customer loyalty.

Regression Model Summary

The study sought to determine the model's summary using coefficient of determination. The findings are represented in Table 3.

Table 3
Regression Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.669[a]	.447	.442	.56942

Source: Field Data (2024)

The model summary results in Table 3 indicated that R = 0.669 and R^2 =0.447. The R^2 indicates that explanatory power of the independent variables is 0.447. This means that about 32.1 percent of the variation in service delivery is explained by personalized guest experience.

Regression model Goodness of Fit

The study checked for model fitness using analysis of variance Table 4.

Table 4
Multiple Regression Model Goodness of Fit Test Results

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	30.653	1	30.653	94.538	.000[b]
Residual	37.936	117	.324		
Total	68.590	118			

Source: Field Data (2024)

The study results in Table 4 indicated that the results computed using the regression model were significant, meaning that the regression model had been computed well and not by chance as supported by a p value of 0.000 which is lesser than the critical p value of 0.05. Further, the results imply that the independent variable are good predictors of service delivery in star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. This was supported by an F statistic of 94.538 the reported p value (0.000) which was less than the conventional probability of 0.05 significance level.

Multiple Regression Coefficients
The study sought to determine the coefficients of the study variables. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5
Multiple Regression Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.123	.275		4.082	.000
Personalized guest experience	.687	.071	.669	9.723	.000

Source: Field Data (2024)

Regression of coefficients results in Table 5 revealed that personalized guest experience have a positive and significant effect on service delivery in star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya (β=0.687, p=0.000).
The optimal model was.
Y = 1.123 + 0.687X$_1$………….............. Equation 2.
The study hypothesized that personalized guest experience has no statistically significant effect on service delivery in star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The null hypothesis (**H$_0$**) was rejected and concluded that personalized guest experience has statistically significant effect on service delivery in star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya (β_1=0.687, p=0.000). According to Tefera and Migiro, (2018) reveals that there were significant positive relationships between the customer satisfaction variables.

Conclusions of the Study

The study concluded that personalized guest experience has a statistically significant positive effect on service delivery in star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. There is importance of collecting customer feedback, ensuring data security, and the high quality of service, which collectively contribute to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Enhancing personalized guest experiences is crucial for improving service delivery in the hospitality sector.

Recommendations of the Study

The study recommended the following:

The study recommends that star-rated hotels in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, should prioritize the enhancement of personalized guest experiences as it has a statistically significant positive effect on service delivery. Specifically, hotels should implement systematic processes for collecting and analyzing customer feedback to continuously improve their services. Additionally, ensuring the security of customer data and property is crucial, as it fosters trust and encourages customer loyalty. Hotels should also focus on creating high-quality service experiences that promote customer satisfaction, as satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the hotel to others. By adopting these strategies, hotels can enhance their service delivery and overall guest satisfaction, leading to increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth promotion.

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