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Influence of Service Quality Dimensions on Guests' Loyalty in Kisumu Hotels in Kisumu County, Kenya

Kilori A. Jonish, Sempele Catherine and Barsulai Stella

Department of Hotel and Hospitality Management, University of Eldoret, P.O Box 1125-30100, Eldoret, Kenya

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the influence of service quality dimensions on guests' loyalty in the 3-star rated hotels in Kisumu County. The study adopted both cross-sectional explanatory research designs. The target population consisted of 10,000 respondents, with a sample size of 384. Out of the 384-sample size, 326 questionnaires were filled and returned. Purposive sampling was used to select hotels while simple random sampling was used to select the guests. Primary data was collected using questionnaires. Cronbach's Alpha index threshold of 0.7 was used to check for reliability of the questionnaire. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 25. The questionnaires were pilot-tested before the study. Descriptive statistics was carried out and inferential tests specifically the Linear Regression was used to establish the effect of independent variables on dependent variable. Data was presented in frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation tables. Results showed that all service quality dimensions had a significant positive relationship on guests' loyalty. Tangibility had a coefficient of (β_1=0.237, $p<0.001$), reliability (β_2=0.155, $p=0.015$), responsiveness (β_3=0.278, $p<0.001$), assurance (β_4=0.134, $p<0.001$) and empathy (β_5=0.379, $p=0.017$). The study recommends improving the physical facilities for them to be more visually appealing, strengthening staff competence and courtesy, and providing individualized attention.

Keywords: Service quality, guests' loyalty, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, 3-star rated hotels, Kisumu County

Correspondence: kilorjonish22@gmail.com

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Introduction

Guest loyalty is defined as the ongoing emotional connection and consistent preference a traveler has for a specific hotel brand or property, leading them to book repeatedly instead of choosing competitors (Wang et al., 2020). It is a critical focus for many hoteliers, as it relates to behavioral loyalty, which can be characterized as a long-term commitment to engaging in significant interactions. All definitions of guest loyalty appear to center around a key element: an organization's ability to attract and maintain a loyal guest over time (Palazzo, Foroudi & Ferri, 2021). As a sector dedicated to service, the hospitality industry provides offerings such as accommodation, food, and beverages. Nevertheless, global hospitality companies encounter various challenges, including intense competition, high rate of technological advancement, and the evolving preferences of clients (Chiang, 2018). Consequently, the quality of service is deemed critically important to guests. Seiders et al., (2023) define service quality as the "time and effort saved by customers while purchasing and using a service." Moreover, Khan, and Khan (2018) suggest that enhancing guest loyalty and service quality can enhance an organization's competitiveness, particularly in markets where services are largely indistinguishable and differentiation is challenging.

In the hospitality sector, hotels are experiencing intense competition, with guests frequently switching from one hotel to another. The hotels in the industry are not only competing against one another but also contend with other venues that provide similar services. The uniformity of the services and products offered by hospitality businesses has intensified this competition. Given that most products and services can be easily replicated, if not identical, Eryiğit and Fan (2021) contend that hotels can set themselves apart through satisfaction and quality.

The hospitality industry, which emphasizes delivering exceptional experiences, holds significant importance for the worldwide economy. Service quality represents a fundamental concept for organizational achievement, defined as the comprehensive assessment of whether a service fulfills or surpasses customer expectations (Liu et al., 2019). Within this highly competitive environment, recognizing the relationship between service quality and guest loyalty is essential for the long-term growth of hospitality organizations. Guest loyalty functions as a vital indicator of sustained success, as loyal patrons demonstrate greater propensity to revisit and recommend services to their networks (Limna, 2023). Consequently, investigating how service quality influences guest loyalty has become an important area of focus for hospitality administrators, marketing professionals, and scholarly researchers. Service quality comprises multiple dimensions and involves a sophisticated combination of various components, including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Jayawardena et al. (2023) contend that the tangible dimensions of service quality, encompassing the

physical setting, infrastructure, and facilities, frequently constitute the initial point of contact between customers and service organizations. The perception of these physical elements can substantially shape a customer's overall impression of the service encounter. However, the intangible dimensions, such as staff attentiveness, the confidence they instill, and their capacity to demonstrate understanding toward guests, prove equally significant in creating a positive customer experience. The combination of these components ultimately determines guest loyalty and the likelihood of establishing enduring loyalty to the establishment (Özdemir et al., 2023). Recognizing how service quality affects guest loyalty is vital, as committed customers generate substantial value for hospitality organizations.

