



Aspects of Electronic Customer Relationship Management and Guest Satisfaction: A Perspective of 4-Star Hotels in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

Key among the aims of many service organizations are to establish and maintain stronger relationships with their customers. In recent times, organizations building strong communication networks with their customers by means of new electronic technologies to facilitate this process. The ultimate aim is to develop customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention. However, customer satisfaction and loyalty have been an issue for many hotels in the hospitality industry. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to establish the effect of aspects of e-CRM such as trust, convenience and security on customer satisfaction among classified hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya. A descriptive cross-sectional study of 384 customers through self-administered questionnaires was conducted. All variables were measured using constructs developed from the literature. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the reliability of the constructs. Pearson correlation technique was used to establish interrelationships between the study variables. The findings of the study revealed significant direct relationships between trust, convenience, and security of online transactions and customer satisfaction. The study recommends to the management of classified 4-star hotels to ensure that their online platforms have major tools such as regular review of websites and customers' privacy that would ensure that services and transactions are believable and trusted.

Keywords: electronic customer relationship management, convenience, security, trust.

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1.0 Introduction

The use of Electronic Customer Relationship Management (e-CRM) in achieving customer satisfaction, profitability, competitive advantage and allegiance has gained popularity among business entities (Mang'anyi, Khabala, Krishna, Govender, 2017; Jamali, Mehrabadi and Pouri, 2017). The uses to which e-CRM can be put keeps changing and it is often in line with increased growth of internet usage, the development and use of new internet and web technologies (Kuster, Vila and Canales, 2016; Dolly and Pruthi, 2014; Khan & Khawaja, 2013). Instead of the tradition where a customer could acquire information from the organization manually, today organizations are interrelating with clients across the globe using technology through the Internet where transactions are based on e-mails, information systems and World Wide Web (Khan & Khawaja 2013). CRM is a widespread business and marketing strategy that combines electronic tools, processes, and other business activities around the customer. It assist establishments to implement collaborative, personalized and significant communication with customers through electronic and traditional networks (Cherapanukron, 2017; Milovic, 2012). The procedures of customer relationship management are being largely applied within marketing and sales business units of major commercial organizations (Johnson *et al.*, 2012).

The e-CRM applications aim at providing additional value for customers using the organization's website. The e-CRM is a part of the organization's general CRM strategy to manage customer interaction regardless of the time, the network the customer chooses, and with the increasing global penetration of the Internet, e-CRM has become progressively more popular as a communication tool, which is also used as a relationship-building channel (Lam *et al.*, 2013). As indicated by Cherapanukron, 2017; Pavithira, 2010), e-CRM is the utilization of data and communication technology to improve client benefit regarding scale and degree. An example is 24-hours-a-day web-banking, which takes triple increment in scale contrasted with the working hours of a bank's physical office. The increase trendy scope is manifested in offering value-added banking services online. The capability of e-CRM for building productive client connections can only be realized if the organization is ordered in such a way that it can rapidly and effectively react to client demands. It is basic that customer requests are handled across different communication channels, involving different organizational units (Salahi and Mehr, 2009).

To understand satisfaction in the web context, we need to have a clear understanding of what is meant by customer satisfaction. According to Faris, Bendle, Pferifer, Reibstein, (2010), customer satisfaction is define as a measure of how products and services supplied by a company meets or surpass customer expectation. Customer satisfaction. is again define by (Faris *et. al.*, 2010) as the number of customers, or percentage of total customers, whose reported experience with a firm, its products, or its services rating exceeds specified satisfaction goals.

