

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

**THE INFLUENCE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE FEATURES ON
CUSTOMER RETENTION: A CASE OF COFKANS HOTEL.**

BY

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MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION**

DEGREE

DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that this work is the result of my own research and has not been presented by anyone for any academic award in this or any other university. All references used in the work have been fully acknowledged.

I bear sole responsibility for any shortcomings.

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CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this Project work was supervised in accordance with procedures laid down by the University.

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DATE

DEDICATION

Don't let the fear of losing be greater than the excitement of winning."

-- Robert Kiyosaki

This work is dedicated to my dear parents Mrs. Mercy Asiedua Ahulu and Mr. George Kwesi Ahulu, who gave me life and encouraged me through it all. Thank you Mummy and Daddy, I can smile today because you gave me reasons to. Also, to all the teachers and lecturers I have encountered on my way up the educational ladder; who selflessly imparted knowledge into me and taught me to work hard, persevere and never give up on myself, I say thank you.

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ABSTRACT

Organizations in the hospitality industry are employing various strategies to retain customers to their facilities due to the increasing competition in the industry and the complexity of customers demand. One key strategy is to ensure efficient customer service to patrons of hotels. This study examines the influence of customer service features on customer retention in one of the prestigious indigenous hotels in the Obuasi municipal-Cofkans hotel. The study used a qualitative design to understand the effects of customer service features from two stakeholders, guest and employees of the Cofkans hotel. A sample of fifteen (15) respondents were obtained via purposive and convenience sampling. An interview guide was used as a research instrument to obtain guests and employees experience on the customer service features and its influence on their retention. The ethically obtained data was analysed using Thematic analysis and the results presented with quotations to support the themes. The findings indicated that customer service features such as professionalism, empathy, responsiveness, communication, friendliness, customer reward and product knowledge were reported to be important characteristics which when practiced and harnessed will ensure greater retention of customers. Also, it was found that there were challenges that limit employees from delivering at the zenith, effective customer service features including; resource constraints, poor recruitment and selection practices of employees and lack of adequate training.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of Study

Globalization has impacted all forms of human endeavour including businesses in the hospitality industry. The many interventions by the governments of Ghana to boost tourism cannot be over emphasized. Hotels are critical component of the hospitality industry. However, the main difficulty facing most businesses is the ability to provide excellent customer service to satisfy customers, retain them and remain both competitive and profitable. Most hotels find themselves uncertain about the influence customer service features has on their customer retention (Lu, Berchoux, Marek, & Chen, 2015). People travel from their places of habitation to other locations for various reasons which may require them to lodge in a hotel. Some of the reasons people travel include; to attend seminars, conferences, and summits to meet existing business partners or explore new business opportunities, to inspect, handover, commission projects, take up appointment in places other than where one lives or in foreign lands and for vacations or holidays (Aziz & Ariffin, 2009). Customer service is an organisations ability to supply their customers' wants and needs. It is the provision of service to customers before, during and after a purchase which enhance a customer's experience to recommend to others (Goodman, 2019). Ettore (2001) is of the opinion that focusing on a customer's information can and ought to be obtained to better understand their view of the service provided by a firm. Customer service can be expressed in personal and interpersonal skills such as communicational skills, professionalism, friendliness, responsiveness, product knowledge and assurance, empathy and rewarding customers. These constitutes the features of customer service. According to Jeng and Bailey (2012) customer retention refers to customer engaging in a contract, either formal or informal, over a period of time, which includes repeated transactions. In loyalty literature, retention means the number of customers who stay with the

provider in the course of an established period, for example a year (Dawes, 2009; Kaura, Durga Prasad, & Sharma, 2015). Customer retention is ‘customers’ intention to stay loyal with the service provider especially in the context of switching cost (Edward & Sahadev, 2011). The difference between companies that grow and those that don’t is customer retention. The more customers that can be kept and continual sales made to, the more likely business goals is to be achieved (Kulbyte, 2019).

According to KPMG (2017), customer retention is the biggest revenue driver. Existing customers who stay with an organization’s brand over time spend 67% more than new customers (Trust Barometer report, 2018). Studies have indicated that an increase in customer retention can increase a company’s profitability by a large margin (Alshurideh, 2016; Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). Cofkans hotel has customer service as one of its pillars on which the hotel operates and this research seeks to find out whether the service features being provided has an influence on its customer’s retention.

1.1 Problem Statement

The core issue to be addressed with the study is to bridge the gap of customer service features and customer retention at Cofkans Hotel. Customer service has been gaining increasing attention from the researchers and practitioners as a recognized field of scholarly study and is a fundamental tool used by hospitality industries for enhancing customer retention and ultimately organizational performance and profitability. The importance of customer service cannot be overlooked because happy customers are like free advertising for an organization as they are more like to recommend the organization’s service to others in their social network (Kierczak, 2019). A lot of studies have been done on the influence of customer satisfaction on customer retention, but little has been done on the influence customer service features has on customer retention. Recommendations from expert, scholars and consultants on current trend for businesses is to become highly customer-centric, that is to put the customer at the centre of business in terms of strategies, actions and processes. Despite this fact, most companies have

ignored the influence these customer service features have on customer retention, believing that customers will patronise their services regardless of the services provided. Such organizations are always shocked when customer base erodes and their existence is threatened resulting from poor sales and cashflow for the such firms that downplayed the significant influence of customer service quality (Allan, 2016). It is common to think that if you have a great product or service, then customer retention will naturally follow. And while this might be the case in some instances, the truth is that it's a short-term strategy. Sooner or later, customers' feel that you don't care about them and eventually leave (Kulbyte, 2019).

The researcher is a staff of Cofkans Hotel and has constantly been witnessing customer base erosion. Customers are excited about the facilities available during during their first visits. They visit probably for a second time and do not patronise the hotel again. This greatly affects the revenue of the hotel. From the researcher's experience as a marketing executive, the old truths still hold well, such that it is easier and more profitable to sell to existing customers than to find new ones (Baker & Hart, 2016). The researcher thus wants to find out if the customer service features being used by Cofkans Hotel has an influence on their customers' retention.

1.2 Objectives

Generally, the study seeks to examine the relationship between customer service features and customer retention and to further analyse how this relationship influences customer retention at Cofkans Hotel. The specific objectives of the study are;

1. To evaluate how customer service features influence customer retention at Cofkans hotel.
2. To identify if there are some barriers to the customer service features provided at Cofkans Hotel
3. To examine other customer service features that customers' need to enhance retention of customers at Cofkans Hotel.

1.3 Significance of Study

Cofkans Hotel has customer retention as one of the ways to increase revenue and be profitable, hence the need to find out if the customer service features being employed by the hotel has an influence on customer retention. This work will therefore provide information regarding customer service features and its influence on customer retention. This work will be available to management of Cofkans Hotel to enable them to know the perception of their customers on the customer service features being provided by the hotel and help improve customer retention.

The importance of the findings of the study is to bring to the fore the relationship between customer retention and the customer services that the hotel provides. This study, apart from contributing to knowledge on the concept of customer service features and customer retention, will also provide information for the stakeholders in the hotel industry on the influences the services rendered to their customers have in keeping them in or out of business. It will also guide the management of the hotel to identify training needed by the staff of the hotel. Policy makers and stakeholders may be guided by the outcomes of this study in formulating and making certain decisions that will enable them to keep their existing customers.