The hotel sector has been recording reduced rate of revisits among hotel guests, adversely affecting the profits of numerous businesses and escalating the expenses associated with attracting new customers through marketing efforts. Consequently, fostering guest loyalty emerges as a valuable strategy for hotels to withstand intense competition and secure a competitive advantage (Veloso, Magalhães, Sousa, Walter & Valeri, 2021). Due to the heightened competition and the continuously evolving expectations of guests, Young and Corsun (2021) assert that hospitality organizations, particularly hotels, which constitute the largest segment of this industry, have identified the key drivers of guest loyalty. Palazzo, Foroudi and Ferri (2021) contend that a hotel's capability to engage guests in the marketplace and deliver tailored products and services is crucial in the current dynamic environment.

Research into the relationship between service quality and guest loyalty, which influences whether guests will return to a hotel or recommend it to others, is therefore essential for the success of the hospitality sector. Ignoring the hotel attributes deemed most significant by guests can lead to unfavorable assessments of the establishment, thereby limiting the likelihood of repeat visits (Wang et al., 2020).

In the current competitive landscape, analyzing service quality and guest loyalty, as well as the impact of guest loyalty on these factors, is a vital strategy. Service quality is a critical determinant of success in securing repeat business. Although the reasons for a guest's initial visit to a hotel may stem from factors partially beyond management's control, the responsibility for creating a satisfactory experience largely lies with both management and staff (Liu et al., 2019). The hospitality industry is increasingly becoming more diverse and specialized, necessitating a variety of talents to ensure service quality across different sectors (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015).

Despite the growth, the quality of service remains a challenge in numerous developing nations. Given that quality is vital for the success of any service organization, a comprehensive study is necessary to gather empirical data that can inform evidence-based decision-making regarding guest loyalty and its impact on the relationship between service quality and guest loyalty within the hotel sector. Therefore, the current study was timely, relevant, and highly applicable to the hotel industry in Kenya, particularly in Kisumu City.

Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

Scholarly investigations have been conducted to elucidate the mechanisms through which service quality dimensions influence guest loyalty

within the hotel industry. Research conducted by Veloso et al., 2021 identified reliability, empathy, assurance, and tangibility as pivotal factors affecting guest loyalty in this sector. Comparable findings were reported in a study by Wang et al., 2020. The research findings demonstrated that nearly all independent variables namely reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy significantly impact guest loyalty. A substantial relationship was established between these variables and guest loyalty in the hotel industry. The authors contend that reliability constitutes the most critical service quality dimension from the guest perspective. Conversely, Hossain (2012) determined that empathy represents the strongest predictor of service quality perceptions and guest loyalty. Jayawardena et al., (2023) provided additional insights into the relationship between service quality and guest loyalty in the hotel sector through an examination of a five-star hotel in Sri Lanka. Five-star hotels predominantly employ quality as a differentiation strategy and command premium pricing for their offerings. The research indicated that the majority of customers expressed satisfaction with the services provided by the hotel, suggesting that service quality can enhance guest loyalty and establish competitive advantage in the marketplace. Additional studies that have documented a positive relationship between service quality and guest loyalty in the hotel industry include Koo et al., 2020; Palazo et al., 2021; and Ünal et al., 2020. These researchers identified service quality dimensions in the hotel sector by examining operational and managerial personnel. The investigations assessed customer expectations and perceptions regarding the services delivered.

The research findings demonstrated that service quality dimensions significantly enhanced customer expectations and satisfaction regarding service quality. Drawing upon these investigations and comprehensive literature review, a the conceptual model examining hotel service quality dimensions and guest loyalty was developed, as presented in Figure 1. Fundamentally, this model evaluates hotel service quality across five principal dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These dimensions have been widely recognized and implemented by numerous scholars and industry practitioners across diverse sectors. It can be established that service quality represents an exceptionally subjective construct that is vital to guest loyalty. Service quality dimensions serve as an effective instrument for hotel managers to assess service quality and detect service gaps that fail to align with customer expectations. Hotel managers must address these discrepancies and enhance service delivery to fulfill and exceed customer expectations while fostering repeat patronage.

According to existing literature, multiple empirical investigations have identified correlations between guest loyalty and Tangibles (Golafshani 2003), Empathy (Young & Corsun, 2021), Responsiveness (Jayawardena et al., 2023), Assurance (Wang et al., 2020), and Reliability (Susanti et al., 2023). The primary objective of this research is to examine the relationship between service quality dimensions and guest loyalty. Consequently, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

H_{01}: Tangibles of service quality have no significant effect on guest loyalty in Kisumu Hotels.

