

The Extent to which Passengers are Satisfied with the Quality of Services Provided by Rift Valley Railways Consortium

Amos Musili King'ola¹

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine what attributes passengers deem important when evaluating the services provided by the Rift Valley Railways Consortium (RVRC) and to assess the extent to which passengers are satisfied with the quality of services RVRC offers. Additionally, it sought to appraise RVRC's performance on various aspects of service quality. A questionnaire containing both open- and closed-ended questions was used to collect primary data for the purpose of achieving the desired results. This data was collected through interviews with a sample size of 40 passengers, resulting in a response rate of 100%. The study used convenience sampling technique where the elements selected were based on their easy availability and proximity to the researcher. Upon analysis, the attributes deemed important by the passengers in judging the quality of services at the Rift Valley Railways Consortium were: courtesy and friendliness of the staff, security of the premises, good driving expertise, accessibility of the staff, and maintenance of trains and railway lines. The study results showed that 37.5% of respondents were dissatisfied, 32% were neutral, 20% were satisfied, and 10% were very dissatisfied with the quality of services provided by Rift Valley Railways Consortium. The quality of the services of the organization was rated as poor, with mean scores ranging from 2.15 to 2.90. This indicates that the company needs to implement new strategies to improve its services and regain the trust of its passengers.

Keywords: Passenger satisfaction, Quality of services, Rift Valley Railways Consortium (RVRC).

Introduction

In attempt to gain competitive advantage in the market, many companies have currently emphasized of quality customer services. According to Gijsenberg et al. (2015), competition in the global market is becoming more intense as more organizations are becoming aware that pricing alone is not an effective marketing strategy. As a result, currently companies are working to develop strategies to ensure service quality thus service differentiation. De Oña and De Oña (2015), provide that although service companies have worked to enhance quality services to their customers, quality service can vary from one customer to the other. The implication is that service providing companies need to assess customer satisfaction every time to effectively recover from mistakes whenever they occur. Quality services to customers are closely linked with cost saving, increased market share and profits. To ensure quality is attained in the market, companies are seeking new approaches to measure the level of quality services which include customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction in a company implies that the company's services exceed customer expectation (Shen et al., 2016).

According to Van Lierop and El-Geneidy (2016), customer satisfaction is an important measure of success for any company. It is essential for businesses to understand the extent to which their customers are satisfied with the quality of services they provide. Customer satisfaction can be defined as the degree to which customers are satisfied with the products and services they receive from a company. Companies need to measure customer satisfaction in order to identify areas for improvement and to ensure that they are providing quality services to their customers. To measure customer satisfaction, companies can use surveys, interviews, focus groups, customer feedback systems, and other methods. By understanding the extent to which customers are satisfied with the quality of services provided by a

company, businesses can identify areas that need to be improved and make changes to their services accordingly. This will help them to increase customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty, which is essential for the success of any business (De Oña et al., 2015).

Markovic et al. (2018), noted that in the marketing environment, customer service is becoming an increasingly important source of competitive advantage as customers become more demanding and expect more from their purchasing experience. Customer service is a crucial part of the customer experience and can be a key factor in customer loyalty and retention. Companies that are able to provide a superior customer service experience, often through personalized service and support, can gain an edge over their competitors. By providing customers with a positive customer service experience, companies can set themselves apart from their competitors and create a unique and memorable customer experience (Selvakumar, 2015). Furthermore, Kim and Choi (2016), noted that customers who have a positive experience with customer service are more likely to have repeated purchase and become loyal. As such, companies that can provide an excellent customer service experience can build customer loyalty and trust, leading to increased customer loyalty and repeat purchases.

