

The Effect of Conscientiousness Trait on Customer Loyalty in Selected Hotels within Nairobi City, Kenya

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Abstract

For most developing nations, the quest to alleviate poverty and its attendant effects is a never-ending journey. As such, there is a need to ensure sustainable development is a reality. In this light, the hotel industry has garnered unprecedented attention as it is seen as capable of providing employment for the populace and also as an avenue through which sustainable development can be achieved. This attention has led to stiff competition due to a rapidly evolving business environment and only those organizations that retain their customers are able to survive and achieve profitability. This paper anchors its discussions on the findings of a study that sought to investigate the place of conscientiousness – a personality trait - on customer attitudinal loyalty among hotels in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study adopted an explanatory research design and a sample of 384 respondents. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Conscientiousness, exhibited through industriousness, achieving nature and high self-control, had a positive and significant effect on customer attitudinal loyalty ($\beta=0.549, p<0.05$). The paper concludes that with conscientiousness, customers tend to be pulled to hotels where employees show high level of responsibility at work, display good product knowledge, and show orderliness and discipline. This makes customers to feel wanted and appreciated thus becoming loyal to an establishment. Consequently, the paper recommends that stakeholders in the hotel industry should implore upon employees to be more cooperative, reliable at all times, understanding and show empathy when interacting with customers. This will, in turn, lead to sustained customer loyalty and profitability. This is premised on the fact that the hotel industry is a key player in the race towards sustainable development.

Key words: *Sustainable development, loyalty, personality traits, hotel industry*

Introduction

Customer Attitudinal Loyalty – An Overview

Of late, the hotel industry has experienced changes with marketers increasingly shifting their focus to relationship marketing due to the realization that by building long-term relationships, the success of organizations can be greatly improved by creating loyalty (Xu, Goedegebuure & van der Heijden, 2006; Yen, Liu & Chao, 2009; Bain & Co. Inc., 2010). However, many researchers argue that many organisations often fail to build relationships with their customers by focusing on acquiring new customers (Owusu, 2012; Peprah & Atarah, 2014). It is widely accepted that attracting new customers is more expensive than retaining the existing

ones (Magnini & Ford, 2004; Hill & Alexander, 2002). Commenting on this, Negi and Ketema (2010) posit that customer loyalty is more than having customers making repeat purchases and being content with their experiences.

In the tourism and hospitality setting, much of the loyalty research has focused on attitudinal dimension (Li & Petrick, 2008; Yi & La, 2004). Additionally, loyalty in the field of hospitality involves more attitudinal and emotional commitment to a product or service experience than in goods or manufacturing firms (Back, 2000; Schall, 2003). Zikmund, McLeod & Gilbert (2003), observe that aspects of price, convenience, availability, customers' habits and customer satisfaction may determine customer attitudinal loyalty and retention. Some studies suggest that these aspects in the hospitality sector are increasingly being viewed as basic needs and do not necessarily result in customer attitudinal loyalty (Back & Parks, 2003; Yi & La, 2004).

According to Kuusik (2007), customers who are satisfied with services defect to other service providers because more relationships need to be established than just focusing on customer satisfaction. Most researches on attitudinal loyalty suggest that behaviours do not just happen, they can be a direct consequence of marketers' programs and their resulting impact on the attitudes and perceptions held by the customer (Rundle-Thiele, 2005), thereby underscoring the importance of understanding loyalty phenomenon from an attitudinal perspective (Izogo, 2016). He further observes that patronizing behaviour towards the service provider is as a result of attitude development. Therefore, in our race towards sustainable development, it is vital that the hotel industry fosters customer loyalty by focusing on building good relationships with their customers.

Studies have shown that attitudinal loyalty is measured by the degree of customers' intentions to revisit the destination and in their recommendation to others (Han & Woods, 2014). Bob (2009) summarizes attitudinal loyalty into three indicators: retention, advocacy and purchasing and argues that retention, as an indication of loyalty, is a reflection of a customer's willingness to remain with a particular firm's service or product.