H_{02}: Reliability of service quality has no significant effect on guest loyalty in Kisumu Hotels.

H_{03}: Responsiveness of service quality has no significant effect on guest loyalty in Kisumu Hotels.

H_{04}: Assurance of service quality has no significant effect on guest loyalty in Kisumu Hotels.

H_{05}: Empathy of service quality has no significant effect on guest loyalty in Kisumu Hotels

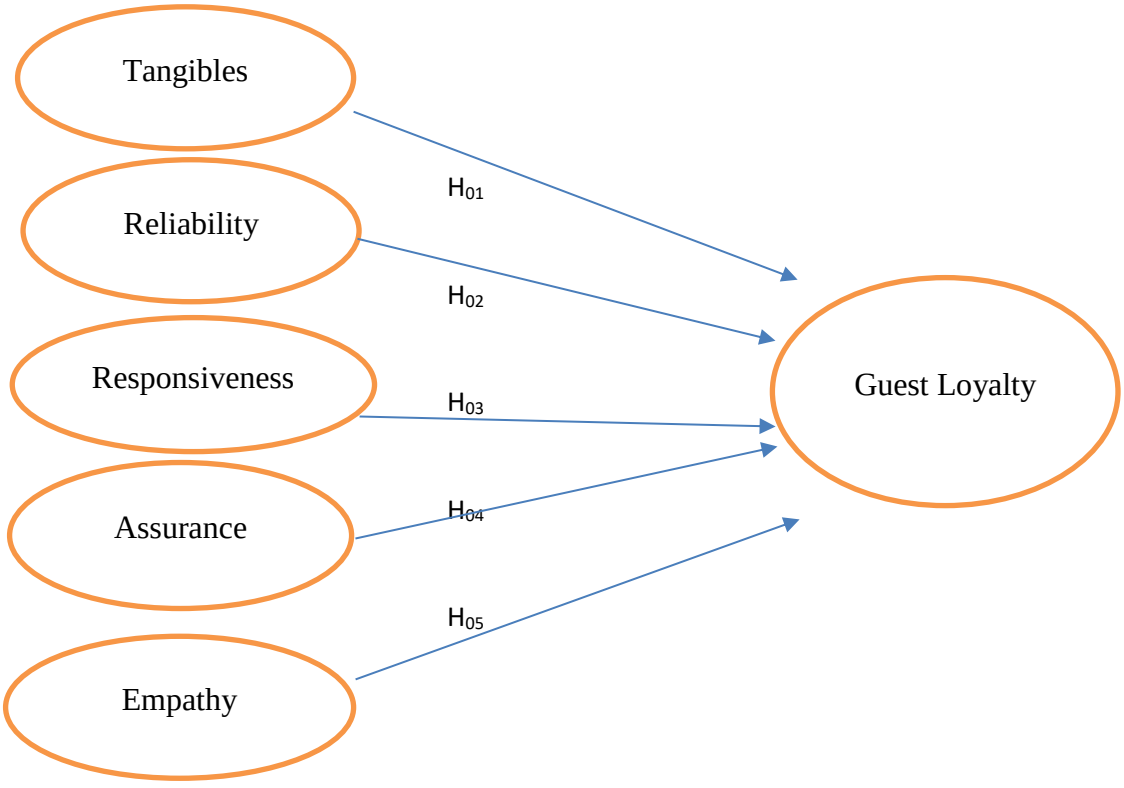


Figure 1: Conceptual model of hotel service quality dimensions and guest loyalty

Materials and Methods

The study was undertaken in Kisumu City using cross-sectional explanatory research design. The selection of this design was influenced by the study's objective, which was to examine the Influence of Service Quality Dimensions on Guests' Loyalty. This research design analyzes the cause-and-effect relationships between two or more variables (Veloso et al., 2021). The main target unit for analysis were customers of six selected three-star hotels in Kisumu.