Every service organization aims at establishing and maintaining a firm relationship with its customers and this has recently pulled an ever-increasing attention of both academia and hospitality industry practitioners (Kuster, *et. al.*, 2016). Many organizations have invested more in the application of new marketing strategies whose core function is to create and maintain firm communication network with their customers and using new technological knowhow to facilitate the process (Jamali, Mehrabadi and Pouri, 2017). The ultimate aim is to advance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention in the hotels However, customer satisfaction and hence loyalty has been an issue for many

organizations operating in the hospitality industry. Past research has relied heavily on CRM and thus little has been done on the effect of e-CRM on customer satisfaction among hotels, even when e-CRM has been defined as the application of technology to increase the scale and scope of customer service, satisfaction and thereby develop customer loyalty (Cherapanukron, 2017). While the importance of e-CRM has been researched extensively, there is inadequacy of research efforts in this area and specifically among hotels in Kenya. This research is, therefore, an effort to examine the influence of e-CRM on customer satisfaction among the classified hotels in the Kenyan context.

The main aim of the study is to examine the direct effects of selected aspects of e-CRM (i.e. trust, convenience, and security of online transactions) on customer satisfaction among classified hotels in Nairobi City County of Kenya.

The research was guided by the conceptual framework illustrated in figure 1 below:

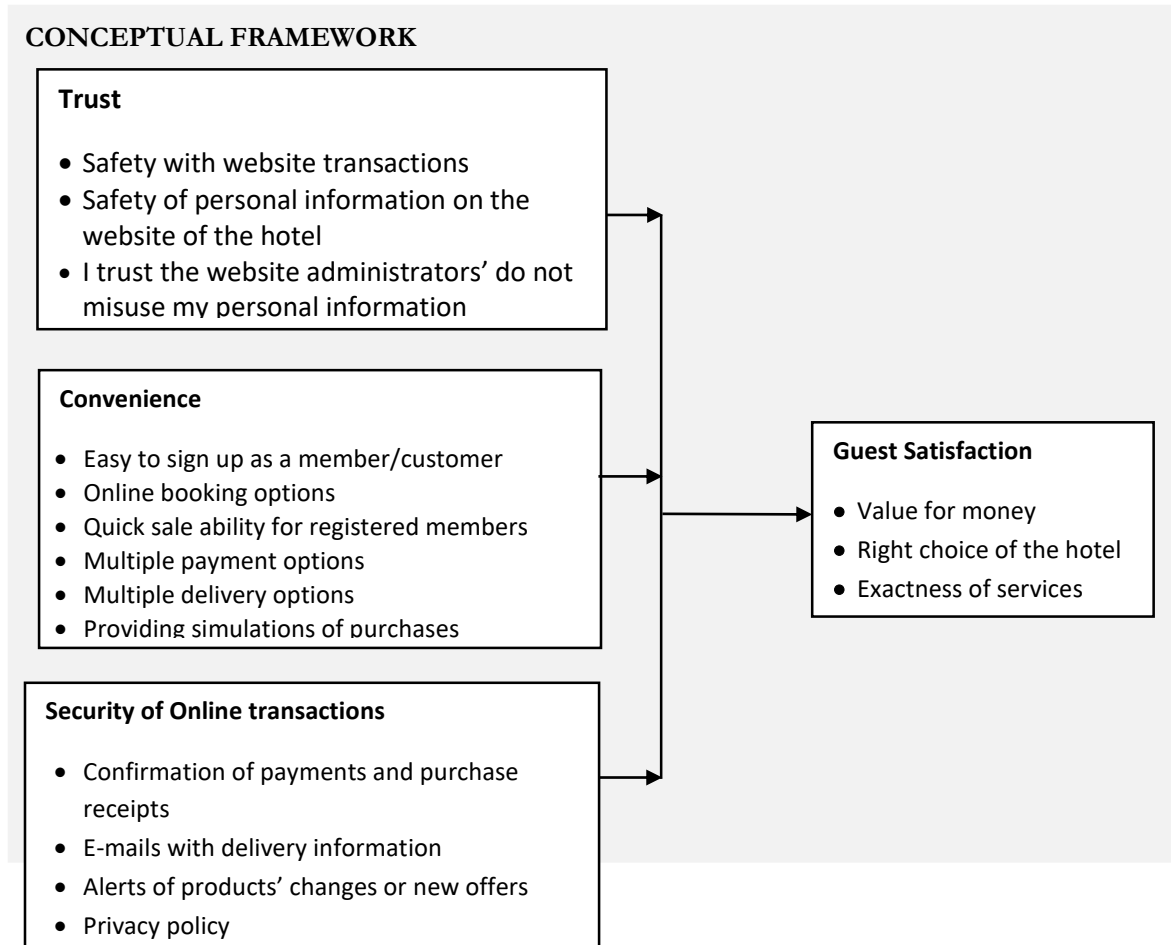


Figure 1: The Influence of the Direct Effects of Selected Aspect of E-CRM on Guest Satisfaction

