

ASSESSMENT OF CUSTOMER SERVICE AS A PROMOTIONAL TOOL IN SOME SELECTED RESTAURANTS IN BOLGATANGA MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA

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Abstract: Good customer service is one of the keys to success in any business, but is particularly important in the hotel and restaurant industry, where guests expect to receive quality service and warm reception. This research work assesses the contribution of customer service as a promotional tool in the hospitality industry in the Bolgatanga Municipality of Ghana. The qualitative research approach of data collection was used to capture the opinions, feelings, and experiences of respondents. Management and employees from the selected restaurants were selected using simple random and purposive sampling techniques to choose fifty (50) respondents from some selected restaurants in the Municipality. Questionnaires were the main instrument adopted for the study. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages counts were used and the results presented in tables using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software package. The study revealed that good and quality services were being offered to customers in most of the restaurants. Also, further findings indicated that some of the restaurants had special techniques in place to lure customers to their restaurants. The study also revealed that (58%) of the services provided by restaurants in Bolgatanga Municipality promote the operations of the restaurants. However, customers' complaints were also embraced by restaurants where most customers complained about the poor services provided by restaurant's and the poor customer and staff relationships of the restaurants. It was recommended that Management should pay attention to customers' complaints in order to satisfy their expectations. Further, management of restaurants should regularly conduct research activities in order to keep regular track about customer satisfaction level.

Key Words: Customer Service, Restaurant, Hospitality Industry, Employees, Management.

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

The continues growth of hotels and restaurants industry in Ghana of late have demanded for recruiting competent employees who have the in-depth knowledge and good human relationships with customers. This requirement affords the employees the opportunity to interact with potential customers during the provision of customer services. For the past 10 years, customer service has become a major area of interest to Management of hospitality outlets and researchers in full service hotels and restaurants. Customer service has a resilient influence on promoting hospitality services which in the end leads to higher profitability margin (Baum, 2006).

According to Mcquity, Finn and Willy (2000) A customer is someone who receives or consumes goods or services and has the capacity to select different product when the needs arise. Again, Turban et al, (2002) also assert that a service entails all activities and responses that customers recognise in their buying. This can be considered as the provision of service to customers before, during and after purchase of any products or services. Customers' in this modern world are not only concerned in the product or service they purchase but all the additional elements of service purchased from the owner or supplier. Much attention should be drawn when they enter a retail outlet and lodging complaints at the front desk or customer care unit. Satisfied customers are looking for unforgettable and dynamic experiences like good reception, excellent interpersonal communication and high quality of service where it counts. There is therefore the need for customer service in the organisation's like restaurant operations to develop loyal customer base and improve relationships with customers, since, loyal customer when satisfied repeat his/her visit and also promote the business through word of mouth recommendations.

Customer service plays a vital role in the hospitality industry. Prominent amongst them is attracting new customers while maintaining existing ones. Many managers of the hospitality industry have however lost focus of this, as a vital component of the service delivery system. However, discovering this essential area is worth being researched upon. This is because customer service to most Ghanaians is an element linked to only big hotels and restaurants in Ghana. Poor customer service delivery is now a major problem especially in restaurant and other place of relaxation (Ghana Tourist Board, 2008). This appears to be as a consequence of inadequate technical knowhow and unskilled human resources recruited for such jobs.

This eventually result in the loss of customers and a consequent collapse of businesses since most restaurant operators are blind to the fact that customer service can serve as a promotional tool for the development of this service sector. The study therefore seeks to look into contribution of customer service as a promotional tool in some hospitality industry in the Bolgatanga Municipality of Ghana.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

The Concept of Hospitality

The hospitality industry entails various range of organisations form cafes and bars through to multi- national hotels. Hospitality is an immediate and positive emotional experience that is dependent on enhancing the interaction concerning the provision of food, drink, entertainment and accommodation (Brotherton & Wood, 2006). A hotel according to Medik and Ingram (2000) is defined as “an institution of commercial hospitality, which offers its facilities and services for sales.” The supply of services in the hotel environment often requires the provision of customer service involving interaction between employees and customers.