1.4 Organisation of the study

The study is organized into five (5) chapters. Chapter One concentrates on the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives. Also, it identifies the significance of the study as well. Chapter Two gives insights on review of related literature and the theoretical underpinning of the study. This is followed by Chapter Three which discuss the methodological approach of the study. Further, Chapter Four presents the data analysis of the study and Chapter Five discuss the summary, recommendations and suggestions for future studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews theoretical literature on customer service, customer service features, customer retention, influence of customer service features on customer retention. The chapter further espouse the challenges to customer service features and customer service features needed to enhance customer retention.

2.1 Definition of Concepts

2.1.1 Customer

Customers can best be described as those who use the output of work, the end users of products or services. They may be internal such as the employees and directors or external like members of the public, other businesses, or government (Dei Tumi, 2005). A customer is one who purchases goods or services from the service provider. Customers are indeed an asset to firms (Hogan et al., 2002). A good customer base ensures a continuous source of future revenue due to repeat purchases done by them and cross- buying of other products offered by the service provider (Dawes, 2009). As competition rises there is the need to generate creative and new ways of meeting the ever-increasing demands of the modern-day customers who are very sophisticated, knowledgeable, demands excellent products and services and have alternatives.

2.1.2 Customer Service

Customer service is an organization's ability to supply their customers' wants and needs (Simons, 2017). According to Hanaysha (2016), customer service is the provision of service to customers before, during and after a purchase. It also means serving the customer, and involves all contact with the customer, be it face-to- face or indirect contact. According to Turban et al. (2002), it is a sequence of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction - that is, the feeling that a product or service has met the customer expectation.

A study by Osuagwu (2009) described customer service to include creating, preserving and improving the interactions among partners in a business entity to recognise the objective of the significant parties. He further explained customer service as a state where all buyers are viewed as separate beings, and every action of the party in question is directed to enhance the communication between key partners in order to understand the objectives of an organization. Accordingly, Haroon (2010) observed that customer services play an important role in increasing the customer loyalty and customers highly consider the value of these services. This means that, delivering excellent and superior customer service is about getting the customer back. Customer service is also about making customers have distinctive customer experience that makes them produce a positive feedback about the organization and also repeat the business they do with the organization. Customer service thus encompasses the ways through which satisfaction will be jointly beneficial with regards to the unseen aspects of products considered by people who have the urge to satisfy their needs. It is generally gripped on anticipated notion which consist of a precise recognition and accepting the wishes of potential and actual buyers, and also modification of the activities of an entity to deliver excellent customer service admirably and professionally (Sokefun, 2011). Customer service is an important tool to generate income and revenue in an organization.

2.1.3 Good Customer Service

Good customer service is about meeting the requests of the Customer. Customers have an inherent hope that they will be treated well (Coldwell, 2001). Thus, in a friendly, kind, and respectful manner. Answering their questions and being knowledgeable about the product or service is also a characteristic of good customer service. If you deliver the product or service you promised, in the way in which you promised, and help the customer with any problems or challenges they may have with the product or service, and the customer is eventually happy with the experience, that's good customer service. Good customer service is also about guaranteeing the customer is receiving the appropriate product or service they truly need and

not selling them more product or service than they need (Fernandes, Veloso, Magueta, & Ribeiro, 2017).

2.1.4 Superior Customer Service

It involves good customer service as well as exceeding the expectations or needs of the customer (Hanaysha, 2016). It's about doing the extra things to please the customer. An example is greeting customers with a gift bag including some free snacks and drinks at the front desk at the time of a guest arrival at a hotel. Someone who experiences a negative customer service is more likely to announce it among others than someone who experiences a superior service.

2.2 Customer Service Features

Customer service features are those attributes that constitute customer service. They are those features that help build good relationship with customers. They are qualities and habit that equips an individual to address customer needs and foster a positive experience. It includes clear communication, professionalism, empathy, friendliness, responsiveness, product knowledge and rewarding customers (Allan, 2016).

2.2.1 Friendliness

Service friendliness has often been anticipated to increase customer satisfaction. A friendly demeanour when attending to customers in an organization is very important and strongly influences success of the organization (Coldwell, 2001). It is significant that employees interacting with the customers and the general environment itself to be customer friendly. Friendliness can be achieved by smiling appropriately when greeting a customer, introducing self, being clear, warm and treat the customer like a guest. Having a positive attitude when attending to the customers and paying attention to their needs are other ways service friendliness is achieved. Customers want to feel important when interacting with service

providers. They want to trust and have confidence in them. They like service givers to be friendly and warm so they, as customers can enjoy a pleasant interaction. Alongside an astounding business plan and sound economics, eloquent human relation skill is vital to the success of any organization (Hill & Alexander, 2017). Being able to skilfully relate to and be pleasant with customers and clients not only encourages brand loyalty and increases customer referrals but it also improves interaction making the entire experience a whole lot more pleasant and comfortable for the service provider and the customer. It is important that companies and organizations pursue ways to attend to customers in a way that portrays friendliness.

2.2.2 Responsiveness

According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), responsiveness is willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Responsiveness is likely to have an important and positive effect on customer retention (Diaz & Ruiz, 2002; Glaveli et al., 2006; Joseph et al., 2005; Jun & Cai, 2001). It refers to the speed and courtesy with which business operations respond to customers request and customer contacts. It increases the psychological comfort of customers.

2.2.3 Professionalism

It refers to the degree of expertise displayed by people serving the customers, either directly or indirectly. It requires careful selection of employees, providing them with technical training and deploying enabling technology to improve their competence and professionalism. It deals with the level of skills and knowledge of the service provider (Allan, 2016).

2.2.4 Product Knowledge

The importance of product knowledge in customer service cannot be understated. Unless there is a complete understanding of the products and or services provided, it will be unlikely that customers' decision is veered towards buying or even considering offerings. Product knowledge will make a customer service team sound confident, competent and efficient (Lawrence, 2012). Their confident in the company's offering will be reflected when they interact with the customer leading to higher possibility of a sale and customer satisfaction (Hill

& Alexander, 2017). Knowing all there is to know about the offerings of the company will make it easier to recommend it to the customer and also provide customized solutions based on their needs (Newman, 2014)

2.2.5 Empathy

Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined empathy as the caring, individualized attention the firm provides for its customers. Empathy is proved to be influential in customer loyalty and retention (Butcher, 2001; Ehigie, 2006; Ndubisi, 2006).

2.2.6 Rewarding Customers

Some customers do a particular organisation a great honour by offering favourable word of mouth publicity regarding a product, telling friends and family, thus adding them to the number of loyal customers after patronising the services of the company (Choudhury, 2014). Rewarding customer loyalty is a process, a program, or a group of programs geared toward keeping a client happy so he or she will provide more business (Tideswell & Fredline, 2004). This can usually be done by giving discounted room rates to loyal customers, embarking on promotions, provision of souvenirs and giving out complimentary packages.

2.2.7 Communication Skills

Communication is the process by which information, ideas, and understanding are shared between two or more people (Harris, 2007). It is imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing or signs There has been almost a consensus in customer service literature that communication is an essential part of successful customer service programs and policies, which is intuitively divided into verbal and nonverbal communication using many traditional and non-traditional means available to communicate with customers (Anderson & Bolt, 2008; Odgers, 2008; Smith, 1999). Communication deals with how information is transferred and received from customers among others, it involves empathetic listening, the use of common language, explanation of the service, its advantages and disadvantages.

