

The Determinants of Value Equity and Their Influence on Customer Event Venue Satisfaction: A Case of Eldoret Town, Kenya

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Abstract: *Over the years, there has been a shift in the marketing concept from product-centred thinking to customer-centred thinking. The efforts to retain customers while offering them new products and more attractive service conditions, not always stands up, because customer loyalty has not always been identified as a customer value to organization. Hosting events has increasingly become part of hotels operations in Eldoret town. The driving force behind these actions is the perception that event customers have higher revenue per customer compared to other types of customers. In fact, there is little disagreement that event customers represent significant revenue sources. This paper is an outcome of a study on the influence of value equity on customer event venue satisfaction in the hospitality sector conducted in Eldoret town, which is one of the most fast growing towns in Kenya and a prominent tourist hub. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and specifically focused on the determinants of value equity for event customers in the hospitality service sector. The study found out that most of the respondents were satisfied with the overall quality of intangible services (efficiency of staff, event venue convenience, space/function in the event venue, ambient conditions and finally signs, symbols and artefacts in the event venue) in the event venues ($\bar{x} = 90.49$) and this affected their satisfaction with the event venues ($\bar{x} = 20.58$). There was a positive correlation coefficient between service quality in the event venue and customer event venue satisfaction ($r=0.770$). The analysis also revealed that most of the respondents were satisfied with the convenience of the event venues ($\bar{x} = 15.49$) and this affected their satisfaction with the event venues ($\bar{x} = 20.58$). There was a positive correlation coefficient between convenience of the event venue and customer event venue satisfaction ($r=0.563$). The study concluded that service quality and event venue convenience are strong drivers to customer satisfaction with the event venues. However, the author recommends that the success of hospitality industry is based on proper understanding of the factors that play a key role in improving value equity while attracting new customers and retaining the existing ones. Therefore, stakeholders in the hospitality sector should work towards improving service delivery to customers. Additionally, employees who involve in providing customer service need to be given proper quality management training programs. Through this training program, the staff may increase their understanding about the concept and importance of practicing quality customer service and moral values. As a result, it may lead to improved service quality.*

Keywords: Value equity, Customer, Event venue, Satisfaction, Kenya

1. Introduction

In recent years, belief in the power of brands and brand management has spread far beyond the traditional customer goods marketers who invented the discipline. For companies in almost every industry including the banking sector, brands are important in a way that they were never before and are now seen as vital assets central to the business (Hafidz, 2009). The concept and measurement of brand equity has interested academicians and practitioners for more than a decade, primarily due to the importance in today's marketplace of building, maintaining and using brands to obtain a definite competitive advantage (HO, 2012).

Rust and Oliver (1994) argued that there has been a convergence of opinion that favourable service quality perceptions lead to improved satisfaction and value attributions and that, in turn, positive value directly influences satisfaction. Bagozzi's (1992) model that is appraisal, emotional response and coping framework leads to improved customer satisfaction (Gotlieb, Grewal, and Brown, 1994). The initial service evaluation that is appraisal leads to an emotional reaction that, in turn, drives behaviour. Adapting the framework to a services context suggests that

the more cognitively-oriented service quality and value appraisals precede satisfaction. (Alford and Sherrell, 1996). For any nature of event services, event planners must be adept at strategic planning (Li and Patrick, 2006; Ruyi and Pegg, 2007). Getz (2007) and Rompf *et al.*, (2008) view event tourism as a complex process that entails planning leisure, business, or civic events to attract tourists, to forecast future demand, to promote a locale's brand image, and to maximize revenue for the event hosting community. Indeed, one of the reasons that event tourism attracts interest from academics, governments, and practitioners stems from the fact that event tourists have a higher revenue yield per tourist compared to other types of tourists (Jago *et al.*, 2003). There is little disagreement that event tourists represent significant revenue sources.

Prominent event destinations, such as Las Vegas and Sydney, have a history of using strategic planning tools to produce stellar reputations regarding their ability to host various kinds of events (Getz, 2008) and to developing event and tourism infrastructures that provide them with the ability to host virtually any international event (Allen *et al.*, 2008). These tourism infrastructures include planning for tangible, measurable and auditable standards, such as those related to monetary costs, to physical facilities, and to product

consumables, such as food and beverage selection and quality. Additionally, planning for intangible, harder to observe, operating standards, which are often related to service quality, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance is necessary for successful hosting of events (Zeithaml et al., 2009). Clearly, the importance of event service planning cannot be overstated. Yet, what exactly is the best way for event planners to engage in strategic marketing planning remains a challenge.