Given that the target population exceeded 10,000, Cochran's formula was used to determine an appropriate sample size of 384 respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select six three-star hotels out of other hotels in Kisumu City, while simple random sampling was used to select the respondents by obtaining a list of rooms occupied by guests from each hotel involved in the study. Each guest's room on the list was assigned a unique number, which was then placed in a basket, and numbers were drawn randomly. The guests whose rooms were selected constituted the sample. A total of 326 questionnaires were filled and returned out of the distributed 384. Reliability was measured using the

Cronbach's Alpha at a level of 0.7%. Data analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Multiple regression was conducted to check the effects of the independent variable service quality dimensions against the dependent variable (guest loyalty). The regression model was given as:

$Y=\beta0+\beta1X1+\beta_2X_2+\beta_3X_3+\beta_4X_4+\beta_5X_5+\varepsilon$

Where:

Y= Guest Loyalty

β0, β1, β2, β3, β4 and β5 = Regression coefficients to be estimated

X1= Tangibility

X2= Reliability

X3= Responsiveness

X4= Assurance

X5= Empathy

ε = Error term

The above model was estimated for Y against each of the service quality dimension.

Results and Discussion

Service Quality Dimensions

Tangibility

While determining the effect of tangibility on guest loyalty. The study sought to determine whether the hotel had good-looking facilities, physical facilities are visually appealing, employees are neat and service materials are visually appealing or not. The findings are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Tangibility of Services

Tangibility statements	Statistic	SD	D	UN	A	SA	Mean	SD
Hotel has good-looking facilities	F	2	3	1	198	122	4.32	0.58
	%	0.6	0.9	0.3	60.8	37.4		
Hotel's physical facilities are visually appealing	F	2	1	1	201	121	4.53	0.55
	%	0.6	0.3	0.3	61.7	37.1		
Hotel's employees are neat	F	5	3	10	172	136	4.25	0.57
	%	1.5	0.9	3.1	52.8	41.7		
Hotel's service materials are visually appealing	F	3	2	1	200	120	4.54	0.56
	%	0.9	0.6	0.3	61.4	36.8		
Average mean							**4.41**	**0.57**

Note. *F = Frequency; SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; UN = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. Source: Primary Data*

The respondents who disagreed with the statement that hotel had good-looking facilities were (1.5%), (0.3%) were neutral, while (98.2%) agreed. These findings were supported by the study carried out by Omar, (2015) on the five-star hotels in South-East Coast of North Cyprus to deal with the variable number of visitors by creating a changeable interior architecture and increasing the number of functions through the flexible solutions. In regards to whether hotel's physical facilities are visually appealing, (0.9%) disagreed, (0.3%) neutral while (98.8%) agreed. On whether the hotel's employees were neat, (2.4%) disagreed while (3.1%) remained neutral with (94.4%) agreed that the employees were neatly dressed and well groomed. The study also sought to determine whether the hotel's service materials were visually appealing. The findings indicated that 1.5% disagreed, 0.3% were neutral while 98.2% agreed that service materials at the

hotel were visually appealing with an average mean and standard deviation of 4.41 and 0.57 respectively.

Reliability of Services

The study sought to determine whether the hotel always keep their promise, solve the problem whenever they occur, perform the service right the first time and finally whether the hotel keep and maintain proper and error-free records. Out of the total respondents, (3%) disagreed (4.6%) were neutral, while (92.4%) agreed that the hotels always keep their promises. On whether the hotels solve the problems whenever the arise, (1.5%) disagreed, (2.1%) were undecided while (96.4%) agreed with the statement. Very few of the respondents (0.9%) further disagreed, (0.9%) were undecided and (98.2%) agreed that the hotels perform their services right the first time. Out of the total respondents, (0.6%) disagreed that the hotels keep and maintain proper and free from error records, (0.9%) undecided while (98.5%) agreed with an average mean and standard deviation of 4.43 and 0.66 respectively as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability of Services

Reliability statements	Statistic	SD	D	UN	A	SA	Mean	SD
Hotel always keeps its promises	F	6	4	15	142	159	4.28	0.62
	%	1.8	1.2	4.6	43.6	48.8		
Hotel always solves the problem	F	2	3	7	136	178	4.38	0.65
	%	0.6	0.9	2.1	41.8	54.6		
Hotel performs the service right the first time	F	1	2	3	148	172	4.46	0.71
	%	0.3	0.6	0.9	45.4	52.8		
Hotel keeps and maintains proper and error-free records	F	1	1	3	152	169	4.58	0.66
	%	0.3	0.3	0.9	46.6	51.9		
Average mean							**4.43**	**0.66**

Note. *F = Frequency; SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; UN = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. Source: Primary Data*

Responsiveness of Services

Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion regarding how responsive the hotel and hotel staff were to their needs, requests and issues. Respondents gave their level of agreement/disagreement with various statements about responsiveness and the results obtained were as presented in Table 3. The majority (96.6%) of the respondents agreed that the hotel staff gave exact time when the service would be performed, (2.5%) undecided with (0.9%) in disagreement. Regarding whether the hotel staff gave prompt service, (0.6%) disagreed, (0.9%) were undecided while (98.5%) agreed that the hotel staff were prompt on service delivery. On whether hotel staff were always willing to help whenever requested, (95.1%) agreed with the statement, (3.1%) were undecided with (1.8%) did not agree with the willingness of the staff to offer assistance whenever required to do so.