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a personal feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from the evaluation of services provided by an organization to an individual in relation to expectations (Leisen & Vance, 2001). Service providers usually place a higher priority on customer satisfaction, because it has been seen as a prerequisite to customer retention. As a positive result of marketing activities, high customer satisfaction leads to repeat patronage and word-of-mouth promotion to friends (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995), while low customer satisfaction has been associated with complaining behaviour (Zeithaml et al., 1996). A satisfied customer often stays loyal and is likely to patronise the firm in future (Kotler & Amstrong, 2006). Customers see service in terms of quality, but how satisfied they are with the overall experience, is what determines their satisfaction. Whether the customer is satisfied after purchase depends on the offer's performance or the customer service in this case, in relation to the customer expectations.

Customer Satisfaction is when the outcome of the service matches the expectations of the service. As pointed out by Looy et al. (2003), even though they differ, one is a component of the other. Zeithaml et al. (2003) defines it as the customer's evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether the product or service has met his needs or expectations. Failure to meet needs results in dissatisfaction, or a poor perception of the service quality. Satisfaction can be acknowledged in various senses depending on what needs the customer had before the service; it ranges from feelings of fulfilment, contentment, pleasure, delight, relief, and ambivalence. Although it tends to be measured as a static quantity, it is dynamic and evolves over time being influenced by a variety of factors. Service quality is one of those factors that contribute to customer satisfaction. The level of customer satisfaction is the result of the customers comparison of the service quality expected in a given service encounter, with the perceived service quality (Looy et al., 2003).

If the customers of an organization are satisfied by quality services the result is that, they will be loyal to them and consequently be retained by the organization, which is positive for the organization because it could also mean higher profits, higher market share, and increasing customer base. According to Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann (1994), there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and economic profit for the company. Arguably, customer satisfaction is an important component in order for the company to be profitable. Increased global competition has led to a greater emphasis on customer satisfaction (Johnson & Fornell, 1991; Ennew, Binks, & Chiplin, 2015). Matzler, Hinterhuber, Bailom and Sauerwein (1996), argues that there are an increasing number of companies that starts to recognize the importance of customer satisfaction for future business. In attempting to increase customer satisfaction it is necessary to understand what the customer wants before they realize it themselves.

2.3.1 Impact of Customer Satisfaction.

Studies have shown that customer satisfaction does have affirmative effect on an organization's profitability. According to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), satisfied customers form the bedrock of any successful business as customer satisfaction leads to repeat purchase, brand loyalty, and positive word of mouth. Also, Sivadis and Jindal (2017) posits that satisfied customers are likely to share their experiences with potential customers via of word of mouth. From their survey study, they found out that customers of restaurants who reported overall satisfaction with the service reported positive word of mouth whereas equally dissatisfied customers were more likely to tell other people of their unhappy experience. Bowen and Chen (2015) argued that having satisfied customers is not just enough, they need to be extremely satisfied customers. This is because customer satisfaction will translate to customer loyalty.

2.4 Customer Retention

Customer retention in the hospitality industry has become increasingly more important (Back & Parks, 2003). According to the findings of Reichheld and Sasser (1990), a 5% increase in

customer retention translated into a 25% to 125% increase in the profitability of nine selected service firms. Long-term customers buy more, bring in new customers, take less of the service providers' time, and are less sensitive to price (Reichheld, 1996; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). It has been shown that the cost of soliciting new customers is seven times higher than that of retaining old ones (Richard & Larry, 1996) and that enhancing customer retention will lead to profit increase. In order to enhance the retention of customers, it is essential for hotel managers to understand the relationship between customer service features and customer retention.

A loyal customer may have emotional attachment to the hotel (Griffin, 1995). Loyal customers are the principal drivers of profits as they continue to stay at a brand's properties. Tideswell and Fredline (2004) reported that guests who fit into the extremely loyalty cluster have high attitudinal attachment to the hotel, so that many are prepared to change the timing of their visit to ensure they are able to stay at their preferred property. They are also not as sensitive on pricing issues and are willing to pay more to stay in their favourite property rather than go elsewhere in favour of cheaper room rate. It has been found that brand loyalty customers also reduced marketing costs associated with attracting new customers (Kotler et al., 1998).

In addition, these customers say positive things about a company to others (Tepeci, 1999) and frequently pay premium prices (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). Barsky and Lin (2004) reported that in the luxury hotel segment among leisure travellers, overall satisfaction was significantly higher among repeat guests. This suggests that satisfying leisure travellers can pay off handsomely with higher rates and more repeat guests. Industry executives continue to emphasize "customer loyalty" as a key to sustaining long-term business success (Oh, 2002). "In the loyalty literature, retention means the number of customers who stay with the provider in the course of an established period, for example a year" (Dawes, 2009). Customer retention rates and customer share are important metrics in Customer relationship management (Hoekstra et al., 1999; Reichheld, 1996).

Customer retention is defined by different studies in different ways like Gerpott, Rams and Schindler (2001) as the continuity of the business relations between the customer and company. As it has stated that, the vital issue in relationship marketing research is the effects of relationships and quality on customers' retention (Lin & Wu, 2011). Retention and attraction of new customer are used as drivers for increase in market share and revenues (Rust, Zohorik, & Keiningham 1995). In the retention of customer, it is important for firm to know how to serve their customers. Post sales services are the important drivers for customer retentions (Saeed, Grover, & Hwang, 2005). It is important for product or service provider to emphasis on the quality of product and service. As stated by Lin and Wu (2011), there is statistically significant relationship between quality, commitment, trust and satisfaction and customer retention and future use of product, as retention is influenced by future use of product. Lin and Wu (2011) argued that findings extend previous research that there is solid relationship between customer retention and quality of service/or products. It was examined that loyalty program with monetary compensation is steps toward great customer retention (Verhoef, 2003). Evidence is available in previous literature that Emotional commitment and loyalty program that gave financial incentives have positive impacts on customer retention (Verhoef, 2003).

In a nationwide customer retention survey, majority of the respondents reported that 75% of the sales were from existing customers (Carter, 2008). 98% of the respondents surveyed agreed to the importance of customer loyalty but only half of them were aware of any customer loyalty program being implemented at their firm. 73% of the firms said that they did not measure customer loyalty (Ray & Chiagouris, 2009). Revenue from loyal customers continue to grow as the customer continue to be loyal to the firm (Sirohi et al., 1998). Companies spend more in attracting new customers rather than retaining the existing ones.

It costs much more to get a new customer then retaining an existing one. Customer retention is now emerging as an important area of analysis and planning. Designing an

optimal customer portfolio, designing a special marketing mix and modifying the organisation can help build good relationship with the existing customers (Rosenberg & Czepiel, 1992).

Companies uninterested in retaining existing customers and looking for new ones is similar to throwing a needle in the Haystack, finding it, again throwing it and then looking for it. The time and money spent in attracting a new customer is not worth if you cannot keep them. All those firms which practise relationship marketing, customer retention have become their primary goal (Coviello et al., 2002; Gronroos, 1991). While customer retention might have a different meaning and measurement for different industries and firms (Aspinall et al., 2001), there is an agreement for the fact that focus on customer retention can generate several economic benefits (Ang & Buttle, 2006; Buttle, 2004). Customer's estimation of use of their service provider in future is an indicator of customer retention (Lin & Wu, 2011). Customer retention usually is described in the context of behavioural intention to return to an organisation and willingness to recommend the organisation to others (Swan & Oliver, 1989; Zeithaml, Berry, Parasuraman, 1996). Customer retention is customer's intention to stay loyal with the service provider especially in the context of switching costs (Edward & Sahadev, 2011). Customer retention is the inclination of the customers to stay with the service provider in future (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). As per Zineldin (2000) retention is defined as a commitment to continue to do business or exchange with a particular company on an ongoing basis.