Questions designed to determine attitudinal loyalty are often based on the how likely one can predict future behaviour. In the hotel industry, retention is most often asked by this question to indicate the relationship the customer has with the service provider and may be an indicator of overall satisfaction. The second indicator is about advocacy to determine attitudinal loyalty (Bob, 2009). An important question is how likely the customer is to recommend the hotel to another person. This is related to retention because of the assumption that a satisfied customer is a cheer leader. This relates to the customer perception that they are doing something right for the company's image. Repurchase is viewed as a third factor which is also assumed as a strong indication of customer satisfaction. The main question is 'how likely are you to continue or increase purchases, or not to purchase product or services from other providers'. They seek to determine if the amounts spent per existing customer will increase or decrease based on additional purchase. All

customer satisfaction indicators are closely related in that they measure customer intent. Negative responses to these types of questions usually indicate a loss of that customer (Bob, 2009).

From the foregoing, it is evident that customer loyalty is indeed critical to the hotel industry and could therefore directly influence the industry's bottom line (Chi & Qu, 2008) and eventually affect sustainable development. Zamora, Va'squez-Pa'rraga, Morales & Cisternas (2005), observe that in the current competitive and difficult business environment, loyal customers are vital for success and continuity of companies. The concept of customer loyalty in tourism industry has received little attention in the literature including companies that offer accommodation (Aksu, 2006). Therefore, it has become an essential subject and concern for service managers. This brings about the need to understand important insights about employees' traits as determinants of customer attitudinal loyalty. Tourism has seen the introduction of relationship marketing techniques and indeed has been in the forerunner of the sectors that have adopted this focus (Ndubisi, 2007). It is, therefore, pertinent to empirically study the impact of the determinants of relationship marketing on customer loyalty. This knowledge will help produce better management of company- customer relationships and achieve a higher level of customer loyalty.

Conscientiousness and Customer Attitudinal Loyalty

Conscientiousness is the degree to which individuals are organized, determined, purposeful, plan oriented, efficient, achievement oriented, thorough, responsible, and reliable (Burger, 2008). Also, conscientiousness trait displays a person who is decent, orderly and hardworking (Burger, 2008). Decency, orderliness and dutifulness give a good image to customers which may influence their loyalty. Hassan and Seyede (2014) have posited that conscientiousness personality trait has a positive impact on customer attitudinal loyalty and retention. Literature suggests that conscientiousness trait is strongly correlated to customer satisfaction which is an aspect of loyalty (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Salgado, 1997).

The Problem

Schulz and Omweri (2012) aver that hotel employees are one of the major hotel images which have not been well considered as key in helping to retain customers. This has resulted in many hotels starting and closing up due to lack of customers. Many customers leave these hotels unsatisfied due to poor customer relationships. From our thesis that customer attitudinal loyalty is a key ingredient for the profitability of an organization in the hotel industry, it then becomes of great import that the effect of conscientiousness – a personality trait - on customer attitudinal loyalty be studied so that the dire situation among hotels can be remedied.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The study was guided by the theory of reasoned action as used by Vogel, Evanschitzky & Ramaseshan, (2008). The theory of reasoned action was chosen because it was presumed that customers' behaviour is a function of attitudes

towards performing behaviour. As illustrated in Figure 1, the dependent variable was customer attitudinal loyalty. The main indicators used were based on previous research (McMullan & Gilmore, 2003; Li & Petrick, 2008) and they were; intention to continue staying in the hotel, intention to make a return visit in future and intention to recommend the hotel to friends and relatives. The independent variable was conscientiousness.

