



The Influence of Customer Care Service Management on the Performance of the Shops and Clothes Businesses in Bukoba Municipality in Tanzania

Irene Rwehika* and Joseph Magali†

Abstract

This paper assessed the effects of customer care service management on business performance for the shop and clothes business owners in Bukoba municipality, Tanzania. Specifically, the paper assessed the effects of selling quality products, complaints management and positive impression on business performance. The study targeted a total population of 110 shop sellers and 850 customers. The systematic random sampling technique and sampling formula were used to select a sample size of 70 participants. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings indicate that on average, shop sellers were selling products of the desired quality and this contributed to business performance. The findings further indicated that the positive impression was managed as required. However, the findings indicate that the impaired products replacement service was missing, the management for complaints was not sufficient, and shop sellers were busy and attended calls while serving customers. This, therefore, reduced business performance. This paper recommends that the business owners should accept replacing the impaired products, strive to make sure that all complaints are handled appropriately and

* MBA Student, The Open University of Tanzania (Autonomous), Kagera Region; Tanzania; josephmagali@yahoo.com

† Senior Lecturer, The Open University of Tanzania (Autonomous), Dar es salaam, Tanzania; joseph.magali@out.ac.tz (Corresponding Author)

timely and should refrain from being busy and attending calls when serving customers.

Keywords: customer care service management, the performance of shops and clothes business, Tanzania

1. Introduction

Kagera region is one of Tanzania's 31 administrative regions whose population engages in producing bananas and coffee and other annual crops such as maize, sorghum and tobacco. The residents of the Kagera region also engage in various economic activities such as fishing, farming, livestock keeping, businesses, construction and industrial works (KADETFU, 2019).

Kurtenbach (2000) defined customer service as the provision of service to customers before, during and after a purchase. According to Kurtenbach (2000), companies that are successful in marketing rank customer service provision as their top priority. Service quality, speed and responsiveness are essential for improving firms' sales growth (Olomi and Rutashobya, 2002). Customers, indeed determine the growth and survival of an enterprise (Lewis, 2000). Kotler (2001) asserted that customer service is associated with service satisfaction and solving customer problems. Hence, there exists a relationship between customer service and customer retention (Belal and Owen, 2007). When businesses offer good customer service and are able to retain customers, automatically increases sales and profitability, which signifies the improved performance of the business (Olomi and Rutashobya, 2002).

In July 2018, one of the researchers visited five shops selling clothes and four shops selling shoes and other merchandise in Bukoba town. She found that among the eight shops she visited only three shops had good services and customer care. This created the impression that there were shop owners who did not know how to attract customers and promote their businesses performance. Therefore, the researchers conducted this study to assess how the customer care services management influenced the business performance.

Wadud (2012) linked customer services and sales revenue for travel agents companies in Finland while Abora (2011) and Kihombo (2015) related it with banks performance in Ghana and Kenya, respectively. The influence of quality products on business performance was confirmed by Lakhali (2009), who focused on the plastic industry in Tunisia. Su, Li, Zhang, Liu and Dang (2008) examined how customer service influenced manufacturing and service firms in China while Forker, Vickery and Droge (1996) linked customer service with furniture's business performance in the USA and Curkovic, Vickery. Droge (1999) aligned the customer service with automotive business industries performance in North America.

The influence of complaint management on business performance was approved by Filip (2013). Similarly, Suradi, Kian and Saludin (2013) revealed that complaint management improved the library use performance in Malaysia. Bengül and Yılmaz (2018) studied the influence of positive impression on bank performance in Turkey, while Ginah and Akpotu (2016) revealed that the positive impression affected the business performance in Nigeria. Arif, Rizvi, Abbas, Akhtar, and Imran (2012) affirmed that positive impressions influenced the performance of the banking and telecom sector in Pakistan. Bart and Brink (2017) and Stratulat (2019) analyzed how complaint management improved the performance of managers during the events' crisis.

The literature shows that previous studies concentrated only on how one of the three variables influences business performance. Therefore, this study is a comprehensive study that involves all of the three variables, which are selling of quality products, complaints management and positive impression. The literature also indicates that none of the studies was done to assess how customer service management influences the performance of shop and clothes businesses in a local city such as Bukoba town.

