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Performance Enhancement of the Catering Information Systems in e-hotels, through ICT Interventions

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Abstract

Prevailing trends of globalising world markets, along with their Information and Communication Technology (ICT) anchor, pose a critical challenge to the local hotel industry. In order to maintain competitiveness in the world scene, this industry urgently needs to adopt e-commerce, in its basic unit of function, the hotel into e-hotels. Good business sense though demands controlled change whose elements are clearly understood, in order to optimise resources, and maximise the desired positive results. It is crucial therefore to fully understand the relationship of hotel activities and the related use of ICT. For this reason, attention is spotlighted upon the Catering Information System (CIS) for food, beverages, conferencing, banqueting, and rooming, products and services. A descriptive field-setting inquiry that relies on the sample cross-sectional survey research design is used in this study. Cluster, stratified, and simple random sampling procedures are assembled into a complex random sampling design, through the use of the proportional allocation method. The broad spectrum of hotel strata by star rating and therefore scale and quality of operation is probed to attain a full understanding of the industry. Credible generalisable scientific theory regarding the use of ICT in e-hotels, results. The CIS, though seemingly heavily loaded on localised physical operations, is found to be quite dependent on information flows. It is seen to be distinctly responsive to the use of ICT, which impulse compels variable improvement of performance along the elements of this CIS. Recipe costing systems, and stock control systems are the recommended most responsive points of intervention. They are followed by rooming, and then sequentially: conferencing and banqueting, followed by electric points of sale, with automated mini-bartending in last.

Key words: efficiency, e-hotels, information and communication technology, catering information systems

INTRODUCTION

In a globalising world it matters little where a business is located spatially within the world geo-political landscape, as national boundaries have become rather diffuse and are no longer able to guarantee localised monopolies (Molenaar 2002). In fact hospitality institutions and more specifically hotels in Kenya are confronting growing competition from their counterparts more proximally located in the Americas, Asia and Europe from where most customers for our local tourist trade emanate from (Economic Survey 2002, 2003).

In these alternative hotels, marketing and operations have integrated ICT and particularly internet well to their advantage as they are able to reach customers faster and facilitate consultation or inquiries, choice and decision making in a one-on-one marketing approach (Evans & Laskin 1994; laurak 2000; Murphy, Olam, Schegg, & Frey 2003). A failure of local hotels to adapt into e-hotels will inevitably result in even more drastically eroded international market share.

It is critical then that urgent measures to transform local hotels into e-hotels are put in place (Cline 2000; Jeong, Haemoon, & Gregoire 2003; Gilbert & Powell-Perry 2004). The move though must be driven by accurate empirical knowledge of the shortfalls and challenges of the operations of local hotels. Naturally, such knowledge can only be obtained from systematic inquiry of the local hotels and one that isolates homogenous activity components of these hotels such as the seven dimensions of the CAPITA construct of hotels, in order for incisive, authentic information that is erstwhile lacking and one that supports clear decision making to emerge (Maringa 2007).

Such detail and circumstantial uniqueness would also reveal penetrating need levels and peculiarities that would on their part suggest very specific interventions. These then are able to decisively re-orient hotels into effective competitive e-hotels capable of re-capturing the otherwise waningglobal market share. The expected positive critical contribution of the hospitality and tourism industry to the local economies would then result.

Aims and Objectives

Research here seeks to determine the relationship if any, that obtains between hotel operations and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) inputs for improved service delivery at the Catering Information Systems (CIS) activity level. Two mutually supplementary hypotheses are set forth to guide this inquiry. The first one, a relational scientific hypothesis is the null hypothesis, and it assumes the following form: $H_0$: There is no relationship between the use of Information and Communication Technology and performance at the Catering Information Systems in e-hotels.

The supplementary hypothesis selected for use here is an alternative hypothesis, and on its part assumes the following form: $H_1$: There is a relationship between the use of Information and Communication Technology and performance at the Catering Information Systems in e-hotels.

In testing these hypotheses, premium is accorded to detail, that allows the functions of the CIS and their respective dispositions to ICT to emerge. In this way a perspicaciously particularised panacea to specific need areas and levels, and a carefully prioritised ICT intervention can be formulated.