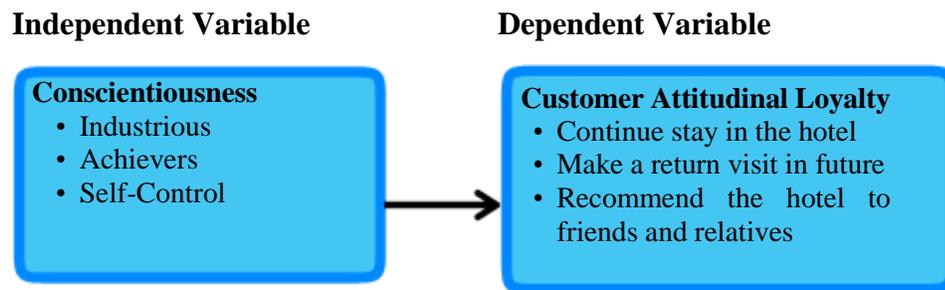


Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*

Research Approach

The survey was conducted in Nairobi, Kenya, between December 2015 and April 2016. The city is accessible by road, rail and air transportation. The study was based upon the philosophical and methodological foundations of logical positivism. This allowed the researchers to presume and formulate variables, hypotheses and operationalize variables based on existing theory as suggested by Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, (2009). The study adopted an explanatory research design.

The study’s population consisted of customers from selected star rated hotels in Nairobi city. These selected hotels were enlisted as most popular hotels in Nairobi city by Trip Advisor (2011), and consisted of: six five star hotels, six four star hotels and six three star hotels giving a total number of eighteen hotels with a total number of 2622 rooms. The average length of stay for customers in these hotels was 3 days. The total number of rooms from five star hotels was 1368; four star hotels had a total number of 860 rooms while three star hotels had a total number of 394 room. Overall the total number of rooms was 2622. The sample size was 384 respondents as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Sample Size per Strata*

	Strata	Target Population	Sample Size	Percentage of Total
1	Three Star	2096	58	15
2	Four Star	4575	126	32
3	Five Star	7278	200	53
	Total	13949	384	100

The study used questionnaires to get information from the respondents and a drop-

off and pick technique was employed in order to boost the response rate. The main indicators for customer attitudinal loyalty was as follows; intention to continue staying at the hotel, intention to return to the hotel, and likelihood to recommend friends and relatives to the hotel.

Completed questionnaires were coded and entered into a data base and the SPSS format files were then available for SEM analysis using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) program version 18.0. Descriptive statistics was performed for comparison of means, frequency distribution, standard deviation, skewness and Kurtosis values. For inferential statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) analysis was used to assess the linear relationship as used by Wong and Hiew, (2005).

Findings

Respondents' Demographic Data

A total of 308 (80.2%) respondents completed the questionnaires. Among them, 187 (60.7%) respondents were male and 121 (39.3%) were female. In relation to age, 104 (33.8%) respondents were between 26-35 years, 83 (26.9%) between 36-45 years old while only 19(6.2%) were above 55 years old. Regarding the number of visits, the highest number of 130 (42.2%) respondents had visited the hotels between one (1) to five (5) times while 112(36.4%) had visited the hotels more than ten times. Additionally, the results revealed that majority of the customers been to the hotels for leisure purposes as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Respondents' Demographic Data

Profile		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	187	60.7
	Female	121	39.3
	Total	308	100
Age	Below 25 years	60	19.5
	26-35 years	104	33.8
	36-45 years	83	26.9
	46-55 years	42	13.6
	Above 55 years	19	6.2
	Total	308	100
Number of visits	1-5	130	42.2
	6-10	66	21.4
	>10	112	36.4
	Total	308	100
Nature of visit	Business	83	26.9
	Conference	92	29.8
	Leisure	133	43.1
Total		308	100

Conscientiousness among Hotel Employees – Findings from the Field

The respondents agreed to the following statements: employees know their work and are orderly, 148 (48.0); employees are disciplined at work, 149 (48.3); employees are responsible in their work, 162 (52.5); employees are dedicated when handling guest problems 150 (48.7); employees are hard working in delivering of services, 159 (51.6); employees display an image of an organized hotel establishment, 146 (47.4); employees are thorough in their work, 147 (47.7); employees show high level of organization, 157 (50.9); employees are dependable, 148 (48.0) and that; employees display self-control when faced with difficult situations, 123 (39.9).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Conscientiousness among Hotel Employees