2. Literature review

2.1 Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model

Customer service management cannot be distinguished from service quality because the quality service makes the customers satisfied (Rahman, Sharma, & Mehta, 2012). Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry initiated the service quality (SERVQUAL) model in 1988. The model highlights the five elements of service quality, which are reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness (Anderson, 1995). SERVQUAL considers the level of service expectations versus perception, and this is called the service gap. Parasuraman et al. (1988) identified the five gaps which are caused by differences between expectations and perceptions from consumer and management, management perceptions of consumer expectations and service quality specifications, service quality specifications and the service delivered, and service delivered and communicated service and service expectation and perceived service quality.

In a nutshell, focusing on variables under the current study; if the quality of the product is not convincing, customers will not be satisfied by the services offered; even if other service dimensions are fulfilled, still, a customer will express the quality gap. Inadequate training of service personnel may result in a negative impression on customers. The customers demand quality service or products based on what has been promised, and if the quality is not met, they will complain. Customers' complaints communicate what customers feel about both products and services. The problem arises when the complaints are not handled effectively and timely. Therefore, while selling quality products, handling complaints of customers and creating a positive impression, the service provider must also meet the customers' expectations.

Moreover, Cronin and Taylor (1992) developed the service performance-based measure (SERVPERF), which does not consider the variable of expectations. Despite the criticism, various scholars still use SERVQUAL to measure the service quality in various sectors, such as health, education, business and other service sectors, because they declare that it covers the wide ranges of

variables that measure the service quality (Bakar, Seval, Akgün & Al Assaf, 2008; Donnelly, Wisniewski, Dalrymple & Curry al., 1995). This study has applied SERVQUAL because the selling of quality products, complaints' management and positive impression are associated with tangibility, assurance and responsiveness of services.

2.2 Customer services and business performance

Wadud (2012) revealed that improved customer services attracted more customers and hence improved sales revenue for travel agents' companies in Finland. Abora (2011) found that there was a link between customer services and profitability of banks in Ghana, while Kihombo (2015) related the customer care services and banks performance in Kenya. Hassan (2013) revealed that customer service influenced the growth of electronic computer enterprises in Mogadishu, Somalia, positively. Ogunnaike, Salau, and Borishade (2014) found that customer care services led to the retention of customers for telecommunication service providers in Nigeria. The literature indicates that no study was done to assess how customer service management influence the performance of shop and clothes business sellers in a local city such as Bukoba town.

2.3 Influence of quality products on business performance

The quality of products and services influence organizational performance (Powell, 1995). Ishikawa and Lu (1985) considered defects and flaws in product quality as backwards-looking. According to Cannatelli, Pedrini and Grumo (2015), a firm's performance may be improved by quality management practices. However, the study focused on the Italian craft brewing sector.

Lakhali (2009) concluded that product quality promoted both organizational performance and competitive advantage for 74 organizations that invested in the plastic industry in Tunisia. Hajjat and Hajjat (2014) confirmed that effective product quality improved the performance of a business in some Arab countries. Suchánek, Richter and Králová (2014) reported that improvement of products' quality enhanced customers' satisfaction for the food industry in Czech. Su et al. (2008) revealed that, for manufacturing

and service firms in China, quality management practices had positive impacts on business performance when mediated by research and development. Forker, Vickery and Droge (1996) found that quality design and product improvement greatly associated with furniture's business performance in the USA. Curkovic, Vickery, and Droge (1999) revealed that quality influenced automotive business industries performance in North America. Jakpar, Na, Johari, and Myint (2012) inferred that perceived product quality, performance and reliability positively and significantly influenced customer satisfaction in Malaysia. However, none of the studies associated customer service management of the shops and clothes' sellers and business performance.

2.4 Influence of complaint management on business performance

Complaint management is a process that identifies service failures and how to resolve the customer problems (Tan & Ong, 2009). Customer complaints show a business deficiency, and if complaints are handled properly, they can improve business performance. Complaints create business recovery strategies and hence may contribute positively to the performance of the business (Filip, 2013). Complaints management can be used as a component of customers' retention strategies and hence can be used to improve business performance (Shahin, 2000). Suradi et al. (2013) revealed that complaints management improved the library use performance in Malaysia. Bengül and Yılmaz (2018) found that complaints management positively and significantly influenced the performance of banks in Turkey. Nevertheless, the studies did not articulate how complaint management affected shop and cloth business performance.