Table 3: Responsiveness of Services

Responsiveness statements	Statistic	SD	D	UN	A	SA	Mean	SD
Hotel staff give exact time when service will be performed	F	2	1	8	147	168	4.58	0.75
	%	0.6	0.3	2.5	45.1	51.5		
Hotel staff give prompt service	F	1	1	3	145	176	4.47	0.78
	%	0.3	0.3	0.9	44.5	54.0		
Hotel staff are always willing to help whenever requested	F	3	3	10	153	157	4.27	0.72
	%	0.9	0.9	3.1	46.9	48.2		
Hotel staff are never too busy to respond to requests	F	1	1	6	139	179	4.36	0.70
	%	0.3	0.3	1.9	42.6	54.9		
Average mean							**4.42**	**0.74**

Note. *F = Frequency; SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; UN = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. Source: Primary Data*

Assurance Service

The researcher sought to know the effects of assurance on guest loyalty in three-star rated hotels in Kisumu City. The respondents were requested to respond to the following statements on a five-point scale: Whether the behavior of hotel staff instilled confidence on customers or not, whether they felt safe with their transactions with the hotel or not, whether the hotel staff were consistently courteous with them or not and finally whether the hotel staff had the knowledge to address their issues. The statement on whether the staff behavior would instill confidence on guests recorded an agreement of (96.4%) while (2.1%) remained undecided with (1.5%) disagreeing with it. Majority (97.3%) of the respondents felt safe with their transactions within the hotels' premise with only (1.2%) and (1.5%) disagreed and remained undecided respectively. Regarding on whether the staff were consistently courteous with the guests, (97.2%) agreed, (0.9%) disagreed while (1.9%) were undecided. Finally (96.3%) agreed, (1.2%) disagreed while (2.5%) remained undecided on whether the hotel staff have knowledge in addressing their issues (Table 4).

Table 4: Assurance of Services

Assurance statements	Statistic	SD	D	UN	A	SA	Mean	SD
Behavior of staff instills confidence in guests	F	3	2	7	148	166	4.48	0.62
	%	0.9	0.6	2.1	45.4	51.0		
You feel safe with your transactions with the hotel	F	2	2	5	144	173	4.52	0.45
	%	0.6	0.6	1.5	44.2	53.1		
Hotel staff are consistently courteous to you	F	1	2	6	139	178	4.44	0.53
	%	0.3	0.6	1.9	42.6	54.6		
Staff have the knowledge to address your issues	F	3	1	8	145	169	4.35	0.55
	%	0.9	0.3	2.5	44.5	51.8		

Average mean	4.45	0.54

Note. *F = Frequency; SD= Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; UN = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. Source: Primary Data*

Empathy Service

The study also sought to know how empathy as a service quality dimension affect guest loyalty. The table 5 shows that (97.9%) agreed that the hotels gave them special attention when needed, (1.2%) disagreed with (0.9%) remaining undecided. On whether the hotel's operations hours were convenient to guests, (98.5%) agreed with the statement, (0.6%) disagreed and (0.9%) undecided. The researcher further sought to find out the level of agreement on whether the hotel has their best interest at heart, most (97.8%) agreed that the hotel had their best interest at heart while (0.6%) disagreed with (1.6%) of respondents' undecided. On whether the hotel staff understood the guest's specific needs, the same trend was observed with the majority (98.8%) agreed that the staff understood their specific needs with only (1.2%) of the respondents disagreeing and remaining undecided.

