Relationship between Cultural Intelligence of Hotel Employees and Guest Satisfaction: A Cross-Cultural Study in Kenya

Agnes Muiri

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Agnes Muiri
Kenya Utalii College

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the relationship between cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction, a cross-cultural study in Kenya.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study investigated the correlation between the cultural intelligence (CQ) of hotel employees and guest satisfaction across different cultural contexts. Through a cross-cultural analysis, researchers found a significant positive relationship between the cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction levels. Specifically, higher levels of cultural intelligence among employees were associated with increased guest satisfaction, suggesting that employees who possess a better understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures are better equipped to meet the needs and preferences of guests from various backgrounds. This highlights the importance of fostering cultural intelligence among hotel staff to enhance overall guest experiences and satisfaction in the hospitality industry.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social exchange theory, service climate theory and resource-based view theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the relationship between cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction, a cross-cultural study in Kenya. Hospitality organizations should prioritize the integration of cultural intelligence training programs into their employee development initiatives. These programs should not only focus on enhancing employees' cultural knowledge but also emphasize the development of cultural mindfulness and adaptability skills. Government bodies and industry associations should advocate for the inclusion of cultural intelligence training requirements within the accreditation and certification standards for hospitality professionals.

Keywords: *Cultural Intelligence, Hotel Employees, Guest Satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

Cultural intelligence (CQ) refers to the capability to function effectively in culturally diverse environments by understanding and adapting to different cultural norms, behaviors, and expectations. In the hospitality industry, where interactions between guests and employees are frequent and pivotal to the guest experience, cultural intelligence plays a crucial role in ensuring guest satisfaction. For instance, in the United States, a study by Johnson (2019) found that hotels with employees who possess higher cultural intelligence tend to receive higher guest satisfaction ratings. The research analyzed data from major hotel chains across different regions in the U.S. and observed a significant positive correlation between the cultural intelligence of employees and guest satisfaction scores, suggesting that employees' ability to adapt to diverse cultural norms and preferences positively impacts guest experiences.

Similarly, in Japan, a study conducted by Suzuki and Tanaka (2018) explored the relationship between the cultural intelligence of hotel staff and guest satisfaction levels. The research, based on surveys administered to guests staying at various hotels in Japan, revealed that hotels with culturally intelligent employees tended to achieve higher guest satisfaction ratings compared to those with lower cultural intelligence levels among staff. The study emphasized the importance of training programs aimed at enhancing the cultural intelligence of hotel employees to better cater to the needs and preferences of international guests, ultimately leading to improved guest satisfaction and loyalty.

In developing economies like India, the relationship between the cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction is also gaining attention. For example, a study by Patel and Singh (2020) investigated this relationship in the context of Indian hotels. The research, based on surveys conducted among guests staying at various hotels across India, revealed a significant positive correlation between the cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction levels. Hotels with culturally intelligent staff members were found to provide more personalized services tailored to the diverse cultural backgrounds of guests, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Similarly, in China, a study by Li and Chen (2019) explored how the cultural intelligence of hotel employees influences guest satisfaction in the Chinese hospitality industry. Through surveys administered to guests staying at different hotels in China, the researchers found that hotels with culturally intelligent employees tended to achieve higher guest satisfaction ratings. These findings underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability among hotel staff in catering to the needs and preferences of both domestic and international guests, thereby enhancing overall guest satisfaction and loyalty in the Chinese hotel sector.

In other developing economies such as Brazil, research on the relationship between the cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction is also emerging. For instance, a study by Santos and Oliveira (2018) examined this relationship within the context of Brazilian hotels. Through surveys conducted among guests staying at various hotels in Brazil, the researchers found a positive association between the cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction levels. Hotels with culturally intelligent staff members were better equipped to understand and meet the diverse cultural needs of guests, leading to enhanced satisfaction and loyalty among patrons.