The increasing usage of e-CRM and its alarming failure rate, call for a better understanding of the relationship between e-CRM and its immediate purpose of customer satisfaction (Nguyen & Mutum, 2012). The introduction of electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) structures, was simply to create and manage long-lasting customer relationships has been a key development in marketing. Therefore towards remaining competitive in this internet-based environment it is important to attract new customers (Mang'unyi, et al., 2017; (Cherapanukron, 2017) and increase customer's retention is crucial to the implementation of e-CRM. The study's conceptual framework is constructed to determine the factors that affect customer satisfaction toward online shopping and to determine the effect of convenience, security and trust as value creation factors affecting customer satisfaction pertaining online transaction (see Figure 1).

Convenience is the extent to which a customer feels that the web site is simple, intuitive, and user-friendly (Hadeer et. al, 2019). Accessibility to information and transaction processes are important precursors to the successful completion of transactions (Rosário, 2015). It is therefore expected that a guest can easily sign up as a member or customer, and have easy access to online booking and have multiple payment options. Again convenience is looked

at as guest anticipation of a quick sales ability for registered members, have multiple deliveries and the website providing simulation of purchases (Ismail et al. 2014). Based on the relationship between convenience and customer satisfaction toward online shopping, the following hypothesis can be stated for this study.

H₁: There is no positive relationship between convenience regarding online shopping and customer's satisfaction.

Security is a set of processes and programs to validate the information source and confirm the reliability and privacy of the information. The problems that consumer face in terms of security and privacy have led some individuals to be unwilling to use electronic transactions because of fear and concern about security issues and distrust of the benefits of online information systems (Faraoni, Rialti, Zollo and Pellicelli, 2018; Winnie, 2014;). Studies from Faraoni et al. 2018; Özgüven, 2011 and Ieng 2008, finds that security poses a major threat to online utilisation, and affects the use of e-payment systems. Similarly, in online shopping, customers waver while buying due to security issues (Belás et al. 2016). Therefore, it can be concluded that a secure and safe transaction provided by stakeholders significantly affects customer's satisfaction. While Mang'unyi et al. (2018), also conclude that there is a significant relationship between the dimensions of e-CRM (security) and customer satisfaction. It can be indicated that the availability of expected safety is the main reason for maintaining customers and not moving to alternative websites (Jamali et al. 2017).

H₂: There is no significant relationship between security and consumer satisfaction toward online shopping.

Trust is defined as a function of the degree of risk involved in online transactions, and the outcome of trust is to reduce perceived risk, leading to positive intentions or reliance toward e-payment adoption (Thaichon Lobo and Mitsis, 2014; Yousafzai et al., 2003). Prior studies found trust to be a major factor influencing customers' willingness to conduct e-commerce transactions and engage in online exchanges of goods and services (Faraoni et al. 2018; Gefen, 2000). Customers' trust in an internet atmosphere is very important as there is little assurance that the online vendor will desist from unpleasant, unethical, and opportunistic behaviour such as unfair pricing, presenting inaccurate information, distributing personal data, and purchase activity without prior permission (Gefen, 2000). Based on the above views, the researchers propose that trust in e-transaction is positively related to customer's satisfaction. According to studies conducted by different researchers ;(Bezhovski et al. 2016; Rosário, 2015; (Dolly and Pruthi, 2014; Clifford et al. 2012;) it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the convenience of website design and the customer satisfaction and e-loyalty; where the first study was applied on a sample of online shopping customers.

H₃: There is no significant relationship between trust and consumers satisfaction toward online shopping.