Retention can be also defined as customer's liking, identification, commitment, trust, willingness to recommend and repurchase intentions with the first four being emotional-cognitive retention constructs and the last two being behavioural intentions (Stauss et al., 2001). Customer retention refers to a long-term commitment on the part of the customer and the firm to maintain the relationship (Wilson, 1995). As per Jeng and Bailey (2012) customer retention refers to a customer engaging in a contract, either formal or informal, over a period of time, which includes repeated transactions. Unprofitable customers and those customers

whose needs cannot be fulfilled by the company should not be retained (Reichheld, 1996). Retention is achieved by good service and good relationships (Hansemark & Albinsson, 2004). Primary aim of customer retention is to achieve zero defections from profitable customers (Reichheld, 1996).

2.5 Influence of Customer Service on Customer Retention

Customer service and customer retention are very well-studied areas in marketing. There are several studies addressing subjects related to customer service, customer retention, and the impact of customer service on customer retention.

Customer satisfaction is ensuring a customer's needs are met, problems are handled, and the customer is satisfied with his experience with the company and the company's products or services (Len, 2015). Customer retention is getting a customer to return after first purchase and continue returning on a consistent basis. These activities go hand-in-hand. Ensuring customers are happy and pleased with their experience is the foundation for them coming back and spending more money with the business.

Bowen and Chen (2015) said that just satisfying customers is not enough, there has to be very satisfied customers. This is because, customer satisfaction lead to customer retention. Generally, customer service is seen to be a factor which entice and preserve customers. Customer satisfaction could come about when there is quality and effective customer service. Most consumers of products are very particular about the additional elements of the service they obtain which ranges from the manner in which they are welcomed upon arrival, to the kinds of teaching given on a product or service and assistance received when a complaint about a product or services is made. Handling customer feedbacks and asking their complaints regularly influence customer retention. Bowen and Chen (2015) agree that there is a positive relationship between customer loyalty and profitability. The increased profit comes from reduced marketing costs, increased sales and reduced operational costs. Again, retained

customers cost less to serve, in part because they know the product and require less information (Len, 2015). Therefore, loyal customers not only require less information themselves, they also serve as an information source for other customers. For organizations to ensure that there is customer loyalty, organisations must be able to anticipate the needs of their customers (Kandampully & Duffy, 1999). According to Kandampully and Duffy (1999), a customer's interest in maintaining a loyal relationship is depended on the firm's ability to anticipate customer's future needs and offering them before anyone else does. Awara (2010) analysed the crucial role that service provider personnel play for value creation and consumer satisfaction, which are necessary for customer retention. The author suggested that effective strategies for customer retention must focus on the management of the relationships between service provider-personnel and their customers, which would enhance effective relationship between service providers and their customers.

2.6 Challenges to the Provision of Customer Service Features

Most companies have come to terms with the need to offer customer service to other customers. But usually, this is just on paper. This often leads to customer dissatisfaction, hence affecting retention. Meanwhile, customer service dealings can often be frustrating, and client requests can frequently appear demanding, there may be barriers in the organization that might make rational consumer requests seem excessive. Companies thus need to understand the barriers to providing excellent customer service and take that into consideration in order to satisfy their customers.

Some of the challenges associated with the provision of customer service feature include;

2.6.1 Over/Under worked Staff

Overworked staff can be the result of understaffing, layoffs, quick growth or assigning too many tasks to too few people (Agbor, 2011). The outcome is that, the staff will quickly lose their energy. Those that do not will be stretched too thin and no single client will appear as a priority to them. Since service staff will have many clients to service, steps will be skipped,

staff and customers will become unsatisfied and clients will receive insufficient attention to their issues (Donate, Peña, & Sanchez de Pablo, 2016). The exact opposite can have a related effect on customer service. If staffs underworked, they will feel less challenged, underappreciated and unimportant. Work has a pattern of expanding to fit whatever time is allotted. If a staff is underworked, case handling turnaround time can drag lengthier than reasonably expected and customers will get frustrated.

2.6.2 Having a Non-Caring Culture

The workplace culture can have an extensive effect on how customer service cases are handled. If the work environment climate is one where customers are not cared for, where staff doesn't care about their work, or if the environment is not empowering, your staff will under-deliver when presented with a customer service case (Darrell, Frederick, & Chris, 2003). This culture inhibits staff from caring enough for customers to make them happy. Customers are not a priority and the consequences of an unhappy customer are not apparent to them.

2.6.3 Poor Accountability

When staffs are not held accountable for their actions, there are no reasons for them to try harder to make sure customers are happy. Staff can constantly place the blame elsewhere and know that they can never get in trouble for letting a customer leave unhappy (Robert, 2005).

2.6.4 Communication of Customer Value

Customer satisfaction is the obligation of everybody in the organisation; from the manager to the cleaner. Staff members must always be reminded of how cherished customers are so that they will treat them in appropriate and valued manner (Kaura et al., 2015).

2.6.5 Inadequate Understanding about Customer Needs

If there's no data, it is easy to make the assertion that you are customer centric. Information leads to the awareness that there is a gap between what your company is doing and what your customers are experiencing (Simons, 2017). Once this gap is made evident, management is

faced with a lot of uncomfortable decisions about what to change. Reliable information can lead to significant innovations that will find greater customer acceptance and market success.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the approaches and methods that were used to gather information to achieve the objectives of the study. The research design used is explained, the sources of data, study population, sample frame for the study, sampling techniques, sample size, tools that were used for data collection and administration and the methods that were used to analyse the data were also explained. The last sub-sections described the ethical consideration and a chapter conclusion.

3.2 Research Design

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), a research design strategy is a general plan of how to answer the research questions that have been set. There are various designs including quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To help answer the research question(s) and objectives chosen called for the use of qualitative research design. This is because, the qualitative method has been found to be appropriate if the researcher intends to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon investigated (Williams, 2007). Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2017) stated that to understand the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon, the researcher should adopt the qualitative method as it provides the diagnostic tools to unearth robust data from a particular research setting.

3.3 Data Sources

The study used data and information from secondary and primary sources. Primary data can be defined as data that is collected for the first time and secondary information refers to information that has been processed (Dawson, 2009). Primary data was gathered from the guest and staff of Cofkans Hotel using questionnaires and interview guide. Secondary data was gathered from other research writings, Cofkans Hotel website and other bulletins. In addition,

secondary data was obtained from books, papers, journals, articles and unpublished dissertations.

3.4 Population

Population is defined as the entire set of circumstances the researcher wants to make a broad view of (Dawson, 2009). Similar definition is posited by Hanlon and Larget (2011) who defined population as the entire people or group of attention to a researcher. The population therefore speaks of the whole number of individuals in a particular place or cluster of interest for a study. There are tens (10s) of customers that patronize the services of the hotel and its employees. Therefore, the current study's population consisted of guests and staff of Cofkans Hotel which has an average occupancy of 54% (34 occupants) and 55 staff members

3.5 Sample Size

A sample can also be defined as the definite group of individuals who are selected to help answer the research questions (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). This means that the sample is a small unit of the total number of people that comprised the research population. Mason (2010) opined that a sample ranging from 6 to 50 as a suitable size for a qualitative study. This is because the main aim of qualitative is not to generalize but understand a phenomenon in-depth. Similarly, there is saturation of data as respondents provide feedback to a researcher with increasing sample size. Charmaz (2006) argues that saturation mostly occurs after the 15th respondent and thereby the use of seventeen respondents as sample size is adequate to test the research objectives.

