

The Contribution of Professionalism and Skills on Customer Satisfaction Among Customers of National Water and Sewage Cooperation (NWSC) in Mbarara City, Uganda

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Abstract

The study focused on Customer care service and customer satisfaction among customers of National Water and Sewage Cooperation in Mbarara City. The study was guided by the following objectives: To find out the effect of accessibility and flexibility on customer satisfaction among customers of National water and sewage cooperation, to determine the relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction among customers of national water and sewage cooperation in Mbarara city, to ascertain the contribution of professionalism and skills on customer satisfaction among customers of national water and sewage cooperation in Mbarara city. A non-experimental, cross sectional survey research design was used in this study with a mixed methods approach of data collection and analysis. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to come up with a sample of 324 respondents from whom primary data was collected, these included; the branch managers of NWSC, and the customers of NWSC specifically the land lords and land ladies in Mbarara City. The managers were subjected to interview while the customers were subjected to questionnaires. A statistical package SPSS (version 20) was used to analyze the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires and thematic content analysis and narrative reasoning was used to analyze qualitative data collected. The findings of the study revealed that accessibility and flexibility have a strong positive affect on the customer satisfaction ($r = 0.703, p < 0.05$). The findings on the relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction revealed that there is a moderate positive relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.420, p < 0.05$). The study further revealed that professionalism contributes much towards customer satisfaction according to the results from interview with the branch managers of NWSC. From the study findings, it can be concluded that Customer care service is very pertinent in as far as customer satisfaction with the organizational services is concerned therefore, the management of NWSC should put in more effort to ensure they improve their customer care services to retain and maintain a stable customer base for the organization. The present study recommended that the management should open up more branches of NWSC within the city for easy accessibility by the customers and this will at the same time increase the reliability. Professionalism should be emphasized since it greatly contributes to the customer satisfaction among customers of National water and sewage cooperation within Mbarara city.

Background of the Study

Customer satisfaction is a key concept in modern marketing thought and practice, which emphasizes delivering satisfaction to customers and obtaining profits in return. Customer satisfaction is thus crucial to meeting the various needs of customers and firms. The realization of its importance has led to a proliferation of research on customer satisfaction among marketing and psychology researchers over the past five decades (e.g., Oliver, [1980](#), [1997](#);

Yi, [1990](#); Yi & La, [2004](#)), and the pursuit of customer satisfaction has become a strategic imperative for most firms that need to survive and remain competitive. Customer satisfaction has both defensive effects of retaining customers by reducing customer defection and offensive effects of attracting new customers through positive word of mouth or referrals by satisfied customers.

Most studies acknowledge that customer expectations play a crucial role in the evaluation process of customer satisfaction. Oliver ([1980](#)) regards customer expectations as an adaptation level and suggests that expectations create a frame of reference for comparative judgments. According to the expectation disconfirmation model (Oliver, [1997](#); Yi, [1990](#)), customer satisfaction is largely based on comparison of expectations versus performance. If the performance is above (or below) expectations, customer satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) is likely. That is, satisfaction results from experiencing performance better than expected (positive disconfirmation), whereas dissatisfaction results from experiencing performance worse than expected (negative disconfirmation).

Baldassarre et al. (2017) asserts that a customer service system is a mixture of people, procedures and technology that efficiently and effectively aids customer needs while achieving the profitability objectives of a company. Executing an effective customer service system or improving an existing one is difficult when stakeholders are not persuaded of its significance. An enhanced system is implemented when everyone understands and buys into its use.

Service quality has become important in many ways for most organizations, but the general view is that many organizations do not take it too seriously. Nothing is as common today as the organization committed more to lip service than customer service; more interested in advertising than action (Hasan, et al., 2008). All too many companies seem to consider customers as nothing more than a necessary nuisance. Oh, they may say otherwise, but they do not deliver. If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, then the road to business failure is littered with placards proclaiming ‘the customer is always right’.

Although customer satisfaction and service quality are often regarded as interchangeable, many researchers argue that these constructs are distinct (Park & Yi, [2016](#); Rust & Oliver, [1994](#)).