2.0 Methodology

The descriptive survey design method was adopted for the study. A structured, a questionnaire was used to collect data from customers of 4-star classified hotels in Nairobi City County of Kenya.

Study units and Research instrument

A total of 384 customers from 10 4-star classified hotels based in Nairobi City County were requested to participate in the study. Out of the 384 questionnaires given to the participants, 44 were incomplete, leaving 340, which were used for the study. This shows a response rate of 88.5%.

The study used a self-administered questionnaire to gather the primary data. The questionnaire was designed with questions based on a Likert scale for easier and faster data collection, coding, and analysis (Kothari, 2012). The questionnaire had three parts. Part One was used to collect data on respondents' bio-information. The second part comprised of three sections, which were designed to collect data on the study independent variables. Section one, two, and three of part two were used to collect data on trust with e-CRM transactions, the convenience of e-CRM transactions, and security of e-CRM transactions respectively. Part Three was designed to collect data on customer satisfaction. All study constructs were determined based on related literature review and were all assessed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scales of this study revealed reliability coefficients of 0.83 (trust), 0.72 (convenience), 0.79 (security) and 0.89 (customer satisfaction) which were all above the threshold level of 0.70 (Creswell, 2012) thus, acceptable.

Data analyses

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients were performed for each scale. The study hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation analysis.

RESULTS

Demographic profiles of the respondents

A little over half (56.5%) of the total respondents were female and male accounted for 43.5%. Moreover, about 81.5% of the participants were aged between 35-44 years. Regarding the number of times participants had visited the hotels, about 52.2% had visited for the first time. Concerning the level of education, the majority (59.8%) had a bachelor's degree indicating that participants in this study were educated and therefore could easily respond to questions in the questionnaires.

Trust about hotel online transactions

Means and standard deviations of trust with online transactions construct are presented in Table I. Overall, as indicated participants in this study agreed with all items of this construct (Overall $M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.746$). In addition, findings revealed that participants ranked high the fact that they trusted website administrators of the establishments to keep their personal information confidential ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.68$).

Table I. Descriptive results of trust with hotels online transactions

Trust	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>MR</i>
I trust the website with my personal information	4.32	0.68	1
I trust the website administrators of the hotel keep my personal information confidential	4.25	0.89	2
I trust the website transactions of the hotel	4.12	0.72	3
Average of all items	4.23	0.76	

Note: $N = 340$, $M = \text{Mean}$, $SD = \text{Standard Deviation}$, $MR = \text{Mean Ranking}$

In comparing the means and the standard deviations of the independent variables of trust with online transactions found in Table 1, it was found that there was a significant influence of trust regarding CRM and guest satisfaction of online transactions. The independent variable with the highest mean with the least variability was ranged first, I trust the website with my personal information ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.68$), followed by I trust the website administrators of the hotel keep my personal information confidential ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.89$) which was ranged second. In addition, it was found that almost a quarter of the respondents agreed to the fact that I trust the website transactions of hotels as an aspect of CRM had great influence ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.72$) on guest satisfaction but was the least ranked. This finding supports (Faraoni et al. 2018; Gefen, 2000) studies that, trust and beliefs include online consumers' beliefs and expectancies about characteristics of the online seller. The online consumer's desire online vendors willingness and ability to act on the consumers' interests, to be honest in transactions and to be able of providing the ordered goods as promised.

Convenience with online transactions

Descriptive results of the quality of support services construct are presented in Table II. As shown, participants in this study recorded the highest level of agreement with items of the convenience of online transactions. Also, participants indicated that the hotels had different cover booking options ($M = 4.75, SD=0.68$) and that it was easy to sign up as a member ($M = 4.22, SD = 0.82$). The overall mean for all the items was 4.39 with a standard deviation of 0.82 indicating that respondents agreed with all items.