Customer Service

Customer service is defined by Lovelock, Patterson and Walker (2007) as task-oriented activities that involve communications between the service provider and the customers by telephone or mail for the purpose of service delivery and service support. This function should be designed, performed and communicated with two functions in mind: customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. Zeithamel et al (2006) defined customer service as ‘the service that provides support of a company’s core products. Companies typically do not charge for customer service. Customer service can occur on-site, or it can occur over the phone or via the internet.’

Customer Service Strategies

The level of standardization in service interactions is a crucial tactical decision that influences on the hospitality organization, employees and customers (Kelly, Longfellow, and Malehorn, 1996). The structure or facility is not just a passive reflection of strategy, but how they relate to each other and how they question assumptions, experiment, and learn. If a design does not recognise this tension between allocating resources to implement toady’s strategies can be creating pressures for people, knowledge, and information processing capabilities cannot be leveraged effectively. The purpose of standardization strategies is the controlling of employee outputs to provide consistent service quality Service standardization helps to minimize variation in human behaviour and provides advantages to the organization of improved productivity, and reduced costs (Kelly et al., 1996).

Customer Service Control

Sturdy (2001) indicated that as the service work continue to grow, the need for control over the conversation between employee and customers also increase. Tyler and Taylor, (2000) stated that customer service control is management policy since employee interactions require close supervision to achieve consistent service quality. The typical assumption of control theory is that an employee would not deliver the expected performance and achieve the desired organizational outcomes unless controls were established (Hartlines et al., 2000).

Although there are a number of definitions of management control, they all contain common elements, and in their broadest sense state that management control is the process used to influence employee behavior to achieve organizational objectives (Anthony and Govindarajan, 2007). Thus, organizations required the cooperation of employees to meet company objectives. The problems with cooperation between parties are that they often have different goals and their efforts are not united. It is therefore suggested that aligning employee and organizational goals is a central control strategy (Ehrhart, 2006).

Subsequently, a strategic decision for mangers is to decide how they wish employees to behave and then create the necessary environment for them to act in the desired way (Simons, 2005). Understanding the nature of people and what motivated them to behave appropriately and comply with organizational objective is an important aspect of establishing management control. Simons (2005) provides discussion on human nature from the two distinct viewpoints of economists and sociologists. The economist view of employee motivation is based on the functioning of economic markets and assumes that employees act in their own self-interest motivated by increasing their financial well-being.

Customer Service as a Promotional Tool in the Hospitality Industry

Novak, (2011) explained that promotion is the process of interaction between establishments and customers in order to build positive attitudes about products and services that lead to their favour in the process of buying on the market. It is a perpetual progression of communication between the business and potential customers. Promotion is defined as a process of mass communication with customers to increase sales of products or services. Promotion covers all the instruments of communication that a message can be conveyed to the target consumers. Satisfied customers always promote an establishment through either advertising on media, personal selling and promotional activities publicity. They also use the company’s Promotional tools such as brochures, design and packaging and flyers to attract new customers to an establishment. Sales promotion, brand image, brand trust, physical location of the restaurant, product and service quality, physical atmosphere or design and pricing are all forms of promotions in

the food industry (Rizwan, et al., 2013). The fundamental fact behind this declaration is by knowing that customers are the pillars for the success of any business and there is the need for the service industries to understand how important is a good customer service to the industry. It is vital for a healthy business in creating new customers, keeping loyal customers and developing referrals for future customers. Excellent customers' service is extremely essential in promoting the business. It is the first point of contact between, the customer and staff. It is the first opportunity an establishment gets to amaze and create a lasting impression. For the customer to return, a need to deliver what was promised is paramount and perfect if it can exceed expectation where possible (Rizwan, et al., 2013).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

3.1 Research Design

The researcher used qualitative research approach of data collection to capture the opinions, feelings, and experiences of respondents about the factors affecting their commitment in their respective organisations for the study. Harwell (2005) described qualitative research as inductive, where the researcher may construct theories or hypotheses, explanations, and conceptualizations from details provided by a participant which the researchers cannot ignore their experiences, perceptions, and biases to the research.