Statement:	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean Statistic	Std. Dev	Skewness Statistic	Kurtosis Statistic
Employees:-	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%				
Know their work and are orderly	1 (0.3)	2 (0.6)	28 (9.0)	148 (48.0)	129 (41.8)	4.28	0.671	-0.865	1.549
Are disciplined	0	5 (1.6)	26 (8.4)	149 (48.3)	128 (41.5)	4.28	0.682	-0.757	0.638
Are responsible	0	4 (1.9)	23 (7.4)	162 (52.5)	119 (38.6)	4.27	0.651	-0.615	0.633
Are Dedicated when Handling Guest Problems	3 (0.9)	8 (2.5)	41 (13.3)	150 (48.7)	106 (34.4)	4.13	0.805	-1.000	1.550
Are hard working in delivering of services	0	8 (2.7)	22 (7.1)	159 (51.6)	119 (38.6)	4.24	0.696	-0.837	1.110
Display an image of an organized hotel establishment	5 (1.6)	7 (2.2)	33 (10.7)	146 (47.4)	117 (37.9)	4.18	0.829	-1.275	2.460
Are thorough	2 (0.6)	10 (3.2)	48 (15.5)	147 (47.7)	101 (32.7)	4.08	0.810	-0.948	1.210
Show high level of organization	2 (0.6)	13 (4.2)	38 (12.3)	157 (50.9)	98 (31.8)	4.09	0.810	-0.948	1.216
Are Dependable	3 (1.0)	8 (2.5)	60 (19.4)	148 (48.0)	89 (28.8)	4.00	0.811	-0.737	0.914
Display self-control when faced with difficult situations	2 (0.6)	11 (3.5)	85 (27.5)	123 (39.9)	87 (28.2)	3.90	0.856	-0.400	-0.184

Skewness and Kurtosis values were found to lie in the recommended range of -1.96 to +1.96 and - 3 to +3 respectively. The distribution of response scores across extraversion personality trait was consequently normal.

Customer Attitudinal Loyalty

Results from the study revealed that most customers intended to continue staying in the hotel 145 (47.1%). Those willing to recommend the hotel to friends were 166

(53.8%), majority intended to revisit the hotel at 169 (54.8%), those who were completely happy with the products and services from the hotel were 134 (43.5%), those who revealed that they did not intend to stay in other hotels were 84 (27.2%), those who felt that the hotel was like a home to them were 135(43.8%) and those who considered that the operations and standards of the hotels were excellent recorded 144 (46.7%). Moreover others who felt like the staff was like a family to them recorded 125 (40.5). The mean response scores approximated 4.00 while the standard deviations were all less than 1.000. Skewness value ranged between -1.96 and +1.96 while Kurtosis values ranged from -3 to +3 revealing a normal distribution of the responses as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Attitudinal Loyalty Descriptive Statistics

Statement: Employees:	SD f/%	D f/%	NS f/%	A f/%	SA f/%	Mean Statistic	Std. Dev	Skewness Statistic	Kurtosis Statistic
I intend to continue staying in this hotel	2	5	22	134	145	4.4	.724	-1.354	2.988
	0.6	1.6	7.1	43.5	47.1	5			
I am willing to recommend this hotel to a friend	4	5	14	119	166	4.4	.765	-1.851	4.816
	1.3	1.6	4.5	38.6	53.8	3			
I intend to revisit this hotel	2	4	11	122	69	4.4	.684	-1.700	4.676
	0.6	1.3	3.5	39.4	54.8	7			
I am completely happy with the products and services from this hotel	1	12	28	134	133	4.2	.798	-1.111	1.287
	0.3	3.8	9.0	43.5	43.2	5			
I do not intend to stay in other hotels	21	45	83	84	75	3.5	.186	-.349	-.711
	6.8	14.6	26.9	27.2	24.3	6			
This hotel is like a home to me	7	21	33	135	112	4.0	.965	-1.143	1.123
	2.3	7.0	11.0	43.8	36.3	3			
The operation and standards of this hotel are excellent	1	16	32	144	115	4.1	.830	-.995	.888
	0.3	5.1	10.3	46.7	37.3	6			