Table 5: Empathy of Services

Empathy statements	**Statistic**	**SD**	**D**	**UN**	**A**	**SA**	**Mean**	**SD**
The hotel gives individual attention	F	2	2	3	147	172	4.45	0.60
	%	0.6	0.6	0.9	45.1	52.8		
Hotel operating hours are convenient to guests	F	1	1	3	150	171	4.56	0.58
	%	0.3	0.3	0.9	46.0	52.5		
The hotel has your best interests at heart	F	1	1	5	143	176	4.44	0.48
	%	0.3	0.3	1.6	43.8	54.0		
Hotel staff understand your specific needs	F	1	1	2	156	166	4.85	0.45
	%	0.3	0.3	0.6	47.9	50.9		
Average mean							**4.58**	**0.53**

Note. F = Frequency; SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; UN = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. *Source: Primary Data*

Guest Loyalty

The study also sought to establish guest loyalty in the hotels. It assessed whether the guests would choose the hotel as their first choice again, results were such that, 96.3% of the respondents agreed, 0.6 % of them disagreed while 3.1% were undecided, indicating that the respondents would give priority to the hotel whenever they visit. On the other hand, the researcher also sought to establish whether the respondents would provide a positive recommendation about the hotel, 96.6% agreed that they are willing to recommend the hotel to a friend, 0.9% disagreed while 2.5% of the

respondents were not sure. The result showed that the respondents were willing to recommend the hotel to friends and other parties. Besides, 96.0% of the respondents agreed that they would revisit the hotel again and again given the chance to do so, 1.2% disagreed while 2.8% were not sure if they intend to revisit the hotel or not. The implication was that the respondents intended to revisit the hotel. Finally, 95.7% of the respondents agreed that the hotel is like home to them and staff are like family to them, 0.6% disagreed with the statement while 3.7% were undecided. The implication is that the hotel and staff is like a home and family respectively to the respondents. Generally, guest loyalty had a mean of 4.46 and a standard deviation of 0.59. The results indicate that the respondents were agreeable on most items on guest loyalty. There were also less variations in the responses. The results are as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Guests' Loyalty

Guests' loyalty statements	Statistic	SD	D	UN	A	SA	Mean	SD
I will choose this hotel as my first choice again	F	1	1	10	154	160	4.40	0.56
	%	0.3	0.3	3.1	47.2	49.1		
I will provide positive recommendations about this hotel	F	2	1	8	148	167	4.44	0.60
	%	0.6	0.3	2.5	45.4	51.2		
I will visit this hotel again	F	2	2	9	143	170	4.42	0.58
	%	0.6	0.6	2.8	43.9	52.1		
The hotel feels like home to me	F	1	1	12	150	162	4.60	0.60
	%	0.3	0.3	3.7	46.0	49.7		
Average mean							4.46	0.59

Note. *F = Frequency; SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; UN = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree.* ***Source:*** *Primary Data*

Correlation Analysis

Correlation statistics is a method of assessing the relationship between variables. Pearson correlation results showed that tangibility is positively related with guest loyalty with a Pearson Correlation coefficient of r= 0.85 which is significant at $p < 0.01$. The output also shows that reliability is positively related with guest loyalty, with a coefficient of r = 0.87 which is also significant at $p< 0.01$. Also, the correlation results indicated that responsiveness is positively related with guest loyalty as shown by a coefficient of r = 0.86 which is significant at $p< 0.01$. Further, assurance was also positively related with guest loyalty as evidenced by a coefficient of r = 0.89 which is also significant at $p< 0.01$. Finally, empathy coefficient had a positive relationship with guest loyalty as evidenced by coefficient of r = 0.81 which is also significant at $p< 0.01$. From the foregoing, there is a linear relationship between tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and guest loyalty. This provided more ground to perform multiple regression analysis as shown on table 7 below.

Table 7: Correlation Analysis Results

Variables	Statistic	Guest Loyalty	Tangibility	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
Guest Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
Tangibility	Pearson Correlation	0.85**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000					
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	0.87**	0.75**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000				
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	0.86**	0.82**	0.79**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000			
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	0.89**	0.81**	0.78**	0.76**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	0.81**	0.84**	0.78**	0.86**	0.82**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	

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

Source: Primary Data

Multicollinearity Assumption Test

Multicollinearity test was done which means that two or more of the independent variables are highly correlated and this situation can have damaging effects on the results of multiple regressions. The VIF values in Table 8 were less than four meaning that there was no multicollinearity.

Table 8: Multicollinearity Test

Attributes	Tolerance	VIF
Tangibility	0.55	2.46
Reliability	0.49	1.87
Responsiveness	0.62	3.15
Assurance	0.38	2.18
Empathy	0.57	1.53
Guest Loyalty	0.40	2.44

Note. Dependent variable: Guest Loyalty.