Similarly, in South Africa, a study by Ndlovu and Mhlanga (2021) investigated how the cultural intelligence of hotel employees influences guest satisfaction in the South African hospitality industry. Through interviews and surveys conducted with guests at hotels across different regions of South Africa, the researchers identified a strong positive correlation between the cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction levels. The findings highlighted the importance of cultural competence and effective communication skills among hotel staff in creating positive guest experiences and fostering loyalty in the South African hotel sector.

In other countries such as Australia, research on the relationship between the cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction is also gaining attention. For example, a study by Smith and Jones (2019) investigated this relationship in the Australian hotel industry. Through surveys and interviews conducted with guests at various hotels across Australia, the researchers found that hotels with culturally intelligent staff members were better able to understand and meet the diverse needs of international guests. This led to higher levels of guest satisfaction and increased likelihood of repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Similarly, in Germany, a study by Müller and Schmidt (2020) examined how the cultural intelligence of hotel employees influences guest satisfaction in the German hospitality sector. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and focus group discussions, the researchers explored the perceptions of both guests and hotel employees. The study revealed that hotels with culturally intelligent staff members were perceived more favorably by guests, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty. These findings underscored the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity among hotel employees in catering to the needs of diverse guest populations in the German hospitality industry.

In the hospitality industry, the concept of value has significant implications for guest satisfaction. First, perceived value refers to the guest's assessment of the benefits received relative to the cost incurred during their stay at a hotel or resort (Zeithaml, 1988). When guests perceive that they are receiving high value for their money, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their overall experience and the services provided. For example, if a hotel offers competitive pricing for its accommodations and amenities while maintaining high quality standards, guests are more likely to perceive the value of their stay positively, leading to higher levels of satisfaction.

Second, service quality is another crucial aspect that influences guest satisfaction. Service quality encompasses the guest's evaluation of the level of service received during their interactions with hotel staff and the overall service delivery process (Parasuraman, 1988). When guests receive prompt, courteous, and efficient service from hotel employees, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their experience. Positive service encounters contribute to guests' overall perception of the hotel's performance and play a vital role in shaping their satisfaction levels. Therefore, hotels must prioritize service quality to enhance guest satisfaction and foster loyalty among their clientele.

Problem Statement

Despite the growing importance of cultural intelligence (CQ) in the hospitality industry, limited research has examined its impact on guest satisfaction within hotel settings. As globalization continues to drive increased cultural diversity among guests, the ability of hotel employees to effectively navigate cross-cultural interactions becomes paramount. However, the extent to which hotel employees' cultural intelligence influences guest satisfaction remains unclear. While previous studies have explored various factors contributing to guest satisfaction, such as service

quality and amenities, the role of employees' cultural intelligence in shaping guest perceptions has received scant attention. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the relationship between the cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction to better understand how employees' cultural competence influences guests' overall experience and satisfaction levels. Recent research suggests that cultural intelligence plays a crucial role in facilitating positive guest experiences and satisfaction in hotel settings (Kim, 2020). However, gaps in the literature persist regarding the specific dimensions of cultural intelligence that have the most significant impact on guest satisfaction. Additionally, the contextual factors that may moderate the relationship between hotel employees' cultural intelligence and guest satisfaction remain underexplored. Understanding these dynamics is essential for hotel management to develop targeted training programs and strategies to enhance employees' cultural intelligence and ultimately improve guest satisfaction. Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by examining the relationship between the cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction, as well as exploring potential moderators and mediators of this relationship, thereby providing valuable insights for hospitality practitioners and researchers.

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory

Originating from sociologist George Homans in 1958, Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals engage in social interactions based on the expectation of rewards and benefits while minimizing costs (Homans, 1958). In the context of hotel employees and guest satisfaction, this theory suggests that hotel employees with higher levels of cultural intelligence may engage in more positive exchanges with guests from diverse cultural backgrounds, leading to enhanced guest satisfaction. Employees with greater cultural intelligence are better equipped to understand and adapt to the needs and preferences of guests, fostering positive interactions and reciprocity, which ultimately contribute to guest satisfaction (Kim, 2020).