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis for conscientiousness structure. Conscientiousness personality trait structure was examined by way of customers' questionnaire. A scale with ten (10) measurement items was subjected to a factor analysis and three components with Eigen values less or equal to one were extracted which cumulatively explained 75% of variance. The first factor renamed 'employee industrious nature' accounted for 29% of the total variance, the second factor titled 'employee as achievers' accounted for 25% while the third factor designated 'employee selfcontrol' a 21% as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 *Factor Structure of Conscientiousness*

Factor	Loadings	Eigen Values	Cumulative Variance Explained
Employee Industrious nature		2.88	28.883
Employees know their work and are orderly	0.766		
Employees are disciplined at work	0.673		
Employees are responsible in their work	0.797		
Employees display an image of an organized hotel establishment	0.761		
Employees as Achiever		2.516	54.045
Employees show dedication when handling guest problems	0.667		
Employees display an image of an organized hotel	0.833		
Employees are thorough in their work	0.765		
Employees show high level of organization	0.599		
Employee Self Control		2.034	74.387
Employees are dependable (D9)	0.776		
Employees display self-control when faced with difficult situations	0.867		

Factor analysis for customer attitudinal loyalty. Customer attitudinal loyalty scale was subjected to a factor analysis and three (3) components with Eigen values \geq one (1) were extracted which cumulatively explained 83% of variance in the data as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6 Factor Structure of Customer Attitudinal Loyalty

Factor	Loadings	Eigen Values	Cumulative Variance Explained
Customer Retention		2.688	33.596
I intend to continue staying in this hotel	0.860		
I am willing to recommend this hotel to a friend	0.846		
I intend to revisit this hotel	0.861		
Customer Advocacy		2.169	60.704
I am completely happy with the products and services of this hotel	0.727		
This hotel is like a home to me	0.627		
The operations and standards of this hotel are excellent	0.838		
Customer Repurchase		1.825	83.513
I do not intend to stay in other hotels	0.916		
The staff is like a family to me	0.687		
Kaise - Meyer - Olkin MSA=	0.895		
Bartlett's test of sphericity=	$\chi^2 = 1758.828$ $p < 0.001$		

Discussion

Exploratory factor analysis identified conscientiousness as a key personality trait with industriousness, achieving nature and high self-control as indicators. In addition, descriptive analysis results revealed that hotel employees had a high conscientiousness personality trait. In terms of specifics on conscientiousness, customers tend to be pulled to hotels where employees show high level of responsibility at work, display good product knowledge, and show orderliness and discipline. Moreover employees who show dependability and display of self-control when faced with difficult situations elicit positive responses from customers. Furthermore, employees with good product knowledge make the total hotel experience enjoyable. Similarly, employees who portray a good image for a hotel through dedication, thoroughness and high level of organization during service delivery may increase customer loyalty.

Previous studies (Owusu, 2012; Peprah & Atarah, 2014; Izogo 2016) have posited that conscientiousness is strongly correlated to customer satisfaction, an aspect of

customer loyalty, which concurs with the findings of this paper. Further, the study findings are congruent with those of Han and Woods, (2014) who found a positive correlation between conscientiousness and customer attitudinal loyalty.

Going by the rule of the thumb as implied in this paper and in previous studies, orderliness, industriousness, self-control devoid of anger, responsible and punctual employees improve customer loyalty. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that although there was agreement about orderly, industrious and good natured employees encouraging customers repeat patronage, there is need to focus on the level of dependability in employees when faced with difficult situations as quite a number of customers were unsure of whether employees were up to the task.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has illustrated the need for hotel employees to be more cooperative, reliable at all times, understanding and show empathy when interacting with customers. With the above put into consideration, customers will become loyal to a hotel. Furthermore, conscientiousness as a trait contributes to increased customer loyalty. In the race towards sustainable development, it behoves all stakeholders in the hotel industry to ensure that the interaction between employees and customers is at its best. This, in turn, will ensure customer loyalty and eventual profitability of the firms. Therefore, it is necessary for employees to display discipline, orderliness and dedication while delivering services to customers. Employees should also show dependability and responsibility in their work. This would not only portray a good image for the hotel but also attract and retain customers.

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