3.2 Study Area (Bolgatanga Municipality)

The Bolgatanga Municipality was established in 2004 by Legislative Instrument (LI) 1797 (2004). Located in the centre of the Upper East Region, approximately, between latitudes 10°30' and 10°50' North and longitudes 0°30' and 1°00' West, it is also the regional capital. Bolgatanga Municipality is bordered to the north by the Bongo District, south and east by the Talensi and Nabdam Districts, and to the west by the Kassena-Nankana Municipality. It covers a total land area of 729 square kilometers. It was the first of three municipalities to be established in the Upper East Region (the others are Bawku and Kasena-Nankana Municipalities), which together with ten other districts constitute the Upper East Region of Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). The municipality had a total population of about 131,550 according to the 2010 population and housing census. The Municipality has a total of thirty-six (36) hotels, guest houses and restaurant outlets (Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly, 2014).

3.3 Sample Size and Sample Population

Population of a research is the total number of all the individual(s) who have certain characteristics and are of interest to a researcher. According to Sinyolo (2012), a population is a full set of cases or elements from which a sample is taken which may comprise objects, animals, people or other units. The population was all the management, chefs, and waiters/waitress, gardeners, and security personnel of the selected restaurants. The sample size of fifty (50) respondents were used for the study which includes the Management and employees from the selected restaurants.

3.4 Sampling Techniques and Instrument

The study used both random and purposive sampling techniques to select 40 employees and 10 Management staff from the five (5) selected restaurants in Bolgatanga Municipality. The employees were randomly chosen from the five (5) restaurants involved in the study, because it gave the respondents equal chance of being included in the sampling procedure. The purposive sampling technique was used to sample two (2) Management staff each from the five (5) selected restaurants. This sample method was appropriate because since the population comprised of individuals from the same field of study, the researcher belief that they respondents have the first-hand information about the subject matter.

Questionnaires were the main instrument adopted for the study. Questionnaires were used because it gave respondents enough time in responding to the questions at their leisure time. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents at their work place.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of Data

The validity of the instrument was ensured through the finding of the preliminary studies. The items of the questionnaire were based on the responses from the preliminary survey. The questionnaires were brainstormed by competent researchers and the ambiguous words were modified to suit the respondents level of understanding.

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data was coded and entered into computer software called Statistical Package for Service Solution (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages counts were used and the results presented in tables.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

From table 1, the data revealed that 16 respondents representing 32% of the total respondents were males while 34 respondents representing 68% were females. This showed that majority of the respondents used in the study were females which is in line with the national gender population distribution of Ghana where female dominates. The next demographic characteristics examined in the study were the ages of the participants. Table 2 shows that 13 respondents representing 26% fall between 18-24 years, 9 respondents representing 18% were within the age range of 25-34 years, followed by the ages between 35-44 years of 42% representation which represent the modal age group of

the respondents and, 6 respondents representing 12% were in the age group of 45-54 years. In addition, only one respondent representing 2% was between 55-64 years. This means that majority of the respondents were between the age range of 35-44 years and the least was between the age range of 55 years and above.

The researcher also studied the level of education to determine the skills and knowledge of the respondents in answering the questionnaire. As shown in Figure 1, the results indicate that the educational level of the respondents was great with 5 respondents representing 10% not educated. It was also found out that only one respondents representing 2% had JHS education level while 10 respondents representing 20% were with SHS certificate. Also, 4 respondents representing 8% were with NVTI certificate and majority of 19 respondents representing 38% were HND graduates while 11 respondents representing 22% were degree holders. It can be deduced that most of the respondents were HND graduates and those with JHS education level were the least representation

The first objective was to find out whether proper customer services served as a promotional tool for restaurants in Bolgatanga municipality. The respondents were asked to indicate how they understand customer service as provided by restaurants. In the analysis, the respondents view customer service in different perspectives. In Table 5, 10 respondents representing 20% understand customer service as adhering to some set standards by management, 26 respondents representing 52% understand customer service as doing whatever the customers want while 14 respondents representing 28% sees customer service as putting the interest of the customer first. Doing whatever the customers want seems to be most preferred customers service by people in Bolgatanga municipality.