2.5 Influence of positive impression on business performance

Ginah and Akpotu (2016) found that a positive impression is looked at facial expression, greeting, smiling, and body language. Their study found a positive and moderate link between impression management and the performance of firms in Nigeria. Rosenfeld, Giacalone and Riordan (1995) affirmed that impression management is a tactic used by the employees in the organizational

setting to improve organizational performance. Arif et al. (2012) related the management of impression and employees' performance rating where they found that the former contributed positively to the later. Bart and Brink (2017) asserted that impressions management fosters the implementation of organizational tasks and goals. Stratulat (2019) reported that Volkswagen Company used impression management during financial crisis to overcome the negative impressions expressed by the public. Beka (2013) asserted that there are scanty studies done to assess the influence of impression management on business performance.

3. Research Methodology

Since this is a quantitative study, it has adopted the positivist philosophy and descriptive design. The study was conducted in Bukoba municipality in the Kagera region. The participants of the research were clothes' vendors and shop owners, and their customers living in Bukoba municipality. The total population was 110 shops sellers, and the customers were estimated to be 850 (Kagera Municipal Council, 2019). The study used the systematic random sampling technique while the sampling formula proposed by Suyono (2012), $n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$ was used to compute the sample size of 267 respondents. However, due to budget and time limitations, only a sample size of 70 participants was used. The survey technique was used where questionnaires were distributed to the customers who bought the products. The customers were requested to express their consents before starting filling the questionnaires. The researcher used the observation technique to investigate whether sellers of the merchandise shops provided the required the customer care services to their customers. The researchers adhered to other research ethical issues such as anonymity, confidentiality, research clearance, and avoided data fabrication, falsification and plagiarism.

The data were screened, coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer software, version 20. Apart from the background variables, the five Likert scales (i.e. 1= Strongly

disagree, 2= disagree, 3= Neither Agree or Disagree, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree) were used to rate the level of agreement by the statements of selling quality products, positive impression and complaints management. The analysis of data was done by using descriptive analysis, where frequencies, percentages and mean values were computed. The validity was enhanced by pre-testing of data to 10 respondents, and reliability was measured in SPSS by using Crobach alpha values, which attained a value above 0.7, signifying that the data was reliable. The response rate was 100%.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

4.1.1 Gender of the respondents

The findings of the study revealed that 54.1% of the respondents were males, while 45.9% of the respondents were females. The results are shown in Table 4.1. The findings show both men and women were the customers of merchandise in Bukoba town. However, the results show that most of the merchandises in the Bukoba town were bought by males. The results indicate that males were more financially independent than females. Therefore, they were able to buy more merchandise than females.

4.1.2 Marital status

The findings on the marital status of the respondents from Table 4.1 show that 43.2% of the respondents were married while 56.8% were singles. No divorced or widowed respondents were reported. The findings show the marriage respondents bought the merchandise more than single ones. The data may imply that probably the married customers bought the products for the benefits of the whole family.

4.1.3 Age of the respondents

The findings of the study revealed that 51.5%, 36.5%, 9.4% and 2.6% of the respondents were aged between 18-27, 28-37, 38-49 and above 50 years respectively. The findings imply that most of the respondents were youths and middle-aged. The findings further

show that the customers of all age range bought the merchandise, and hence the shop owners should have strategies to serve each of the age group, particularly youths who were the majority.

Table 4.1: Respondents’ demographic information

Sex of the customer		
Variable(s)	Frequency	Percent
Males	40	54.1
Females	34	45.9
Total	74	100.0
Marital status		
	Frequency	Percent
Married	32	43.2
Single	42	56.8
Total	74	100.0
Age of the respondents		
	Frequency	Percent
18-27	38	51.5
28-37	27	36.5
38-49	7	9.4
50 and Above	2	2.6

The effects of selling quality products on business performance

According to Table 4.2, using the 5-points Likert scales, the mean ratings ranged from 3.054 to 3.919 for all variables, and this indicates that most of the respondents perceived that selling of quality products influenced business performance in one way or another. The results from Table 4.2 indicate that the overall mean score was 3.589.