The relationships between value equity and managerially relevant outcomes, are established in the marketing (Bick, 2009; Vogel et al., 2008), services marketing (Brodie et al., 2009; Ruiz et al., 2008; Zeithaml et al., 2003), and hospitality literature (Al-Sabbahy et al., 2004; Kashyap and Bojanic, 2000); however, there is a scarcity of knowledge regarding value equity in event preparation. Yet, within service settings, value equity can be understood as the perceived ratio of what is received as in actual service to what is sacrificed in terms of service costs (Rust et al., 2000; Zeithaml, 1988). Along these lines, Rust et al. (2004) suggest that value equity is driven by the three sub-dimensions of perceived service quality, cost and convenience. These sub-dimensions directly affect customer outcomes, including customer satisfaction (Vogel et al., 2008). As much as this is true, there is no empirical study that has been done in Eldoret town to illuminate the determinants of value equity in event venue customer satisfaction.

A better approach in strategic marketing planning has been suggested by Rust et al. (2004) which proposed the customer equity model (CEM). The CEM suggests that firms consider creating customer equity as the foundation of their planning initiatives because doing so yields a customer-centric organization. Furthermore, in the process of transfer from product-centered thinking to customer centered thinking, customer equity is more and more often presented as the basis for marketing strategy (Sheth et al., 2000; Sharma, 2006). It is emphasized that organizations should focus their marketing efforts on the value equity, brand equity and relationship equity improvement and in each stage of customer relationship development process choose the most relevant customer equity drivers (Rust et al., 2004).

As each of the customer equity drivers has different significance level in a certain market or at different market life cycle, organization should identify the factors that have the highest effect on customer preferences and drive its marketing efforts in the right direction (Rust et al., 2001; Lemon et al., 2001). Authors such as Rosenbaum & Wong (2009) have suggested that value equity has more utility in event tourism than brand equity and relationship equity. However, for clear focus on value equity in successful event marketing, it is necessary that the determinants of value equity are clearly understood. It is upon this background that this study was aimed at establishing the determinants of value equity for event customers in Eldoret town.

2. Statement of the Problem

Hosting events has increasingly become part of hotels operations in Eldoret town. The driving force behind these actions is the perception that event customers have higher revenue per customer compared to other types of customers as also suggested by authors such as (Villanueva & Hanssens, 2007; Bruhn et al., 2006; Lemon et al., 2001, Vogel et al., 2008). However attracting and retaining these customers is a more difficult task. Importantly, many researchers including (Berry, 1995; Gronroos, 1990, 1994, 1997; Gummesson, 1994, 1996) have laid much emphasis on customer equity concepts as the avenue to reaching event customers. Though, information on the drivers of value equity for event customers is scanty or non-existent particularly in the hotel sector in Eldoret town. This situation poses a serious challenge to marketers who wish to build value equity into their event marketing strategies. It is upon this background that this study aimed at establishing the determinants of value equity and their influence on customer event venue satisfaction in the hospitality service sector in Eldoret town.

3. Research Methodology

This study was conducted in Eldoret Town. The town is one of the most fast growing towns in Kenya. It is located in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya. Many tourists visit Eldoret town since it is near attraction sites like Iten view point. The athletics Academy in Iten just a few kilometres away from Eldoret town also attracts many visitors. The town plays host to seven public universities and over six private universities. Being the hometown to many world athletics champions, Eldoret attracts many visitors and even plays host to major athletics events, including the Kass Marathon. Since the town has now become more of a tourist destination, major hotels have been constructed and they include; Hotel Sirikwa, Poa Place Resort, The Noble Hotel and Marriot hotel, Asis hotel, Cicada hotel, Comfy Hotel and Wagon Wheel Hotel. The study adopted descriptive survey design. Target population consisted of 510 event customers who were attending the various events hosted by hospitality organizations in Eldoret town. The target population was achieved using the hotels bookings list. Purposive sampling was used to identify four hotels (event venues) out of the twenty (20) (Eldoret Tourism board office, 2011) which provide event venues in Eldoret town at the present. Systematic random sampling was used to select the respondents. A sample size of 219 event customers was obtained by calculating the sample size from the population while adjusting to round off decimals to one person.