Source: Primary Data

Regression Model Coefficient

Regression model coefficients were run so that they are used in regression equation and also testing hypotheses. results were that tangibility had a coefficient estimate which was significant, based on β1= 0.237 p-value < 0.001. Therefore, an increase in tangibility

by one-unit results to an increase in guest loyalty by 0.237 units. Furthermore, the effect of tangibility was reiterated by the t-test value = 2.543, which implied that the standard error associated with the parameter is more than the effect of the parameter. Further, reliability had coefficients that was significant, based on β2 = 0.155 (p-value = 0.015 which is less than α = 0.05). Therefore, for each unit increase in reliability, there is up to a 0.155-unit increase in guest loyalty. Moreover, the effect of reliability was tested by the t-test value of 3.456 which implied that the effect of reliability surpasses that of the error. The results further revealed that responsiveness also had a coefficient which was significant (β3 = 0.278, p < 0.001). Therefore, for each unit increase in responsiveness, there is up to a 0.278-unit increase in guest loyalty. The t-test value of 2.334 further confirms that responsiveness had an influence on guest loyalty. Assurance too had coefficient that was significant (β4 = 0.134, p<0.001) which suggests that each unit increase in assurance, moves guest loyalty up to 0.134 units. This was further confirmed by the t-test value of 2.941 which means that the effect of assurance surpasses that of the error. Finally, the findings showed that empathy had coefficient estimates which were significant, based on β5= 0.379 (p-value = 0.017 which is less than α = 0.05). This suggests that there is up to a 0.379-unit increase in guest loyalty for each unit increase in empathy. This was further confirmed by a t-test value of 4.098 as shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Regression Model Coefficients

Attributes	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.437	0.225	—	2.125	0.002
Tangibility	0.237	0.083	0.174	2.543	0.001
Reliability	0.155	0.067	0.223	3.456	0.015
Responsiveness	0.278	0.105	0.257	2.334	0.000
Assurance	0.134	0.055	0.175	2.941	0.000
Empathy	0.379	0.175	0.198	4.098	0.017

a Dependent Variable: Guest loyalty

Source: Primary Data

Therefore, the optimal model was:

$Y= 0.437+0.237X_1 +0.155X_2 +0.278X_3 +0.134X_4 +0.379X_5$…….Equation

Model Summary

Variation in y explained by x-variables. (R-squared), which showed proportion of the change in guest loyalty due to manipulation of service quality dimensions (predictor variables) is shown in Table 11, Model summary presents (R^2) .742 which indicates the strength and direction association of service quality dimensions and guest loyalty.

Table 10. Multiple Regression Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.856	0.742	0.737	0.322

***Note**. Predictors: (Constant), tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Source: Primary data*.

Discussion

Effects of Service Quality on Guest Loyalty

Tangibility of Services

The results indicated that the tangibility dimension has a positive and significant influence on guest loyalty in three-star-rated hotels located in Kisumu City. These hotels maintain cleanliness and possess distinctive features that set them apart, making them visually appealing. Additionally, the hotels offer spacious, well-ventilated rooms equipped with modern amenities. The findings also revealed that the hotels' layout is attractive, and the staff are attired in uniforms. Employees provide assistance to hotel guests, including guidance. Furthermore, the study found that the hotels are situated in areas with well-developed and visually appealing structures. These findings align with the research conducted by Seiders et al. (2023) and Patten (2016), who investigated customer perceptions of tangible service quality in the restaurant sector using five dimensions of tangible service attributes: presentation value, table aesthetics, sensory perceptions, hygiene purity, and vehicle convenience, discovering a statistically significant causal relationship between tangible service factors and diners' satisfaction within the upscale dining segment. This further supports the findings of Koo et al., (2020) and Liu et al., (2019), which assert that tangibility reflects the manifestation of staff and physical facilities within an organization.

Reliability of Service

The results indicated that the reliability dimension positively and significantly influences guest loyalty in three-star hotels located in Kisumu City. The study revealed that customers receive satisfactory services as their complaints and requests are addressed promptly. There is no bias in pricing, and the costs of additional services at the hotel are reasonable. Furthermore, the staff are attentive, reassuring, and helpful, which contributes to the timely delivery of services as promised. Additionally, there is accurate documentation and pricing of the services provided. These findings align with those of Kotler and Keller (2006), who established a strong correlation between service quality (Reliability) and guest loyalty. The conclusion drawn indicates that the reliability of a business reflects its capability to fulfill orders accurately, deliver on time, and safeguard personal information. The study also supports the findings of Keshavarz et al., (2019) and Suchanek and Kralova (2019), who noted that guests expressed high levels of satisfaction and loyalty regarding the reliability dimension among other SERVQUAL metrics. It is important to emphasize that the findings of this study resonate with the research conducted by Chiang (2018) and Zhang et al. (2020), which determined that the reliability dimension has the most significant effect on guest loyalty.