The respondents agreed that the products sold to them met the required standards, and the average score was 3.9. This implies that selling quality products attracted customers and made the customers more satisfied and hence continued to buy the products and, in this case, the performance of the business improved in terms of increased business sales and profitability. The product quality reliability scored an average of 3.8, implying that the quality of the bought products did not change abruptly. The contribution of product standard to product quality scored an

average score of 3.7. This implies that customers preferred standardized products. The findings also show that product durability contributed to business performance. The findings indicate replacement of the impaired products scored 3.1, indicating that the respondents were indifferent to whether the seller agreed to replace the impaired products. The results from Table 4.2 also show that product aesthetics scored 3.743, signifying that customers agreed that it contributed to business performance. The findings are in tandem with Lakhali et al. (2009), who found that the quality of the products influenced the competitive advantage and organizational performance in Tunisia.

Table 4.2: The influence of selling quality products and business performance

Attribute	Findings	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Ranking
The product quality reliability and business performance	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5	3.770	2
	Frequency (f)	1	9	9	42	13		
	Frequency (fx)	1	18	27	168	65		
Product standards and performance	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5	3.919	1
	Frequency (f)	2	7	6	39	20		
	Frequency (fx)	2	14	18	156	100		
Product durability and performance	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5	3.459	4
	Frequency (f)	1	18	11	34	10		
	Frequency (fx)	1	36	33	136	50		
Impaired product replacement and buss. performance	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5	3.054	5
	Frequency (f)	9	12	20	32	1		
	Frequency (fx)	9	24	60	128	5		
Product	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5	3.743	3

aesthetic s and buss perform ance (BP)	Frequenc y(f) (fx)	2	11	3	46	12		
		2	22	9	184	60		
							Grand mean	3.589

4.2 The influence of complaints management on business performance

The results from respondents regarding this objective are presented in Table 4.3. The table shows that the overall mean of the results ranged from 2.81 to 3.36 for all variables, and this indicates that respondents rated the statements from disagreeing to neutral scales.

The responses from the individual items in Table 4.3 show that having good communication skills scored 3.36. Employees ability empathize with unhappy customers 3.15, acknowledgement on the complaints scored 3.26, thorough knowledge about the problem at hand 3.04, fair investigation and analysis of the complaints 2.95, handling complaints according to policies, while keeping the customer informed 2.81 and follow up with the customer to ensure that is satisfied 3.18. The overall mean of 3.11 indicates that the customers were unsure whether the complaints management influenced business performance or not. The findings indicate that shop owners in Bukoba Municipality did not prioritize complaints management. Therefore, the complaints management did not contribute to business performance for shops owners selling merchandise in Bukoba municipality. Suradi et al. (2013) found that complaints' management and service quality influenced the organizational image at the Malaysian public university library.

Table 4.3: The influence of complaints' management on business performance

Attributes	Findings	Stron gly disag ree	Disag ree	Neut ral	Agr ee	Stron gly agree	Mea n	Ran king
Good	Value	1	2	3	4	5	3.36	1

communication skills and BF	(x) Frequency	7	15	8	32	12		
	(fx)	7	30	24	128	60		
Ability to empathize with unhappy customers and BF	Value	1	2	3	4	5	3.15	4
	(x) Frequency	4	20	15	31	4		
	(fx)	4	40	45	124	20		
Thorough knowledge about the problem at hand and BP	Value	1	2	3	4	5	3.04	5
	(x) Frequency	6	20	18	25	5		
	(fx)	6	40	54	100	25		
acknowledgment of the complaints and BP?	Value	1	2	3	4	5	3.26	2
	(x) Frequency	1	21	14	34	4		
	(fx)	1	42	42	136	20		
Fair investigation and analysis of the complaints and BP	Value	1	2	3	4	5	2.95	6
	(x) Frequency	7	19	26	15	7		
	(fx)	7	38	78	60	35		
Resolving complaints according to policies and BP	Value	1	2	3	4	5	2.81	7
	(x) Frequency	4	28	23	16	3		
	(fx)	4	56	69	64	15		
follow up with the customer to ensure that is satisfied and BP	Value	1	2	3	4	5	3.18	3
	(x) Frequency	6	19	12	30	7		
	(fx)	6	38	36	120	35		
Grand mean							3.11	