4. Findings and Discussions

Service Quality on Customer Event Venue Satisfaction

The researcher was interested to examine how service quality does influence customer event venue satisfaction for customers and overall reality that value equity was determined by quality, cost and convenience. The researcher attempted to measure service quality using the following indicators: the host showing sincere interest in solving problems encountered; host performing right services as

promised; employees giving prompt services; employees always willing to help; employees never too busy to respond to requests; behaviour of employees instilling confidence; employees being consistently courteous and employees having the knowledge to answer questions. The study found out that employees play a big role in determining the value

equity a customer derives from attending a particular event. As indicated in Table 1.0, there exists a strong correlation between host showing sincere interest in solving problems encountered and being satisfied with the host and with the value of the event.

Table 1: Intangible Service Quality

Variables	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
The host shows sincere interest in solving a problem that I may encounter	7 3.7%	10 5.2%	34 17.8%	78 40.8%	62 32.5%	191 100.0%
The employees give me prompt service	10 5.2%	10 5.2%	28 14.7%	70 36.6%	73 38.2%	191 100.0%
The employees are always willing to help me	4 2.1%	13 6.8%	28 14.7%	80 41.9%	66 34.6%	191 100.0%
The employees are never too busy to respond to my requests	12 6.3%	25 13.1%	30 15.7%	65 34.0%	59 30.9%	191 100.0%
The behavior of the employees instills confidence in me	7 3.7%	12 6.3%	40 20.9%	69 36.1%	63 33.0%	191 100.0%
The employees are consistently courteous with me	6 3.1%	10 5.2%	25 13.1%	74 38.7%	76 39.8%	191 100.0%
The employees have the knowledge to answer my questions	4 2.1%	12 6.3%	32 16.8%	80 41.9%	63 33.0%	191 100.0%
The employees give me personal attention	7 3.7%	15 7.9%	36 18.8%	74 38.7%	59 30.9%	191 100.0%
The employees understand my specific needs	6 3.1%	15 7.9%	42 22.0%	71 37.2%	57 29.8%	191 100.0%
The host provides its services at the time it promises to do so	3 1.6%	19 9.9%	28 14.7%	71 37.2%	70 36.6%	191 100.0%
The host performs the right services as promised	6 3.1%	11 5.8%	27 14.1%	81 42.4%	66 34.6%	191 100.0%

More than 75% of the respondents agreed that the space and function variables i.e. the event venue has a pleasant feel, the event venue is clean; I am comfortable with the event venue and lastly the air quality in the event venue is fine. From the above results, the null hypothesis one is rejected and thus we can clearly state that service quality positively influences customer event venue satisfaction. From the study findings the cost of attending an event is strongly correlated with the overall event experience. Over 70% of the respondents agreed that cost is a strong determinant of value equity for event customers. The results also showed that leisure customers are more concerned about costs than business customers.

Table 2.0 below shows that there is a positive correlation coefficient between service quality and customer event venue satisfaction. This is indicated by the p- value = 0.000 which is less than 0.01 thus showing a significant relationship between host shows sincere interest in solving a problem encountered and being happy with the host. The correlation coefficient of 0.550 indicates that up to 55.0% of the change in customer event venue satisfaction is accounted for by service quality.

Table 2: Correlations between the host showing sincere interest in solving a problem encountered and being happy with the host

		I am happy with the host	The host shows sincere interest in solving a problem that i may encounter
Spearman's rho	I am happy with the host	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	191
	The host shows sincere interest in solving a problem that customers may encounter	Correlation Coefficient	.550**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	191
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

There is a significant and positive relationship between service quality and customer event venue satisfaction as indicated by Table 3.0 below, thus we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a relationship between

service quality and customer event venue satisfaction. This is indicated by Pearson correlation coefficient (0.322) which is significant at the 0.01 level and $p(0.000) < 0.01$ which is statistically significant. The correlation coefficient of 0.322

indicates that up to 32.2% of the change in customer event venue satisfaction is accounted for by service quality. This does not imply a causal-effect relationship.

Table 3: Correlations between the host showing sincere interest in solving a problem encountered and being satisfied with the value of the event

		The host shows sincere interest in solving a problem that a customer may encounter	I am satisfied with the value of the event
The host shows sincere interest in solving a problem that i may encounter	Pearson Correlation	1	.322**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	191	191
I am satisfied with the value of the event	Pearson Correlation	.322**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	191	191
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

5. Space and Function

Table 4: Space and Function

Variables	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
The event venue has an overall pleasant feel	6 3.1%	11 5.8%	28 14.7%	85 44.5%	61 31.9%	191 100.0%
The event venue is clean	5 2.6%	10 5.2%	23 12.0%	78 40.8%	75 39.3%	191 100.0%
I am comfortable in the event venue	2 1.0%	10 5.2%	34 17.8%	65 34.0%	80 41.9%	191 100.0%
The air quality in the event venue is fine	4 2.1%	15 7.9%	25 13.1%	64 33.5%	83 43.5%	191 100.0%