3.6 Sampling Technique

In this study non-probability sampling was used throughout. This sampling method does not give all elements in the population of study an equal chance of being selected hence some elements may or may not be selected (Creswell & Clark, 2017). It usually based on certain assumptions that concern the study population. This sampling technique was used because it is impossible to predict the customers coming in daily and the data collection goes on (Newman,

2004). The non-probability methods of sampling that was used included convenience and purposive sampling methods. Convenience sampling method involves the selection of respondents based on convenience. In this study, convenience sampling was used because, the guests do not come to the hotel in any order. Anyone moves in any time and since the researcher was only at the hotel on certain hours of the day, it was best to use convenience sampling in order to get as many as possible guest. Guest were then interviewed when they agreed to be interviewed. Purposive sampling was also used at some point; this method of sampling is heavily dependent on the subjective decision of the researcher and here it was used to determine the employees to be interviewed (Dawson, 2009).

3.7 Research Instrument

The gathering of data instrument ranged from a simple observation at the hotel to collection of information through interview guide from various customers and employees in the hotel. The guide was in two parts. One part was answered by the hotel guests and the other part was answered by the staff of the hotel so as to be able to answer the research questions. The guide was designed to answer the research questions according to laid down procedures in the development of appropriate semi-structured interview guide (Adams, 2015). The Interview guide was in two sections; the first section asks for some few background characteristics of the respondents such as the sex, tenure, job title while the second part had a list of questions developed by the researcher based on the research objectives that were highlighted.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was used to analyze content from various sources obtained from employees and the guest. The analysis followed the six-step approach in thematic analysis enumerated by Braun and Clarke (2006).

3.9 Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of this study was access to some information that was considered very sensitive. Also, provision of data within the time schedule for the researcher was also a

challenge. However, to ensure that the research is not curtailed in the middle of data collection, private engagements was adopted in respect of the sensibility of the respondents. The study was also be constrained by time and finance, and this also explains why the sample size of fifteen respondents used.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

According to Fouka and Mantzorou (2011), ethical consideration is central in research. This is because it safeguards the honour of respondents and ensures that published information is true and does not discredit anyone. This builds trust and authenticates research (Iphofen, 2011). This research ensured that ethical considerations were adhered to. The concept of beneficence was observed. The researcher ensured that participants understood the purpose and relevance of this study. Anonymity of respondents was also considered since the researcher did not at any time divulge any private information about a participant. Identities of participants were concealed. Confidentiality in addition was also adhered to. This is because personal information received from respondents were properly managed. Data were well secured and was available to the researcher and the researcher's supervisor only. Furthermore, all respondents participated voluntarily since their consent were sought for without any form of persuasion or coercion (Resnik, 2011).

3.11 Profile of Organisation

Cofkans Hotel started operating in Obuasi on 23rd May, 2015 and it has been the most outstanding hotel in Obuasi since then. Since its opening it has been winning various awards of which the recent one is the best two-star hotel in the Ashanti Region.

The vision of the hotel is to be the largest and most reputable locally owned hotel chain in Ghana. Its mission is to provide superior international quality hotel accommodation, facilities and services that will delight the hotel's guests by highly skilled, well exposed and motivated staff with an innovative and locally executed experience.

It is a luxurious hotel conveniently located in a serene environment in the Gold City, Obuasi, in the Ashanti region, conducive for both business and leisure travellers. It is equipped with 50 rooms of various room types that is; executive suites, deluxe, twin, superior twin and standard rooms. Cofkans Hotel provides a multiple of meeting spaces and a variety of set ups for your banqueting and meeting requirements. The Cofkans Hotel offers clients with excellent dining choices. Whether indoor or outdoor, the restaurant and bar sections offer a variety of snacks, à la carte menu of both local and continental cuisines, and drinks. The Hotel provides other facilities and services such as a business centre, outdoor pool, laundry services, a concierge and an elevator, restaurant, saloon, fitness centre, and convenience shop.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

Research results provide the step by step approach of reporting how data obtained from the field was analysed to provide meaning (Creswell & Clark, 2017). This section showcased how the research questions stated earlier was answered. Data obtained were predominantly primary and complemented by some secondary information from the hotel's website and journal publication for rigorous data analysis and interpretation. This section presented the findings in four facets. The first section presented the profile of the human sample used for the study. The second, third and fourth sections present analyzed report to answer each of the research objectives. Finally, a conclusion is made to summarize the outcome of the chapter.

4.1 Profile of Respondents

The study used two categories of respondents in other to help unearth the dynamics on when and how customer service features have effect on retention of customers. The profile of respondents purposively sampled were employees of Cofkans Hotel represented by 'E' and some customers that had come to the hotel for service also represented by 'C'. The staff were primarily floor operation staff (waitress, housekeeping, front desk officers) whose conducts demonstrate the customer service quality of Cofkans Hotel The lived experiences of the ten (10) customers and seven (7) staff members consisting of both gender (males- 8 and females- 9) were collated, thematized and presented in relation to the research objectives below:

4.2 Customer service features influence on customer retention

Customer service qualities including empathy, responsiveness, knowledge, customer reward among others have been found to relate with customer retention (Ascarza et al., 2018), customer satisfaction (Ennew et al., 2015), loyalty (Kaura et al., 2015) and other positive outcomes. The study examined from the current stakeholders (customers and staff) as the study's respondents about how customer service influence customer retention. In unison,

majority (93.3%) of the respondents said that the customer service features have great influence on customers returning to the hotel. The narration and quotations under each feature of customer service is discussed below;

4.2.1 Knowledge about the hotel's services

Employees knowledge about a product or service is an important feature within the customer service literature (Hill & Alexander, 2017). Both categories of respondents agree that, the knowledge of the products and services offered by Cofkans Hotel is important to provide customers with timely information. Product knowledge is vital as one cannot sell what he or she does not know. Product awareness inspire confidence in the customer service quality that will be provided to a customer as well as minimize distrust resulting from inadequate information. The reverse is true where product knowledge is demonstrated with clarity to ensure smooth transaction between customers and clients. This was reported by the respondents (customers).

With the staff idea of what they have and what they are selling, and they can confidently talk about it, it increases my interest in the product or service. Anytime there is an opportunity, I am likely to patronise the service [C3].

Other respondents also emphasized such opinion in the reverse by stating;

I feel embarrassed when a service provider does not have full knowledge on what they are selling. I think it should be more of their problem than mine. It reduces my confidence in them. It is important they know their product [C5].

Similarly, a respondent posited that;

I ask a lot of questions, and I tend to get the required responses. I expect the staff to provide responses.

From the data obtained, it was found that, this feature of customer service was not highly demonstrated by employees of Cofkans Hotel. A respondent's quotation below summarized such assertion of poor product knowledge by employees about the hotel's services;

...Most of the restaurant staff of the hotel do not know exactly what is in their menu and what it entails'. They keep going back and forth when asked about certain products or meals [C1].

Despite this assertion of how important product knowledge is to customers, majority debunked the assertion that it will influence their future return to the hotel for services. Respondents were considerate that if an employee do not know immediately, they can just find out from their superiors. Also, employees were not privy to all products at any point in time but recommended that they should do their best to know products and services available at any time to provide customers.

4.2.2 Customer reward programs

Customer reward programmes were highly inclined by respondents to be an important feature of customer service. Customers are fond of good souvenirs, discount packages, promotions, and other reward programmes and these have positive effect on retention.

For instance, a respondent posited such importance by stating;

Reward programs build customer loyalty in the long run, I think it has an influence on customer retention immediately [C10].

Also, another respondent highlights how valuable it is for such rewards;

I am likely to keep patronising based on what I get from the service provider. When my patronage is noticed and appreciated, I feel valued [C1].