The railway industry is one of the most important transportation systems in the world. It plays an essential role in the economic development and social advancement of many countries. As such, it is essential to evaluate the extent to which customers are satisfied with the quality of the services provided by railway companies (Malago & Jonyo, 2015). According to Denney et al. (2017), marketers are interested in the extent to which passengers are satisfied with the quality of their services in the railway transport because it is an important indicator of customer loyalty and satisfaction. It helps them determine if they are providing a satisfactory level of service and if they need to make any changes to their service offering or improve the overall customer experience. By understanding the level of satisfaction that passengers have with the quality of their services, marketers can make more informed decisions regarding their service offerings and target marketing strategies. By doing so, they can build customer loyalty and help ensure that passengers have a positive experience with their railway transport services.

Rift Valley Railways Consortium (RVRC) was a private company which was responsible for running the railway systems in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The company has been in operation since 2006 till 2017 where it was reverted to Kenya Railway Corporation and Uganda Railway Corporation. Before termination of Consortium contract in mid-2017, RVRC was considered one of the most important transportation networks in East Africa. Thus the research aimed to assess the extent to which passengers are satisfied with the quality provided by RVRC (Rambo & Okelo, 2016). The study focused on the customer service, reliability, safety, security, and other aspects of the service provided by the company. Additionally, the research also sought to identify areas for improvement, and suggestions for how the company could improve its services. The research was conducted through a combination of surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Through this research, RVRC gained insight into the ways in which services were improved to ensure passenger satisfaction (Malago & Jonyo, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

The railway industry is one of the most important transportation systems not only in Kenya but across the globe. It plays an essential role in the economic development and social advancement of many countries (Amadi, 2016). As such, it is essential to evaluate the extent to which customers are satisfied with the quality of the services provided by railway companies. Customer satisfaction is an important factor in determining how successful a company is, and it is essential to understand the needs and preferences of customers in order to provide the best possible service. The purpose of this research is to determine the extent to which passengers are satisfied with the service quality provided by Rift Valley Railways Consortium. Specifically, this research sought to identify the factors that contribute to passenger satisfaction as well as the impact of these factors on passenger loyalty and overall satisfaction. Additionally, the research also sought to identify potential areas for improvement in order to enhance passenger satisfaction.

Expectancy-Value Theory

Expectancy-value theory is a theory of motivation which suggests that individuals will be motivated to engage in a task or behavior if they believe that doing so will result in a desired outcome or reward. The theory proposes that motivation is the result of a person's expectation that a particular behavior will lead to a desired outcome and their evaluation of the value of that anticipated outcome (De Simone, 2015). According to the theory, an individual's motivation to engage in a task or behavior is determined by their level of expectancy and their level of value that is, the extent to which they believe the outcome is desirable. The expectancy-value theory has been used to explain customer satisfaction with the quality of services provided. As illustrated by Poort et al. (2019), it can be argued that customer satisfaction is largely determined by the customer's expectations of the quality of the service they receive, and their

evaluation of the value of the service they receive. Customers who have high expectations of the quality of service they receive and who believe that the service they receive is of high value, are more likely to be satisfied with the service.

Empirical analysis

Rai and Rao (2019), analyzed customer perceptions and expectations of service quality and noted that are often quality of services are represented quality framework, which includes service dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. In order to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty, companies must ensure that their service fulfills all of these criteria. The assessment of customer perceptions and expectations of service quality is an essential element in the development of a successful service strategy. Companies must strive to meet or exceed customer expectations in order to stay competitive and profitable. This involves understanding the customer's needs and wants, and the development of a service strategy that meets those needs and wants (Rai & Rao, 2019). Study by Ahmed and Sattar (2015), recommended that companies must also be aware of external factors that may impact their service quality, such as economic, technological and legislative changes. The measurement of customer-perceived service quality is essential for companies to be able to identify areas for improvement and to track progress towards goals.