With respect to certain special arrangements or services put in place to entice customers in table 6, the result revealed that 30 respondents representing 60% indicated there are certain services that are implemented to lure customers to their restaurants while 20 respondents representing 40% said there were no special services to induce customers to their restaurants. This shows that apart from the regular services provided by restaurants in the municipality, most restaurants still go further to provide special services to their customers in order to lure their them to their restaurants against their competitors.

Regarding Figure 2, 40% of the respondents said prompt services were used to attract prospective customers into restaurants while 48% and 12% of the respondents said delivery of service on time and facilities of the restaurant respectively are the techniques used to attract customers. This shows that delivery of service to customers is best customer service technique if adopted by restaurants in the municipality it will serve as a promotional tool to their businesses.

To know whether customers were satisfied with the services provided by restaurants, there was a need to grade such performance by the respondents. The findings in table 7 shows that 25 respondents representing 50% considered the services of the restaurants as very good, 8 respondents representing 16% said their services were good while 6 respondents representing 12% and 11 respondents representing 22% observed their services to be bad and very bad respectively. This shows that, an appreciable number of respondents (50%) considered the services of restaurants in Bolgatanga municipality as very good.

It is revealed in table 8 that, 29 respondents representing 58% were of the view that the services they render promote the operations of the restaurants while 21 respondents representing 42% held a contrary view about the services of restaurants in promoting their operations. This shows that most restaurants in the municipality have noticed the relevance of the service they provide in promoting their business. However, a significant proportion of the respondents held a contrarily view.

From Table 9, 40 respondents representing 80% revealed that their services are accepted by their customers while 10 respondents representing 20% held a contrary view about the services acceptability. This show that most of the respondents in the municipality confirmed that their services are accepted by their cherished customers. With regard to table 10, 10 respondents representing 20% said customers sometimes complain about the services provided by restaurants while 40 respondents representing 80% assert that customers have never complained about their services to them. This goes to confirm the earlier part of this research that customers considered the services rendered by restaurants in Bolgatanga municipality as very good. However, the restaurants should consider the concerns of the 20% of the respondents who held a contrary view.

On the issues regarding customers complains about the restaurants services, the result is presented in table 11. It shows that 22 respondents representing 44% considered the issue of poor services provided by restaurant's as customers' complaints while 21 respondents representing 42% and 7 respondents representing 14% cited poor customer and staff relationships and untidy environment respectively as the complaints received from customers. This goes to confirm that there are poor services provided by restaurants with regard to customers' complaints.

Analysis from Table 12 indicate that a significant number of 21 respondents representing 44% received customers' complaints every day while 19 respondents representing 38% and 6 respondents representing 8% received complaints every week and every month respectively. The restaurants who received customers' complaints every two months were 6 respondents representing 12%. This finding indicates that majority of the respondents complain about the services of the restaurants virtually every day while the least complains to the restaurants were made every month.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

The main purpose of the study was to look into the contribution of customer services as a promotional tool in the hospitality industry. The researcher employed a qualitative research approach as the research design. The study used both random and purposive sampling techniques to select 40 employees and 10 Management staff from the five (5) selected restaurants in Bolgatanga Municipality.

In the study, it was found out that good and quality services were being offered to customers where most of the respondents understand customer services as doing whatever the customers' desire, which ultimately made customers very satisfied with the restaurants services.

It was further revealed that restaurants had special techniques in place to entice customers to their restaurants. The study also revealed that (58%) of the services provided by restaurants in Bolgatanga municipality promote the operations of the restaurants. On the other hand, customers' complaints were also embraced by restaurants where some customers complain about the poor services provided by restaurant's and the poor customer and staff relationships of the restaurants.

On how frequent they received customer complaints, a significant number (44%) received customers' complaints virtually every day while 38% of the respondents received complaints every week which is considered to be very bad for the restaurants reportage.

6. CONCLUSION:

The study has examined the customer service practices as a promotional tool in the hospitality industry. It is clear that customer service serves as a promotional tool in the operations of restaurants in Bolgatanga Municipality. This is in view of the fact that, in attempt to satisfy the needs of customers, restaurants put in places various techniques and strategies necessary to the interest of customers.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS :

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Management should pay attention to customers' complaints in order to satisfy their expectations, and try to reduce the frequency of customer complaints.
- ii. Further, management of restaurants should regularly conduct research activities in order to keep regular track about customer satisfaction level.
- iii. Regular in-service-training should be carried out to equip the staff with the skills to meet the current trends of the industry.