Cofkans Hotel have instituted some reward programmes for customers and was praised by the sampled customers;

The discount from the hotel management came as a pleasant surprise to me. I didn't even know my patronage had been noticed. Anytime I have to be in a hotel around Obuasi it will definitely be Cofkans Hotel [C2].

Another quotation supporting the assertion of the potency of rewards;

A simple thank you for your patronage goes a long way. I feel appreciated and it will always be on my mind. If I find myself around this vicinity and I have to be in any hotel, it would be Cofkans Hotel [C5].

A quotation from a customer about how reward incentive to clients have positive influence on customer retention was also highlighted below;

I was surprised when I came in once and they mentioned I had a special rate. I asked why and they said they appreciate my patronage and that is their way of saying thank you. Since then I haven't thought of any other hotel when I am around [C7].

From the above information from customers, it appears there is an overwhelming impact of customer service feature of reward programme having a great impact on customers patronage of the hotel's services in future. This finding was similarly reported by Len (2015).

4.2.3 Empathy influence on customer retention

The empathy feature which indicates the level of individual attention and keeping the provision of customers' interest at heart was also asserted to have an influence on customer retention. Since, hoteling is a service business, how customers are treated with care, attention and interest has been found to be a significant feature (Allan, 2016). Respondents suggested that empathy is critical as shown in the quotation below;

If I walk in as an individual, I expect an individual attention. I am paying for my product or service, why not show some empathy towards me, why not give me all the attention I need. I shouldn't feel like my patronage is becoming a bother. If overlooked, I am the type that might never return [C1].

This assertion is true because people will always remember how they felt when they visit a facility like a hotel, whether good or bad and this has an effect on their retention rate.

People want to feel special and their interest put first. If I feel valued at the facility and my interest is put first, I will keep coming [C3].

From the above quotations, it is evident that treating people as 'kings', 'queens' and having genuine interest shown to customers have influence on their decision to come back just like what consultants and scholars in marketing, human resource, and customer service postulate. The respondents stated that the hotel staff does great on empathy and tends to influence their decisions of always coming to the hotel.

The warm approach of the front office team is a great influence factor to my constant patronage [C2].

4.2.4 Communication style influence on customers patronage of hotel's services

Effective communication is a two-way approach between parties. Within the hospitality industry, the communication style of employees influences how customers perceive the hotel and its services. Respondents highlighted the varied reasons why they come to the hotel such as to manage stress, for leisure, conferences, seminars etc. and that employees should

communicate effectively to win their trust to return for services again. This is how a respondent described his sentiments;

It's important that service providers know how well to communicate. When to say what and how to even say it. No one wants to be devalued, we are paying for the service rendered, let us feel important by communicating to us well. Listen to us, pay attention to our needs and provide to us exactly what was communicated [C1]

Respondents posit how good communication influence their satisfaction and has been highly practiced by staff of the hotel selected for the study;

Customer Service providers should understand what communication is. It is vital to customer satisfaction. It's a needed skill. You can't be talking to me anyhow and expect me to be happy and keep patronising your service. I think the staff of the hotel communicate well and clearly [C2].

This assertion was echoed by another respondent as;

...listening carefully to your guest needs, attending to them and even request for feedback is when you know you have fully satisfied a guest. No one wants to be around someone who doesn't see the importance in good communication [C3].

In fact, respondents even postulated how communication can be used strategically to ensure high return rate by the firm by ensuring communication is a priority. This include creating an effective communication channel with the guest to solicit opinions, providing feedback, keeping in touch with guest even away from the hotel premises, seeking their advice before major changes are made were all enumerated by respondents to ensure that communication feature of customer service provide significant returns. Effective communication ensures satisfaction and consequently retention which was also found by Bowen and Chen (2015).

4.2.5 Staff friendliness influence on patronage intentions

Friendliness is an essential service skill needed for all service providers. It makes the organization connect with the customer and once the rapport is good, customer loyalty increases. Respondents indicated that, one strategy that keeps them returning to the hotel is the friendliness of staffs of Cofkans Hotel as highlighted in the following quotations.

Friendliness is the key reason I keep coming back. Unfriendly staff are difficult to communicate with. So, this greatly influences my coming back [C2].

I currently have a rapport with some of them that makes it easier for me to come back. They call me and I call them too. We have become friends and my loyalty sticks with them [C3].

A welcoming environment is able to take away stress. No one really wants to be in a tensed environment and as such it has an influence on my decision to keep patronising the hotel [C5].

From the above, friendliness of the front staff members is very key to provide a memorable and welcoming experience for customers. This consequently influences their intentions and actual behaviour of patronizing the hotel's services anytime there is the need. This is in consonance with the findings of Kaura et al. (2015).

4.2.6 Professionalism influence on customer retention

Closely intertwined with friendliness is staff demonstrating professionalism in their delivery to clients of the hotel. Professionalism as a feature of customer service was considered and reported highly by customers who were sampled for the study. Employees being friendly, approachable and easy going should not bar them from knowing the limit they can go with a guest. Participants stated that it is a skill they look out for and influence their intention to return to a hotel such as Cofkans Hotel. Majority of customers (90%) reported that professionalism demonstrated by the hotel's staffs was taken into consideration in making their retention decisions.

Professionalism is one thing that keeps me coming back to Cofkans. The girls here are real professionals [C3].

Staff of the hotel are up to their task. They know what they are about, and it influence my decision to keep patronising them. I have to trust that I am safe in their custody [C6].

The findings on professionalism implies that, the hotel identifying right candidates by recruiting and selecting the right applicants, employing professionals to help solve business need of ensuring a higher retention of guest. The revelation supports the findings of Allan (2016) who found professionalism exhibited by employees in her sampled chains of hotels in USA to be an important feature than customers look out for in making retention decisions.

4.2.7 Staff responsiveness influence on hotel patronage

A swift response to guest is also a characteristic of customer service quality. In the era of radical changes, innovation, competition and increasing choice of alternatives available to people, one strategy to ensure success within the hotel industry is to respond rapidly and in excellence to customers' demands. Respondents (customers) agree that responsiveness of staff at the hotel is an important consideration to retention. However, respondents reported a relatively low responsiveness from employees at the hotel and contend of influencing their decision not to return to the hotel if the responsiveness to customers demands is not improved. This was captured in the following quotations;

The more time is wasted on getting something done, the easier it is for us to look elsewhere to get it done fast. Swift response really influences my decision. I am tempted to look elsewhere a lot of times [C1].

This statement of dissatisfaction with responsiveness was also shared by another participant who indicated that;

It is frustrating when you need something done and its delaying. If I had a better option, I would have left Cofkans Hotel long time [C2].

The impact of poor turnaround time was so alarming that if respondents had other alternatives available within the vicinity, they could have opted for other options relative to the hotel this study was conducted. Cofkans Hotel is poor on this dimension because most customers' experiences were not satisfactory;

I think Cofkans Hotel is enjoying some sort of monopoly in this vicinity, I dislike how long it takes to get things done. I cannot have my time wasted and expect me to keep coming back when I have an option. I will obviously look for another alternative [C5].

The above quotation shows that customers were not satisfied with the responsiveness dimension at Cofkans Hotel and are looking for suitable alternative. This is in line with Hill and Alexander (2017) findings that customers want swift services and failure to meet customers need in time may lead to firms losing out to competitors.

The hotel should really work on their slow service delivery. Very soon, I will be packing my bags for other alternatives. It just seems they are the best around town, so it is prudent to be here. If I had a better option, I would have left long time [C10].