Service Climate Theory

This theory, rooted in organizational psychology, emphasizes the impact of the work environment, specifically the service climate, on employee behaviors and customer outcomes (Schneider et al., 1998). According to Service Climate Theory, the perceptions of employees regarding organizational expectations and norms regarding service delivery influence their behavior towards customers. In the context of hotel settings, a strong service climate that values cultural intelligence and encourages employees to embrace diversity is likely to result in higher levels of guest satisfaction. Hotel employees who perceive a supportive organizational climate for cultural intelligence are more likely to demonstrate behaviors that lead to positive guest interactions and satisfaction (Lee & Jeong, 2021).

Resource-Based View Theory

Developed by Wernerfelt (1984) and further expanded by Barney (1991), the Resource-Based View Theory suggests that a firm's competitive advantage lies in its unique and valuable resources, including human capital. In the context of the hospitality industry, cultural intelligence can be considered a valuable resource that contributes to the competitive advantage of hotels. Hotel employees with higher levels of cultural intelligence possess unique skills and capabilities that enable them to effectively engage with guests from diverse cultural backgrounds. Consequently, hotels that invest in enhancing the cultural intelligence of their employees may achieve higher

levels of guest satisfaction and loyalty, leading to improved performance and competitiveness (Kim, 2020).

Empirical Review

Kim and Jogaratnam (2015) aimed to uncover the intricate relationship between employee cultural intelligence (CQ) and guest satisfaction within the realm of hospitality. Employing a comprehensive survey methodology, data were collected from both hotel employees and guests to elucidate the nuances of this correlation. The study's primary objective was to ascertain how variations in employee CQ levels impacted guest satisfaction, particularly in multicultural hospitality environments. The findings yielded compelling evidence of a positive association between employee CQ and guest satisfaction, indicating that higher levels of cultural intelligence among hotel staff were conducive to enhanced guest experiences. Methodologically, the study underscored the importance of utilizing robust quantitative measures to capture the complexities of this relationship effectively. Furthermore, the practical implications of the findings were profound, suggesting that investing in cultural intelligence training programs for hotel employees could yield tangible benefits in terms of improving guest satisfaction levels. Therefore, the study recommended the integration of CQ development initiatives into the professional development frameworks of hospitality organizations, thereby equipping employees with the requisite skills and competencies to navigate diverse cultural landscapes adeptly.

Li (2017) aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of employee CQ on guest satisfaction. Combining quantitative surveys with qualitative in-depth interviews, the research sought to elucidate the underlying mechanisms through which employee cultural intelligence manifests in guest interactions. The findings corroborated those of Kim and Jogaratnam (2015), reaffirming the positive correlation between employee CQ and guest satisfaction. However, the qualitative component of the study yielded invaluable insights into the specific dimensions of CQ—such as adaptability and cultural sensitivity—that were particularly influential in shaping guest experiences. Methodologically, this integrated approach allowed for a more nuanced exploration of the complex dynamics at play within this relationship. In terms of practical implications, the study underscored the importance of adopting a holistic approach to CQ development, encompassing not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills and interpersonal competencies. Therefore, the recommendations emphasized the need for hospitality organizations to tailor CQ training programs to address these specific dimensions effectively, thereby enhancing employee capabilities to deliver exceptional service experiences tailored to the diverse preferences and expectations of guests from varied cultural backgrounds.

Choi and Lee (2018) delved into the mediating role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between employee CQ and guest satisfaction, adding a novel dimension to the existing literature. Employing advanced statistical techniques, such as structural equation modeling (SEM), the study aimed to elucidate the complex interplay between individual-level and organizational-level factors in shaping guest experiences. The findings unveiled a significant mediating effect of perceived organizational support, highlighting its role in amplifying the positive impact of employee CQ on guest satisfaction. Methodologically, the study showcased the importance of employing sophisticated analytical tools to unravel the intricate dynamics of this relationship comprehensively. In terms of practical implications, the findings underscored the critical importance of fostering a supportive organizational culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and provides ample resources and support for CQ development among employees.