Responsiveness of Services

The results demonstrated that the reliability dimension has a positive and significant impact on guest loyalty in three-star hotels in Kisumu City. The hotels exhibit a notable level of service responsiveness among the three-star-rated establishments in Kisumu City. This is because employees exhibited friendliness and were proactive in informing customers about service timings, assisting guests, and delivering prompt service. Additionally, customer issues are addressed immediately, with employees demonstrating a strong willingness to help when called upon.

Orders are consistently delivered on time, and in the event of any inconveniences, apologies are offered. This implies that enhanced responsiveness is directly linked to increased guest loyalty. These findings align with the research conducted by Young and Corsun (2021), which provided empirical evidence that responsiveness to customer inquiries and complaints serves as a significant driver of guest loyalty, regardless of the resolution outcome. Their research also concluded that responsiveness is more critical than achieving a positive outcome in resolving service provider-customer conflicts, which is consistent with the current study's findings.

Assurance of Service

The study revealed that three-star hotels in Kisumu City demonstrate high levels of service assurance, which positively and significantly impacts guest loyalty. This is attributed to the strict confidentiality of customer information, comprehensive training of hotel employees in customer care, and a strong emphasis on customer security. Moreover, hotel staff genuinely prioritize the interests of their customers, fostering a welcoming and polite atmosphere, and their interactions with guests are characterized by care. This is evident in the courteous manner in which employees respond to customer inquiries. To ensure that customer requests are fulfilled effectively, hotels have equipped their employees with the necessary resources. The findings of this study align with those of Rauch et al.; (2015), who conducted an analysis on the impact of physical evidence and service assurance on guest loyalty. The results indicated that service guarantees significantly influence guest loyalty. The assurance dimension was identified as a critical factor in improving guest loyalty, which in turn positively affects guest loyalty. This study also supports the work of Susanti et al. (2023), which demonstrated a positive relationship between the assurance dimension and overall guest loyalty and loyalty in five-star hotels. The results suggest that effective assurance practices enhance guest experiences, thereby directly improving metrics of guest loyalty.

Empathy of Services

The research found that empathy in service is present among three-star hotels in Kisumu County, significantly influencing guest loyalty. This is attributed to staff attentively listening to customers' concerns and requests, demonstrating genuine interest in their feedback. This individualized attention from hotel employees ensures that customers feel their issues and requests are adequately acknowledged. Employees are trained to listen without interruption when guests express themselves, with all actions directed towards benefiting the customer. Another indicator of service empathy is the provision of suitable opening hours. This supports the findings of Eryigit and Fan (2021), who defined empathy as the ability to perceive another's thoughts and feelings while sharing their emotional experiences and providing personalized attention to customers. Consumer purchasing behavior is increasingly leaning towards emotional connections, which often lead to repeat purchases. Eryigit and Fan (2021) highlighted the importance of empathy in enhancing customer experiences within the hospitality industry. It is established that empathetic interactions contribute to enhanced guest loyalty and loyalty, supporting the idea that emotional connections influence repurchase behavior in star-rated hotels.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research findings indicated that tangibility had a positive and significant impact on guest loyalty, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. Consequently, a majority of guests expressed agreement that the hotel's furniture and rooms were modern and comfortable, the interior and exterior decor was attractive, the staff maintained a neat and well-groomed appearance, and the rooms were kept clean. Additionally, the reliability dimension also demonstrated a positive and significant effect on guest loyalty, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Thus, the study concluded that hotel staff and management fulfilled their commitments, addressed guest issues promptly, maintained appropriate and convenient working hours, and ensured that records were accurately kept without any errors.

Furthermore, the study found that the interaction between staff responsiveness and guests contributed to guest loyalty. Most hotel staff were prompt and precise in-service delivery, always willing to assist guests and never too busy to provide help when needed. The assurance dimension also positively and significantly influenced guest loyalty. It can be concluded that the behavior of hotel employees instilled confidence in guests, indicating that the staff were professional and knowledgeable in addressing customer inquiries, proficient in English, and effective in communication. The hotel staff effectively instilled confidence in customers. Lastly, empathy was found to positively affect guest loyalty in three-star-rated hotels, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This suggests that enhancing the level of empathy in service among hotels will elevate the guest loyalty levels in three-star-rated hotels in Kisumu City. The study recommends continuous improvement in service delivery through annual staff training to attract and retain more guests.

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