The reverse is true where respondents indicated returning for services if practices are done swiftly.

I am more likely to keep patronising service when things are done swiftly. When you get things done for you immediately when you need it [C6].

Responding to guests swiftly is very important if you want to keep them coming back [C8].

Customers want excellent service from hotels during their stay in these facilities because of the cost factor and the need to obtain value for their money. In this digital economy, services are expected to be swift and this reinforces the observation of Charlse (2016) and Darrell et al. (2003) that hotels should minimize time wastage by using various tools such as digitization and excellent team of floor operations who will provide services within a short period of time.

4.3 Barriers to the customer service features at Cofkans hotel Ltd.

The study sought to identify some prevailing barriers to the customer service features at Cofkans Hotel. Seven (7) employees shared their lived experiences about issues that limits their efforts to provide effective customer service across all the dimensions that customer service quality has. These are thematized below;

4.3.1 Resource Constraint

One challenge that was identified was resource gap that the employees are faced with. Resources are scarce and the to-do list is numerous. The employees (80%) at Cofkans Hotel talked about they not having adequate logistics to execute their task. This point is clearly captured in a quote by one of the staffs;

When it comes to being well equipped to provide these services, there is more to be done. Most complains have been made with regards to delay in service deliveries and some of these problems got to do with employees not so well equipped with the necessary resources. I think if employees are well equipped, we will do more in providing excellent service [E1].

The above quotation provides some explanation to the low response time as the necessary tools and equipment that makes delivery efficient is lacking. This supports the assertions made by

Len (2015) and Robert (2005) that hotels should have adequate logistics to meet customers' expectations.

When it comes to being equipped with right resources, I think our outfit does not really boost of confidence. We get our own uniforms and sometimes the colours differ which is not up to the standard of the hotel [E2].

Logistics inadequacy affect the standardization that bequeath a hotel as was similarly reported by Hanaysha (2016). Logistical deficit was highlighted as one of the challenges that affect their delivery of customer service feature such as professionalism and tangibles that makes the hotel appealing to customers and prospective ones.

4.3.2 Poor Recruitment and Selection Practice

The hotel industry is noted to have high turnover of employees (Davis, 2013). This implies that management should have a strategy in place to ensure the continuous availability of employees to render effective service to clients. With the targeted research settings, Cofkans Hotel, there was poor recruitment and selection practice in identifying the right candidate for a job role, replacing a vacant position due to turnover, immediacy of replacement and inadequate human capital were highlighted as a challenge. This is supported by the following quotations.

Already we are not a lot of staff and we do a lot at particular times. When a colleague resigns it takes a lot of time before he is replaced, and this really affects our work [E6].

From the quotation above, it appears there are peak sections, but the available staff are unable to match up due to their numbers. This tends to affect the level of their responsiveness to customers.

Some staff are just lazy, working with them does not encourage at all. It is important that the Human Resource Department employ people who are ready to work [E5].

It seems the quality of staff employed also affect the delivery of these features. In this hotel for instance, both the number and quality of staff is problematic. It also appears there is a challenge regarding Human resource planning.

Service usually delay because we are a few people providing these services. Sometimes one person would have to be attending to a lot of guests at the same time and the guest complains. This really hinders the provision of excellent service [E3].

The poor management of human capital in the hotel thereby puts strain on incumbent which makes response time to offering a service longer as well as other features which are compromised due to the limited number of employees (understaffing).

4.3.3 Lack of training

Another challenge that was also revealed by respondents was the lack of training opportunities for employees to develop and learn new skills in customer service delivery. Training and development have been found to be an efficient strategy in the transfer of skills, development of new abilities and effective performance of job roles (Kossivi, Xu, & Kalgora, 2016) and the lack of it is the reverse. Employees complained about such limited opportunity for training and were captured in the quotes below;

We die out of ideas sometimes, but we really want to wow our guest too. Inadequate training, I will say prevents us from doing more [E5].

Training and development are an essential Human resource approach to develop employees to latest practices in customer service delivery. From the above assertion, it appears Cofkans Hotel is losing out on their Human capital development which is translating into employee's delivery which is not exceptional.

Inadequate training is a major factor. The nature of the job requires that we should be constantly trained to be abreast with new trends to meet the competitive markets [E1].

The findings support the revelation from other studies within the customer service literature where lack and inadequate training and development is hampering firms in exhibiting higher standards in performance (Ennew et al., 2015; Han & Hyun, 2015).

4.4 Critical customer service features for staff retention

Another aim of the study was to identify from the number of customer service features that customers perceive to be critical in order to enhance their retention at Cofkans Hotel. To achieve that, a percentage in agreement to a feature and its corresponding rank was adopted.

The Table 1 below provides a summary presentation of critical customer service features in descending order of importance

Table 1: Ranking of Customer Service features

No.	Feature	Frequency (n=10)	Percentage (%)	Rank
1.	Empathy	10	100	1 st
2.	Responsiveness	10	100	2 nd
3.	Professionalism	9	90	3 rd
4.	Communication	9	90	4 th
5.	Friendliness	8	80	5 th
6.	Customer Reward	6	60	6 th
7.	Product Knowledge	5	50	7 th

NB: Each respondent(customer) shared his/her experience on each feature of customer service
Source: Field work (2019)

From the Table 1, it could be noted that key features that customers need as self-reported by sampled customers were staff showing empathy towards customers, being responsive to customers need and acting professionally as they serve these varied clients who are mostly people with professional skills in industries especially the main clientele-gold mining companies at Obuasi. On the contrary, customer service quality features such as customer reward and employee having full knowledge about the products and services the organization has to offer at any time was perceived to be minimal critical factors. This finding is in line with studies that found professionalism and staff responsiveness to clients demands as very critical to customer satisfaction, retention and loyalty (Bowen & Chen, 2015; Kaura et al., 2015). Similarly, the findings also confirm the ratings that respondents provided about the staff at Cofkans Hotel which were 80% stating they were very good, 10% stating good and 10% stating satisfactory.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided a thematic analysis of data obtained from varied respondents comprising customers and employees within the research settings, Cofkans Hotel. The results indicate that the hotel is doing well in ensuring customer service is offered to guests in the hotel and was corroborated by customers who were interviewed despite some shortfall in response time. This customer service features were found to drive customers enthusiasm to return back to the hotel and that there was a business case to invest in customer service quality. This resource investment and other consideration from management of the hotel will help minimize the barriers such as inadequate logistics, inadequate training and poor recruitment and selection practices.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

This section provided a summary of findings from the empirical field study conducted. It draws conclusion based on the obtained findings presented and finally makes recommendations based on the objectives. Similarly, recommendations in terms of future research opportunities were identified and shared for further studies.

5.2 Summary

Organizations especially in the service sector such as hotels are adopting various approaches to attract and return patronage of their services to survive in this turbulent and competitive business world. The main aim of the study was to examine customer service features at Cofkans hotel and its relationship with customer retention. Thus, the study seeks to examine the customer service features and customer retention and to further analyse how it influences customer retention at Cofkans Hotel. This was achieved by using a qualitative design where fifteen participants were sampled to share their experiences on the research topic. First, the aim was to examine the level of customer service features and its influence on customer retention at Cofkans hotel. The findings revealed that there is a general high level of customer service quality at Cofkans hotel as assessed from the structured interview. It was revealed that customer service features including professionalism, communication, responsiveness, empathy, friendliness, product knowledge, and customer rewards were seen as critical blocks that ensures loyalty of customers to the hotel's services.