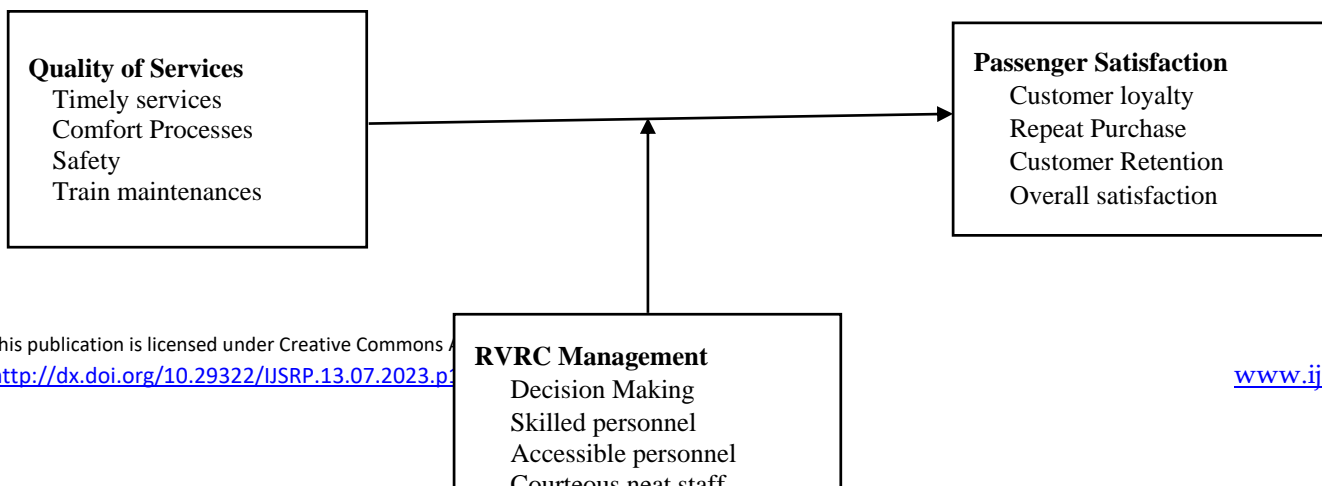
Companies should use customer surveys, focus groups and other qualitative methods to gain an understanding of customer perceptions and expectations of service quality. Additionally, companies should measure the performance of their service offering against established standards, and monitor customer complaints and feedback to ensure that they are improving their service quality. Kumar and Kumar (2016), conducted a study to explore the impact of service issues on customer perception of quality. The researchers looked at customers who either had or had not encountered a service problem recently. Results from the study indicated that service issues had a negative effect on customers' views of service quality, and those who were unsatisfied with problem resolution were twice as dissatisfied as those whose issues were resolved to their satisfaction. Mishra and Prasad (2016), suggested that reliability is the most crucial factor for service companies, which means delivering the service dependably and accurately the first time. If a problem does arise, it does not necessarily mean the customer will be lost, as long as the company does not ignore it.

Instead, the company has the opportunity to improve customer retention rates by rectifying the issue and providing a satisfactory service on the second attempt. Miranda et al. (2018), suggested that service workers should be given the authority to solve problems in an inventive and successful manner. Similarly, to Morton et al. (2016), they highlighted the significance of keeping frontline employees informed of the organization's performance, equipping them with the skills and information to contribute to the organization's success, and rewarding those who performed well. Their research showed that by allowing employees to promptly address customer complaints, it "can transform a potentially irritated or mad customer into a content one.

Conceptual Model

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable



Moderating Variable

Source: Author, 2023

Research Design

The researcher employed a descriptive survey to get information for the study. This type of survey is meant to illustrate potential behavior, characteristics, qualities, and values. Descriptive research, as the name implies, focuses on outlining the features of the group being studied (Oso & Onen, 2009).

The Population of the Study

The researcher focused on individual customers travelling in Nairobi-Mombasa railway line. The same was selected using convenient sampling technique and from the population selected, 40 passengers were selected in a period of eight days and for each day 5 passengers were interviewed for the study. The researcher focused on customers travelling for long-distance.