4.6 The influence of positive impression on business performance

The findings from Table 4.4 show that the average score was 3.6, which is approaching 4, indicating that the positive impression

contributed to business performance for the merchandise shop owners in Bukoba Municipality. The findings show that the appropriate dressing scored the mean of 3.7, which is approaching 4. This indicates that the shop sellers were dressing appropriately and thus attracted the buyers and increased sales revenue. The respondents further asserted that employees were confidence and controlled their body language, as witnessed by the scored of 3.6. The findings on whether the sellers were smiling and laughing when selling the shop products scored 3.9, signifying that this was practised by employees.

The customers also appreciated that the sellers actively listened to their requests, as manifested by an average response of 3.61. The customers further acknowledged that sellers were aware of handling customers’ emotions, and this statement registered the mean of 3.54. Moreover, the politeness, consideration and friendliness expressions scored the mean of 3.85, indicating that it was satisfactory. The question of whether sellers refrained from being busy or attended calls when serving customers attained a mean score of 3.22. The data signifies that sellers were busy and attending calls when serving customers, and this displeased customers. Ginah and Akpotu (2016) found that impression management contributed to organizational performance for the fast food and restaurant sector in Nigeria.

Table 4.1: The influence of positive impression on business performance

Attributes	Findings	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Ranking
Dressing appropriately and BP	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5	3.70	3
	Frequency(f)	3	9	7	43	12		
	Percentage	4.1	12.2	9.5	58.1	16.2		
	F(x)	3	18	21	172	60		
Confidence and controlled body	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5	3.60	5
	Frequency(f)	4	13	8	42	7		
	Percentage	5.4	17.6	10.8	56.8	9.5		
	F(x)	4	13	8	42	7		

language and BP	tage F(x)	4	36	24	168	35		
Smiling and laughing and BP	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5		
	Frequen cy(f)	2	6	9	41	16	3.90	1
	Percenta tage	2.7	8.1	12.2	55.4	21.6		
	F(x)	2	12	27	164	80		
Active customer listening and BP	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5		
	Frequen cy(f)	3	9	11	42	9	3.61	4
	Percenta ge	4.1	12.2	14.9	56.8	12.2		
	F(x)	3	18	33	168	45		
Caring customer emotions and BP	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5		
	Frequen cy(f)	4	6	17	40	7	3.54	6
	Percenta tage	5.4	8.1	23.0	54.1	9.5		
	F(x)	4	12	51	160	35		
Politeness expression and BP	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5		
	Frequen cy(f)	2	6	7	45	14	3.85	2
	Percenta ge	2.7	8.1	9.5	60.8	18.9		
	F(x)	2	12	21	180	70		
refrain from acting busy and BP	Value (x)	1	2	3	4	5		
	Frequen cy(f)	5	20	10	31	8	3.22	7
	Percenta tage	6.8	27.0	13.5	41.9	10.8		
	F(x)	5	40	30	124	40		
Mean							3.62	

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings indicate that, on average, shop sellers were selling products of the desired quality, and this contributed to business performance, and the positive impression was managed as required. However, the findings indicate that the impaired product replacement service was missing, the complaints management were low, and shop sellers were busy and attended calls when serving customers. This reduced business performance. Hence, this study recommends that the business owners should accept replacing the

impaired products, strive to make sure that all complaints are handled appropriately and timely, and should refrain from being busy or attending calls when serving customers.

6. Contribution to the study

To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study that has integrated the three variables, such as the importance of selling quality products, complaints' handling and creation of a positive impression on business performance. Moreover, it is the first study to focus on the importance of customer care management for shop sellers of merchandise in Tanzania. The study also contributes to the SERVQUAL model by revealing that the absence of impaired products replacement and complaints management procedures generates service gaps.

The study contributes to the application of customer service management to business owners who reside in the periphery to improve their business performances since a majority of the studies on customer care services focus on the formalized businesses or businesses with high capital such as hotel, banks or health institutions.

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