Also, the study was aimed at identifying if there are some barriers to the customer service features provided at Cofkans Hotel. The outcome from the interviews with shop floor

employees of the hotel outlined some challenges despite employees' high motivation both intrinsic and extrinsic to achieve such customer service goals. These include; inadequate training, resource constraints in the provision of working resources and poor recruitment and selection practices in identifying and engaging the services of the right employees. These found challenges inhibit the full demonstration of all the features of customer service within Cofkans hotel and must be addressed immediately.

Again, the study purposed to identify customer service features that customers' need to enhance their retention at Cofkans Hotel. From the ranking of the various customer service dimension based on the feedback from respondents, it was found that the features which were found to be topmost are responsiveness, professionalism and communication whereas the least perceived features were customer reward and product knowledge.

Moreover, some recommendation strategies have been highlighted based on the findings from the study to improve customer service practices that will ensure effective service features.

5.3 Conclusion

Service quality is an important component in the service sector. The hotel industry continually has new entrants joining the space for the scant customers who patronize hotel services. This indicates that existing hotels should adopt other relative but lower cost strategies to ensure higher retention of existing customers and even attract new clients to the hotel as other hard approaches such as increase in infrastructure and redevelopment of facilities are capital intensive and long-term strategies. Customer service features including responsiveness, empathy, professionalism, friendliness, product knowledge, customer reward and communication were all found to be critical features to ensure the retention of customers. These soft skills strategies should be enhanced at Cofkans hotel so that greater value will be obtained from employees engaged and clients' experiences will be positive. The infrastructure at the

disposal of the research settings, Cofkans hotel is adequate and makes the hotel the most endowed hotel within the Obuasi Metropolis and thus a 'go to' four-star hotel if an individual seeks for comfort in a serene environment. The revelation from this qualitative study re-emphasise the increasing need for training of employees on the various dimensions of customer service features for the effectiveness of the hotel in achieving the hotel's mission of providing customers with exceptional service in the hotel's stately elegance facilities.

5.4 Recommendations

The following highlights some recommendations that should be taken into account by stakeholders in academia and the research organization on service quality and for improved services.

5.4.1 Practical Implications.

The responses and results from the study can be used by Cofkans hotel to determine dimensions of customer service features they are performing very well and even beyond the expectations of customers as well as know dimensions that need urgent intervention to make service provision great in the hotel. Thus, from the dimensions of service quality assessed by the current study, they are perceived by customers as unique and a hotel's performance in one aspect of the dimension should not be perceived by management as providing good overall services. For instance, if Cofkans hotel employees exhibit professionalism, it does not warrant that their employees are responsive as these are two separate forms but complimentary features by which customers view overall service quality. Hence, management of Cofkans hotel should take a holistic view in developing and maintaining their service provisions to customers by providing adequate training opportunity for employees in customer service delivery. This will minimize imbalance in service quality perception scoring by customers as customers perceives services as the whole to be greater than the sum of its individual parts.

The study revealed that Cofkans hotel is meeting customer service quality but must work on a few dimensions as well. The hotel's current practices on friendliness, professionalism and communication domains are in line with the hotel's customer service mission to offer customer-focused services which is rooted in the value of ensuring that they exceed the expectations of every customer at every single time they reach out to the hotel for service. The other domains, customer reward and responsiveness needs to be improved. The findings demonstrate a positive linkage between service quality on retention and intention to recommend the hotel as self-reported by customers who were sampled for the study.

Moreover, other hoteliers should consider assessing their customer service features so that they can examine their service performance as shared by customers, employees and management. This will help identify qualities and areas which need management's attention to ensure that customers' expectations on hotel services are met. Thus, this study adds to the utility of customer service features of hotels as this will help them to address the gap in service delivery features to meet stakeholders need.

In addition, it was found that there is a business case in investing in the provision of customer service features to ensure that customers become satisfied. When customers are impressed with a hotel service, they even act as strong agents in recommending the hotel's services via word of mouth and positive reviews on social media platforms. These have implications in attracting more customers to the hotel to increase sales, goodwill, productivity, performance and profitability. This will guarantee the perpetuity of the hotel to be in business for long a period of time as posited by the Going concern principle in management where a business is expected to operate into the foreseeable future time

The study has the following contribution to academia. The concept of customer service features was tested and its relationship with retention was examined. This research adds to literature on customer service quality that has predominantly been conducted mostly in western countries.

The study filled a gap in the literature where there have been calls to assess customer service quality features from different context and practical consideration by management and consultants of these research settings to make the academic research highly application to the world of work.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

First, the study focused on few stakeholders (customers and staffs). Though, trends in customer service features studies shows that, respondents include diverse stakeholders including management, creditors and industry experts to share their insight on a hotel's customer service, this study was limited in this regard. This would provide a more holistic and concrete view about the organization's service quality and associated impacts.

In addition, the study cannot rule biases such as social desirability and faking which sometimes characterized qualitative studies using face-to-face interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This may possibly affect the results obtained. Generalization is impossible with a qualitative study.

5.6 Recommendation for Future Study

More research works are needed to examine the relationship between customer service features and customer retention by adopting different hospitality firms to provide utility for such firms to improve their processes on customer service. Moreover, the researcher propose that based on the limitations found with the current study, future research should use large sample size which is inclusive by sampling from the multiple stakeholders in the hospitality industry.

Further, future studies should use other methodological approaches such as quantitative and/or mixed method to examine such relationship between customer service features and its associated consequences including retention, recommendation, satisfaction.

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APPENDIX



SECTION ONE (STAFF)

Dear Respondent,

The purpose of this research is to find out if Customer Service features provided at Cofkans Hotel has any effect on Customer Retention. All answers will be treated confidentially.

Thank you.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Sex.....
2. Job Title of respondents.....
3. Age range.....
4. Tenure with the organization.....

INTERVIEW GUIDE – STAFF

1. What are the hotels customer service goals?
2. Are you always motivated to deliver on hotel service promise?
3. Are you well equipped with the right resources to deliver customer service?
4. What are some of the factors hindering the provision of excellent customer service to guest?
5. What other factor within your set up can aid the hotel to improve upon its current service level?

SECTION TWO (GUEST)

Dear Respondent,

The purpose of this research is to find out if Customer Service features provided at Cofkans Hotel has effect on Customer Retention. All answers will be treated confidentially.

Thank you.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Sex.....
2. Job Title of respondents.....
3. Age range.....
4. Tenure with the organization.....

INTERVIEW GUIDE – STAFF

1. How did you hear about Cofkans Hotel?
2. How long or how many times have you patronised the services of the hotel?
3. What do you like about Cofkans Hotel?
4. What do you dislike about Cofkans Hotel?
5. How does staff friendliness influence your decision to keep patronising the hotel? (Do you see it as an important feature that influences customer retention?)
6. How does staff responsiveness influence your decision to keep patronising the hotel?
(Swift response to guest)
7. How does staff professionalism influence your decision to keep patronising the services of the hotel?
8. How does staff communication style influence your decision to keep patronising the services of the hotel?

9. How does staff product knowledge influence your decision to keep patronising the services of the hotel? (Staff knowledge on available products and ability to tell guest about new ones)
10. How does customer reward programs influence your decision to keep patronising the services of the hotel? (Discounts, promotions, souvenirs)
11. How does the staff show of empathy influence your decision to keep patronising the services of the hotel? (Individual attention and customer interest at heart)
12. How would you rank the staffs of Cofkans Hotel?
13. Would you recommend Cofkans Hotel to others? On what basis?
14. Are there any improvements or features you think could enhance customer retention?