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Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	16	32.0
Female	34	68.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2017

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Age (years)	Frequency	Percent
18-24	13	26.0
25-34	9	18.0
35-44	21	42.0
45-54	6	12.0
55-64	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

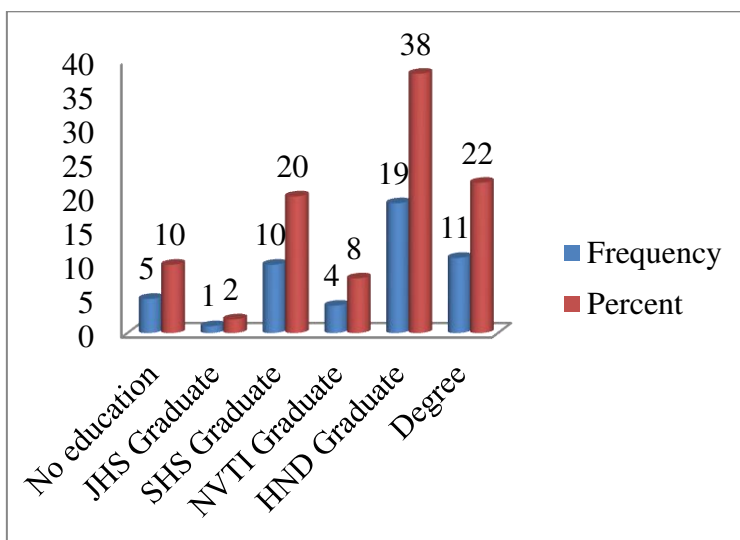


Figure 1: Educational level of Respondents

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Adhering to a set standard by management	10	20.0
Doing whatever the customer wants	26	52.0
Putting the interest of the customer first	14	28.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	30	60.0
No	20	40.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

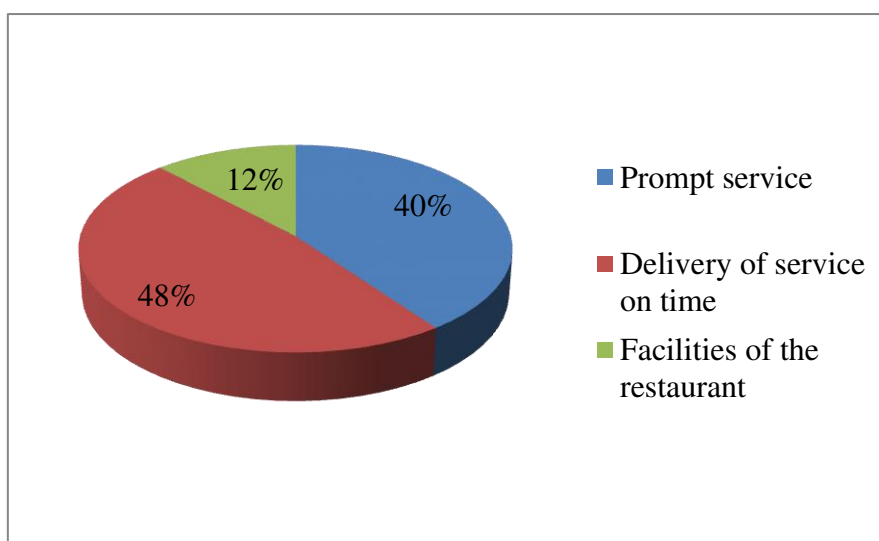


Figure 2: Techniques Used to Attract Prospective Customers into the Restaurants

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	25	50.0
Good	8	16.0
Bad	6	12.0
Very bad	11	22.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	29	58.0
No	21	42.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	40	80.0
No	10	20.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	10	20.0
No	40	80.0
Total	50	98.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor services	22	44.0
Poor customer and staff relationships	21	42.0
Untidy environment	7	14.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Everyday	21	42.0
Every week	19	38.0
Every month	4	8.0
Every 2 months	6	12.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017