Table II. Descriptive results of convenience with hotels online transactions

Convenience	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>MR</i>
Different options of booking for covers are available	4.75	0.68	1
Different payment methods to choose are available on the hotels' website	4.35	0.99	2
The transactions were easy to complete			
It was easy to sign in as a member	4.25	0.89	3
	4.22	0.72	4
Total	4.39	0.82	

Note: $N = 340$, $M =$ Mean, $SD =$ Standard Deviation, $MR =$ Mean Ranking

To determine how much convenience was influencing online transactions with the hotel, it was indicated that different options of booking for covers are available had the highest influence ($M = 4, 75, SD = 0.68$) among the co-factors and were ranked first. This was followed by Different payment methods to choose are available on the hotels' website ($M = 4.35, SD = 0.99$) and the transactions were easy to complete ($M = 4.25, SD = 0.89$) and then It was easy to sign in as a member ($M = 4.22, SD = 0.72$). These results are presented in Table II.

These findings indicated that participants viewed Convenience of e-CRM transactions as the extent to which a customer feels that the web site is simple, intuitive, and user-friendly and in line with (Grover, 2011) study. Availability of information and ease of the transaction processes are important precursors to the successful completion of transactions (Rosário, 2015; Cherapanukron, 2017).

Security of hotels' online transactions

Descriptive results of the analysis of the respondents' data in relation to security are presented in Table III. Results revealed that participants indicated that the hotels' website was secure for their personal information ($M=4.85$, $SD = 0.89$) and was not misusing their personal information ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.68$). Overall, participants registered a mean of 4.30 with a standard deviation of 0.60. This finding indicates that there is a significant relationship between security and consumer's satisfaction toward online shopping (Mang'unyi et al. 2018) which means that there is a positive relationship between security of e-CRM and customer satisfaction. Therefore, it can be said that safe and secure transactions have a significant effect on consumer's satisfaction (Jamali et al. 2017).

Table III. Security of hotels online transactions

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>MR</i>
The hotel's website is secure for my information	4.85	0.89	1
The hotel' website does not misuse personal information	4.25	0.68	2
I received confirmation of my money that I paid through my email	4.07	0.36	3
I received alerts of products changes or new offer	4.01	0.47	4
Total	4.30	0.60	

Note: $N = 340$, $M = \text{Mean}$, $SD = \text{Standard Deviation}$, $MR = \text{Mean Ranking}$

Customer satisfaction

Descriptive results of the analysis of the participants' data in relation to customer satisfaction are presented in Table IV. Results revealed that participants' felt that they had received value for their money ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 0.89$) and that the choice of the hotel was the right thing they had done ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.68$). Overall, participants demonstrated agreement with items of customer satisfaction ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.87$). In light of these findings, it is apparent that participants in this study were satisfied.

Table IV. Customer satisfaction

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>MR</i>
The choice of the hotel is the right thing I did	4.25	0.68	2
I have received value for the money I invested in the holiday	4.85	0.89	1
Services of this hotel are exactly as expected	4.13	0.87	3
Total	4.41	0.81	

Note: $N = 340$, $M = \text{Mean}$, $SD = \text{Standard Deviation}$, $MR = \text{Mean Ranking}$

This finding confirms studies of (Reichheld & Schefter 2000; Galbreath, 2002; Yang & Peterson 2004; Anderson & Mittal; 2000) which revealed that the primary aim of e-CRM is to acquire consumer loyalty, improve consumer retention, leading to repeat business and increased profitability.

Testing of study hypotheses

The first hypothesis (H_{01}) suggested a no significant relationship between trust with online transactions and customer satisfaction. As presented in Table V, the correlation between trust and customer satisfaction was statistically significant, ($r(338) = .79, p < .001$, two-tailed). Correlation results revealed a direct relationship between trust with hotels' online transactions and customer satisfaction. Thus, H_{01} was rejected demonstrating that an increase in trust would result in an increase in customer satisfaction.