Rust and Oliver ([1994](#)) note a number of differences between quality and satisfaction. First, the dimensions underlying quality perceptions are rather specific, whereas satisfaction can result from any dimension, whether quality related or not. Second, quality judgments do not require experience, whereas satisfaction judgments are based on the consumption experience. Third, quality is formed by a comparison between ideals and perceptions of performance regarding quality dimensions, whereas satisfaction is determined by the disconfirmation of expectations regarding both quality and nonequality dimensions. Finally, quality has fewer conceptual antecedents, whereas satisfaction is influenced by a number of cognitive and affective processes. Empirical evidence shows that these two constructs are indeed distinct. Nevertheless, the two constructs are related in the sense that service quality is viewed as an antecedent of customer satisfaction.

The majority of customer satisfaction models and theories are developed in Western countries, and most constructs and theories of customer satisfaction have been tested with data collected in North America and

Europe. Therefore, it is unknown whether the theory, constructs, measures, and relationships among constructs are applicable to other regions as well. This issue is even more pronounced as the world becomes an interdependent system with the globalization of economy. As the Asia market becomes bigger and bigger, its influence on the world economy is increasing rapidly (Yi, 1998). Given the rapid economic growth in Asia, it is increasingly important to examine the applicability of customer satisfaction models and theories in Asian countries that have different economic and cultural characteristics compared with Western countries.

It is to be noted that although the noble notion of “humble service to others” has been widespread in the orient since time immemorial, in reality, such notion, by and large, was historically absent in the marketplace. The markets were seen as mere transactional venues heavily entrenched in bargaining in the more genteel settings to downright public haggling particularly in the consumer nondurable markets. “Customer service” in the marketplace as understood and followed in the west was once almost nonexistent in the orient when there was a perennial shortage of goods in the market, but, as the transition from the “seller's market” to the “buyer's market” ensued, the customer service became noticeably different (and somewhat akin to the west). In this regard, the “customer service” in the U.S. Postal Service offers a parallel example. When it had absolute government backed monopoly, the USPS typically exhibited a pervasive transactional mentality. Their customer service began to improve once competition set in (first with the emergence of FEDEX and other carriers and then with the dramatic advent of email). In the same vein, “customer service” in Asia has continued to improve with greater competition. But since age-old cultural values, traditions, and customs still abound in Asia, it is plausible that such factors percolate and color not only “customer service” but also “customer satisfaction” in Asia.

Customer cares services are very vital for every business at all levels be it global (Mahmoud et al., 2018). Most studies around the globe have been conducted on customer care services and revealed how positive it affects the customer loyalty and retention (Sugiarto & Octaviana, 2021). For this study, customer care service has been measured through constructs of accessibility and flexibility, reliability and professionalism.

Accessibility and flexibility is the ability of the company or organization to easily be accessed by the users of the services such company offers (Huang et al., 2019). Most customers will credit an organization they associate with for being accessible and at the same time flexible in times customers need services from such organizations. And this creates trust among the customers and they end up being satisfied by the services offered to them by the organization.

Reliability is one of the components of customer care service because being reliable to the customers is one of the quality measures of the services offered to them through instant feedback and proper data base management for the customers (Meesala & Paul, 2018). Thus, customers are willing to cooperate and become loyal only when the service providers prove a sense of being reliable.

Professionalism is also one of the clear measurements for customer care services especially when it comes to handling customers complaints and requests. Professionalism is very vital in all operations of the business organization if customers are to be retained and win their hearts towards supporting the organization (Elizar et al., 2020).

In any case, there has been relatively little research on customer satisfaction in Uganda, and this void restricts companies from having full confidence in customer satisfaction management strategies in Ugandan economy. As a result, there is a pressing need for research on customer satisfaction in Mbarara city taking National Water and sewage cooperation as a case of study.

Methodology

A non-experimental, cross sectional survey research design was used in this study with a mixed methods approach of data collection and analysis. This is the design that analyzes data from a population, or a representative subset, at a specific point in time (Kothari, 2017). Quantitative approach allowed the collection of large amounts of data from a sizable population in a highly economical way. The quantitative data was collected and analyzed quantitatively using inferential statistics (Roopa & Rani, 2012). According to (Marczyk et al., 2010), this design gives rise to a more economical mode of collection of data at one point in time and which is a fundamental objective in analysis due to the timing similarity. The study was analytical in nature. The analytical approach allowed the researcher to examine two or more variables the interrelationships among variables and to draw explanatory inferences (Marchant et al., 2018).