Validity and Reliability

To make sure the data validity, the researcher asked experts to review the questionnaire. Further, to measure the reliability of the data, a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.79 was obtained. This value is considered to be sufficient (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze and present the data.

Descriptive analysis

Attributes	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Courteous and friendliness of the staff in serving customers	40	1	5	2.77	1.12
Trustworthiness and honest of employees	40	1	5	2.7	1.04
Cleanliness of the premises	40	1	5	2.25	1.13
Convenience hours of operation	40	1	5	2.8	1.22
Security in the premises	40	1	5	2.53	1.41
Staff politeness and respect to customers	40	1	5	2.4	1.13
Possession of knowledge and skills by staff	40	1	5	2.47	1.06
Provision of individualized attention to customers and prompt services	40	1	5	2.15	1.15
Staff ability to solve problems at designated time	40	1	5	2.38	1.08
Clean and neat appearance of the staff	40	1	5	2.62	1.08
Comfortable ride	40	1	5	2.52	1.13
Availability of services	40	1	5	2.38	1.03
Safety of traveling	40	1	5	2.38	1.13
Approachability of top managers for queries willingness of staff to help customers	40	1	5	2.8	1.11
Well aerated train	40	1	5	2.53	1.18
Credibility of the service providers	40	1	5	2.6	1.03

Good driving expertise	40	1	5	2.9	1.13
Efficiency of the services offered	40	1	5	2.81	1.13
Accessibility of staff	40	1	5	2.6	1.11
Well-lit train at night	40	1	5	2.47	1.18
Adequacy of information in the internet	40	1	5	2.23	1.10
Clean and smoking-free environment	40	1	5	2.3	0.99
Well maintained train terminus	40	1	5	2.45	1.22
Train derailment measures	40	1	5	2.47	1.11
Speed control measures	40	1	5	2.83	1.04
Frequent maintenance of trains	40	1	5	2.32	1.05
Maintenance and improvement of railway lines Provision of foodstuffs at night ride	40	1	5	2.25	1.10
Strict adherence of train departure and arrival times	40	1	5	2.51	1.03
Valid N (list wise)	40				

Source: Author, 2023

According to the findings, the passengers rated the quality of the services as relatively satisfactory. Based to the results it is noted that good driving expertise being the highest-ranked at an average of 2.90 and the lowest-ranked being individualized customer attention with a mean of 2.15. Speed control measures and convenience hours of operation were both rated in the middle of the range, with means of 2.83 and 2.25 respectively. The range of quality ratings was from 2.15 to 2.90.

Summary

The purpose of the research was to find out how satisfied customers are with the services offered by the Rift Valley Railways Consortium and to determine how well the consortium is doing in regards to its service quality characteristics. Data from the respondents were obtained from questionnaire that combined both closed and open-ended questions. The responses were then analyzed using descriptive statistics and the findings evaluated and discussed.

Conclusion

Based on the results, it is clear that the respondents valued the staff's friendliness and politeness greatly. Again, the passengers ranked as important the provision of security by Rift Valley Railways Consortium, cleanliness of the property, and a smooth ride. The passengers suggested that the rift valley railways consortium's services be improved by maintaining the trains and rail lines properly, upgrading the train station, providing effective, modern coaches with comfortable seats, and train the staff to be polite and helpful when providing services to customers. By strictly adhering to arrival and departure times as well as by not overloading the trains to reduce accidents and discomfort, better services could be provided.

Recommendation

The study recommended that Rift Valley Railways Consortium should work to close the space between what passengers expect and how they judge the services they receive. This can be done by providing better services than other transportation options such as buses. Railway transport has many advantages like safety, no traffic and cost-effectiveness as it can transport more people at one time. The railway industry should educate passengers about the advantages of using their services. To do this, they should create marketing campaigns that appeal to current and potential passengers. This could be done by enhancing service quality that meet the needs of both existing and potential passengers.

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