Table V. Trust and customer satisfaction

		Trust	CS
Trust	r	1	0.79*
	Sig.		.000
	n	340	340
CS	r	0.79*	1
	Sig.	.000	
	n	340	340

Note: CS = Customer Satisfaction, * Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The second hypothesis (H₀₂) suggested a no significant relationship between the convenience of online transactions and customer satisfaction. As presented in Table VI, the correlation between convenience and customer satisfaction was statistically significant, ($r(338) = .56, p < .001$, two-tailed). Correlation results revealed a direct relationship between convenience and customer satisfaction. Thus, H₀₂ was rejected demonstrating that the more convenient the establishment's online transactions get the more customers would be satisfied.

Table VI. Convenience and customer satisfaction

		Convenience	CS
Convenience	r	1	0.56
	Sig.		.000
	n	340	340
CS	r	0.56	1
	Sig.	.000	
	n	340	340

Note: CS = Customer satisfaction, *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The third hypothesis of the study (H_{03}) suggested a no significant relationship between the security of online transactions as an aspect of e-CRM and customer satisfaction. As presented in Table VII, the correlation between the security of online transactions and customer satisfaction was statistically significant, ($r(338) = .77, p < .001$, two-tailed). Correlation results revealed a direct relationship between the security of online transactions and customer satisfaction. Thus, H_{03} was rejected demonstrating that the more customers would feel secure with online transactions the more they would be satisfied.

Table VII. Security of online transactions and customer satisfaction

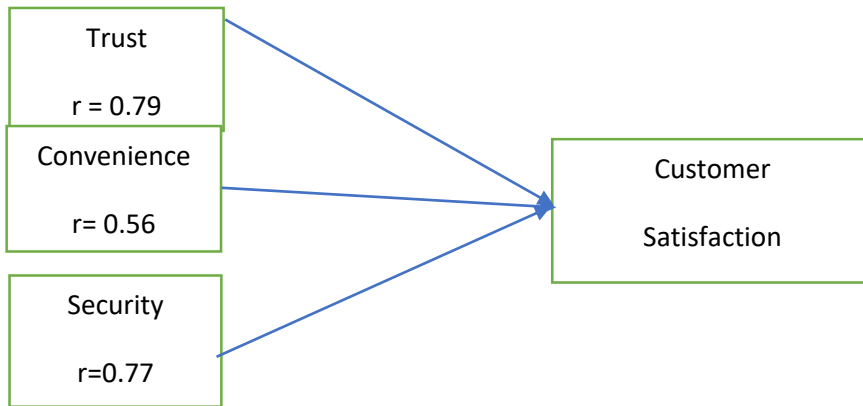
		Security	CS
	r	1	.77*
Security	Sig.		.000
	N	340	340
	R	.77*	1
C S	Sig.	.000	
	N	340	340

Note: CS= Customer Satisfaction, *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. Conclusion

Based on the study objectives and the findings presented, the following conclusions are made. First, trust with online transactions as an aspect of e-CRM is a component of customer satisfaction among classified hotels. Second, convenient online transactions as an aspect e-CRM is an important part that forms the whole customer satisfaction package. Finally, the security of customers' information when dealing with online transactions is a vital facet of customer satisfaction and believability.

The hypothesis that were stated for the study have the highest significant influence on customer satisfaction in the study area and were rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that all the selected aspect of e-CRM were very significant in affecting customer satisfaction ($p < .001$). Again, trust have the highest effect and considers the most important construct on customer satisfaction of on-line transaction in the study area because it was found to have the strongest r.



5. Recommendations

The management of classified hotels needs to ensure that their online platforms possess all the necessary tools that would ensure services and transactions are believable and trusted. To this end, establishments should ensure that their websites are reviewed regularly in order to accommodate customers' needs. Management of these establishments needs to ensure that their online platforms are equipped with options for customers to feel okay. Online platforms need to be secured. Customers' privacy needs to be seriously considered. To this end, managers of classified hotels need to ensure that administrators of websites do keep customer's information secure.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has some limitations that needs to be addressed in future research. The present work focused on customers among classified hotels, there is a need for research on other hospitality establishments. Further, data were only collected from classified hotels in Nairobi City County using structured questionnaires only. There is need to triangulate in future research to capture in-depth information. Further, as the study used cross-sectional design to collect data, longitudinal research is required to identify true changes in customer satisfaction.

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