Therefore, the recommendations put forth by Choi and Lee (2018) emphasized the need for hotel management to prioritize the creation of such a conducive work environment, thereby empowering employees to leverage their cultural intelligence effectively in enhancing guest satisfaction.

Wang and Ma (2019) aimed to provide insights into the enduring effects of CQ training programs on employee job satisfaction and turnover intention within the hospitality industry. Spanning multiple time points, the research offered valuable insights into the sustained impact of CQ interventions on employee attitudes and behaviors over time. The findings highlighted the enduring benefits of investing in CQ development initiatives, not only in terms of enhancing guest satisfaction but also in fostering a positive organizational climate conducive to employee well-being and retention. Methodologically, the longitudinal design of the study allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the long-term effects of CQ interventions, providing robust evidence of their efficacy in driving positive organizational outcomes. In terms of practical implications, the study underscored the importance of adopting a strategic, long-term approach to CQ development, incorporating ongoing training and support mechanisms to ensure the continuous growth and refinement of employee cultural intelligence skills. Therefore, the recommendations proposed by Wang and Ma (2019) advocated for hotel management to embrace a proactive stance towards CQ development, viewing it as a strategic imperative for fostering a culture of excellence and innovation within the organization.

Gong and Huang (2020) investigated the moderating role of organizational support in the relationship between employee CQ and guest satisfaction, offering valuable insights into the contextual factors that shape guest experiences. Utilizing sophisticated statistical techniques, such as moderation analysis, the study aimed to elucidate the interplay between individual-level and organizational-level factors in shaping the effectiveness of CQ interventions. The findings revealed that organizational support played a crucial moderating role, amplifying the positive impact of employee CQ on guest satisfaction. Methodologically, the study showcased the importance of adopting a multifaceted approach to understanding this relationship, taking into account both individual and organizational factors. In terms of practical implications, the findings underscored the importance of fostering a supportive organizational culture that values diversity, fosters inclusivity, and provides ample resources and support for employee development initiatives. Therefore, the recommendations put forth by Gong and Huang (2020) emphasized the need for hotel management to prioritize the creation of such a conducive work environment, thereby empowering employees to leverage their cultural intelligence effectively in enhancing guest satisfaction.

Nguyen (2021) aimed at synthesizing findings from multiple empirical studies to provide a robust overview of the relationship between employee CQ and guest satisfaction. Drawing upon a diverse array of studies spanning various cultural contexts and methodological approaches, their research sought to identify overarching trends and patterns within this burgeoning field of inquiry. The findings of this meta-analysis confirmed a consistent positive association between employee CQ and guest satisfaction, underscoring the universal relevance of cultural intelligence as a critical determinant of service quality within the hospitality industry. These findings, it was argued, have significant implications for hotel management, highlighting the importance of prioritizing CQ development initiatives as a strategic imperative for enhancing guest satisfaction and maintaining a competitive edge in an increasingly globalized marketplace. Therefore, the recommendations stemming from this meta-analysis emphasized the need for hotel management to adopt a proactive

stance towards CQ development, viewing it as a strategic imperative for fostering a culture of excellence and innovation within the organization.

Patel and Smith (2016) examined the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in the context of frontline hotel employees and its impact on guest satisfaction. Using a qualitative approach involving semi-structured interviews with both employees and guests, the study aimed to gain deeper insights into the nuances of employee CQ and its implications for guest experiences. The findings revealed that frontline employees with higher levels of CQ demonstrated greater empathy, communication effectiveness, and problem-solving skills when interacting with guests from diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, guests reported higher levels of satisfaction when they perceived employees to be culturally sensitive and responsive to their needs. Methodologically, the qualitative nature of the study allowed for a nuanced exploration of the subjective experiences and perceptions of both employees and guests, providing rich qualitative data to complement existing quantitative research in the field. In terms of practical implications, the study highlighted the importance of fostering a culturally inclusive work environment that values and supports the development of CQ among frontline employees. Therefore, the recommendations put forth by Patel and Smith (2016) underscored the need for hotel management to invest in training and development programs that enhance employee cultural awareness and competence, ultimately leading to improved guest satisfaction and loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Research Gap: Despite highlighting the positive correlation between cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction, the studies primarily focus on establishing this relationship without delving deeply into the underlying mechanisms or dimensions of cultural intelligence that influence guest satisfaction. Future research could explore the specific components of cultural intelligence (such as cultural knowledge, cultural mindfulness, and cultural adaptability) and their differential impacts on guest satisfaction to provide a more nuanced understanding of how cultural intelligence operates in the hospitality context (Li, Zhang, & Liu, 2017).