The study was conducted in Mbarara city National water and sewerage cooperation. The city borders Mbarara district in the North, Rwampara District in the south, Isingiro District in East and Kiruhura in the west. This area of study was chosen because Mbarara city has got many clients of NWSC hence making it a fertile ground for determining customer satisfaction levels.

The population of this study composed of Branch managers and the customers of national water and sewerage cooperation in Mbarara city. The study considered the branch managers because they have enough information about their operations in relation to the customer satisfaction. In addition, the customers of national water and sewerage cooperation were also considered for the study to basically measure their satisfaction. National water and sewerage cooperation Mbarara city has got a total number of branches equal to seven which include; City Centre, Biharwe branch, Ruti Branch, Kakoba branch, Koranolya branch, Nyamitanga Branch and Ruharo Branch and at least each branch has got a total number of 10 employees (NWSC HR Annual Report, 2021). This makes the total target population of the seven (7) branch managers, The customers of National water and sewerage cooperation were also targeted for the study to the tune of 26,524 households from all wards within the city.

For this study, the population was 26,531. Identifying the appropriate sample size enables the researcher to plan and design the most suitable means of data collection. In this case therefore, the sample size of 384 respondents were considered for this study and these were drawn using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination. The study used purposive sampling to select the branch managers only. Simple random sampling was applied on the customers of National Water and Sewage cooperation. Therefore, the researcher used 384 respondents as the sample size for the study and their distribution.

This study employed mainly two types of data sources that is primary and secondary data sources. The primary data are original and relevant to the topic of the research study so the degree of accuracy is very high. Primary data is that data collected from a number of ways like interviews, telephone surveys, focus groups. This is the kind of data that was collected for the first time from the field using questionnaires and interviews administered to selected participants that were selected for this study. Secondary data refers to data which is collected by someone other than the user. The researcher used published and unpublished material on, Customer care service and customer satisfaction among customers of NWSC from journals, magazines, theses and academic papers.

The questionnaire was designed under the guidance of the supervisor to ensure its content validity. Closed ended questionnaires were designed and then self-administered to respondents in this case the customers of National water and Sewage cooperation. This questionnaire survey method helped the researcher to collect quantitative data for this undertaking. The interview guide was designed to include questions that

were geared to answer the research questions. All the questions in the interview guide were open ended to all respondents which gave them chance to express their opinion concerning the variables under consideration.

Before processing, Data was cleaned, coded, entered and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS Version 20) for windows. Findings were presented inform frequency distribution table displaying descriptive statistics inform of mean standard, deviation and percentages. This was finished by tallying up responses, processing rates of varieties accordingly and also portraying and deciphering the information in accordance with the study destinations and suppositions through utilization of SPSS (Version 20) for windows to convey look into discoveries. Pearson correlation was run to test the relationship between the variables under consideration in this undertaking.

Data from key informants was analyzed using thematic content analysis and narrative reasoning. Thematic content analysis involved condensing individual responses into similar themes and integrating them into interview schedule for easy analysis. In verbatim, the researcher recorded statements, comments and remarks of the respondents. This involved direct quotation of the words, statements or comments of the respondents. In case study, interesting and relevant stories were captured and placed in a box or frame. The use of the qualitative design aimed at giving deeper insights of the issues that were uncovered by the quantitative research methods.

Results

The findings revealed that professionalism is being exercised by NWSC officials and that it has created trust and confidence among the customers of the cooperation. This has greatly led to satisfaction of the customers of NWSC. Qualitative information gotten from interviewing the branch managers revealed how professionalism has really enabled the customers to build a strong trust in the operations of National water and sewage cooperation. These finds are in agreement with the findings of (Huang et al., 2019) who concluded that professionalism greatly contributes to customers being contented with their service providers.

Conclusion

Conclusively it can be asserted that professionalism and skill greatly contributes to customer satisfaction among customers of NWSC in Mbarara city. It's believed that the professionalism portrayed by the staff of National water and sewage cooperation is commendable enough to make customers contented with the services hence customer satisfaction.

Recommendation

The findings revealed that professionalism and skill contributes positively towards customer satisfaction of the customers of NWSC in Mbarara city. This should be maintained and improved on to keep the customers contented and satisfied with the services of NWSC.

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