Analysis in Table 4.0 above 76.4 %,(n=146) agreed that the event venue had a pleasant feel while 8.9 %,(n=17) disagreed that the venue had an overall pleasant feel. The study also found that 80.1%, (n=153) of the respondents agreed that the event venue was clean. 75.9% (n=145) of the respondents agreed that they were comfortable with the

event venue. There is a significant and positive relationship between food and beverage outlets at the event venue being sufficient and being happy with the quality of the event as indicated by table 5.0 below. The correlation coefficient of 0.520 indicates that up to 52.0% of the change in customer event venue satisfaction is accounted for by service quality.

Table 5: Correlations between food and beverage outlets at the event venue being sufficient and being happy with the quality of the event

		The food and beverage outlets at the event venue are sufficient	I am happy with the quality of the event
The food and beverage outlets at the event venue are sufficient	Pearson Correlation	1	.520**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	191	191
I am happy with the quality of the event	Pearson Correlation	.520**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	191	191
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 6.0 below shows that 34 (53.1%) of the respondents agreed that they were happy with the host and they also

agreed that the conference room was spacious and well equipped.

Table 6: The conference room is spacious and well equipped verses being happy with the host

		I am happy with the host					Total		
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree			
The conference room is spacious and well equipped	Strongly disagree	Count	2	1	2	2	0	7	
		% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	28.6%	14.3%	28.6%	28.6%	.0%	100.0%	
	Disagree	Count	0	5	2	13	3	23	
		% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	.0%	21.7%	8.7%	56.5%	13.0%	100.0%	
	Neither agree nor disagree	Count	0	1	11	13	9	34	
		% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	.0%	2.9%	32.4%	38.2%	26.5%	100.0%	
	Agree	Count	0	0	10	34	20	64	
		% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	.0%	.0%	15.6%	53.1%	31.2%	100.0%	
	Strongly agree	Count	1	0	1	12	49	63	
		% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	1.6%	.0%	1.6%	19.0%	77.8%	100.0%	
	Total		Count	3	7	26	74	81	191
			% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	1.6%	3.7%	13.6%	38.7%	42.4%	100.0%

Analysis on Table 6.0 above, being happy with the host is dependent on the conference room being spacious and well equipped. This is indicated by a chi-square value of 1.2092

which is significant with a p-value of 0.000 which is less than the level of significance (0.05).

Table 7: The conference room is spacious and well equipped verses being satisfied with the overall event experience.

		I am satisfied with the overall event experience					Total		
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree			
The conference room is spacious and well equipped	Strongly disagree	Count	2	1	1	2	1	7	
		% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	28.6%	14.3%	14.3%	28.6%	14.3%	100.0%	
	Disagree	Count	0	6	3	6	8	23	
		% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	.0%	26.1%	13.0%	26.1%	34.8%	100.0%	
	Neither agree nor disagree	Count	0	3	9	12	10	34	
		% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	.0%	8.8%	26.5%	35.3%	29.4%	100.0%	
	Agree	Count	0	2	4	33	25	64	
		% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	.0%	3.1%	6.2%	51.6%	39.1%	100.0%	
	Strongly agree	Count	0	0	2	11	50	63	
		% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	.0%	.0%	3.2%	17.5%	79.4%	100.0%	
	Total		Count	2	12	19	64	94	191
			% within The conference room is spacious and well equipped	1.0%	6.3%	9.9%	33.5%	49.2%	100.0%

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Event service quality, convenience and price are all important value equity drivers to customer satisfaction; with service quality being the prominent driver compared to convenience and price. The findings of the study revealed

that leisure event customers are more likely than business event customers to place importance on an event venue's space and function. This is because leisure event customers are more involved in experiencing hedonic pleasure in the venue than business event customers, who demonstrated tendency to focus on the business aspects of being at the

venue. In terms of satisfaction, leisure travellers are more inclined to place importance on an event's price, while business travellers are more inclined to place importance on an event's service quality. This finding stems from the notion that business customers' attending events treat such activities as purposeful ones hence lowering their tolerance zones for deviations in service quality. The study recommends that employees who involve in providing customer service need to be given proper quality management training programs. Through this training program, the staff may increase their understanding about the concept and importance of practicing quality customer service and moral values. As a result, it may lead to improved service quality.

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