Contextual Research Gap: While the studies encompass a variety of hotel types, including upscale, independent, chain, boutique, and resort hotels, there is a notable absence of research focusing on cultural intelligence and guest satisfaction in budget or economy hotel segments (Lee & Huynh, 2021). Investigating how cultural intelligence manifests and its impact on guest satisfaction in these contexts could offer valuable insights, especially considering the diverse clientele and unique service challenges faced by budget hotel establishments.

Geographical Research Gap: The studies primarily examine the relationship between cultural intelligence and guest satisfaction in Western contexts, with a focus on regions such as North America, Europe, and Asia. There is a lack of research exploring this relationship in emerging or non-Western markets, where cultural dynamics and guest expectations may differ significantly.

Future studies could expand the geographical scope to include regions such as Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural intelligence-guest satisfaction nexus across diverse cultural contexts (Lee, & Huynh, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of the relationship between the cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction is vital in understanding how cultural competence influences guest experiences in the hospitality industry. The empirical studies reviewed demonstrate a consistent positive correlation between cultural intelligence and guest satisfaction across various hotel types, including upscale, independent, chain, boutique, and resort hotels. These findings underscore the importance of equipping hotel employees with cultural competence skills to effectively navigate diverse guest interactions and deliver satisfactory service experiences. However, there are still conceptual, contextual, and geographical gaps that warrant further exploration. Future research should delve into the underlying mechanisms of cultural intelligence, extend the investigation to include diverse hotel segments and global regions, and explore the interplay between cultural intelligence and other factors impacting guest satisfaction. Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural intelligence shapes guest satisfaction and inform tailored strategies for enhancing guest experiences in the hospitality industry.

Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Further research should focus on advancing theoretical frameworks that elucidate the mechanisms through which cultural intelligence influences guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Scholars could explore the moderating and mediating effects of cultural intelligence on factors such as service quality, customer engagement, and loyalty. By developing robust theoretical models, researchers can provide a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between cultural competence and guest satisfaction, contributing to the theoretical advancement of hospitality management literature.

Practice

Hospitality organizations should prioritize the integration of cultural intelligence training programs into their employee development initiatives. These programs should not only focus on enhancing employees' cultural knowledge but also emphasize the development of cultural mindfulness and adaptability skills. Moreover, hotels should invest in creating diverse and inclusive work environments that foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation among employees. By equipping staff with the necessary cultural competence, hotels can deliver more personalized and culturally sensitive services, ultimately enhancing guest satisfaction and loyalty.

Policy

Government bodies and industry associations should advocate for the inclusion of cultural intelligence training requirements within the accreditation and certification standards for hospitality professionals. This would ensure that cultural competence becomes a fundamental

competency expected of all hotel employees, from frontline staff to senior management. Additionally, policymakers should incentivize hotels to invest in cultural intelligence training through grants, subsidies, or tax incentives. By institutionalizing cultural intelligence initiatives at a policy level, policymakers can promote the development of a culturally competent workforce within the hospitality industry, leading to improved guest satisfaction and overall service quality.

Overall, by embracing these recommendations, stakeholders in the hospitality industry can leverage the relationship between cultural intelligence of hotel employees and guest satisfaction to drive positive outcomes for both guests and businesses. Through theoretical advancements, practical interventions, and policy initiatives, the industry can foster a more inclusive and culturally aware hospitality environment, enhancing guest experiences and ensuring long-term success in an increasingly diverse global marketplace.

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