

Product Quality as a Determinant of Spa Choice Decisions Amongst Customers in Eldoret Town, Kenya

Koki K. Faith¹, Ariya George² & Sempele Catherine¹

¹University of Eldoret, Department of Hotel and Hospitality Management, Box 30100 –1125 Eldoret, Kenya

²University of Eldoret, Department of Tourism, Travel and Tour Operations Management, Box 30100–1125 Eldoret, Kenya

Corresponding Author's Email address: kokifaith@gmail.com

Abstract

The choice decisions individuals make to visit a spa is not current. Over a thousand years ago people sought spas for health and cure through the use of communal baths, to socialize, worship, or relax until when the Greeks and Romans arrived that the art was taken to a higher notch where spas were also used for recreational purposes. There is limited evidence of published research on the determinants of spa choice decisions amongst spa customers in Kenya. Thus, this paper aimed to understand spa-goers' choice decisions and contemplations in selecting spa amenities. The study sought to assess the influence of product quality on customers' spa choice decisions. The hypothesis 'product quality influences customer's spa choice decisions' steered the study. Questionnaire was used to collect data. The target population was comprised of 4004 spa customers in Eldoret town. 311 spa customers participated in the study. Descriptive and inferential statistics which included Pearson correlation and regression analysis were employed to examine data collected. The findings indicated that product quality was a very important determinant of customers' spa choice decisions. A unit change in product quality resulted in 1.088 change in customers' spa choice decisions. The correlation analysis results also revealed that product quality had a fairly strong positive relationship with customer's spa choice decisions ($r = .768$, $p\text{-value} < .05$). The study concluded that product quality influences customers' spa choice decisions. The study recommended that spa operators should follow up on customers' product quality contentment and also strive for product consistency. The findings from the research are to benefit the spa operators, policymakers, the public, the private sector, the government, and other stakeholders.

Key words: Product quality, Spa services, Customers' spa choice decisions

INTRODUCTION

The term 'spa' is believed to have stemmed from the Belgian city of Spa during the 14th century, which concurring to van Tubergen and Van Der Linden (2002), could have stemmed from the Latin term 'spagere' (meaning to sprinkle, scattering or moisturize) or the Latin expression 'sanitas per aquas' (meaning wellbeing by means of water). Through the olden days, the Roman cleansing beliefs progressively transformed in the direction of a spot for recreation and leisure, instead of a spot for curative purposes.

As time went on, the concept of spa spread worldwide with more advancement in Europe, India, China, Southeast Asian, Thailand and Africa. Spa facilities were developed in Europe to deliver therapies and amenities for therapeutic and well-being to enhance the life status and well-being of individuals (Costa, Quintela & Mendes, 2015). Various researches in the leisure industry and hospitality arena have explored the important qualities that influence individuals' spa choice criteria, especially concerning hotel spas (Dimitrovski, Todorović, 2015; Kucukusta, Pang & Chui 2013).

Kucukusta, Pang and Chui (2013), in their study on spas discovered that determinants of spa choice decisions are the attributes that drive customers to one spa facility over the other. The success of spas in attracting customers depends upon the quality of the essential benefits that it offers. The intention of the complete development of quality execution and perfection ought to facilitate visitors' fulfillment and accomplishment of healthier business results (Inic, Milutinovic, Jergovic, & Vucelja, 2010).

Kucukusta and Guillet (2014) postulated that, in spa service delivery, product quality was considered as the most important attribute of customers' spa choice decisions regarding spa selection criteria. This implies that quality functions as a central part in well-being business and well-being tourism, mostly in spas.

A spa is a comparatively recent perception of travel in Kenya; thus the launch of spa resorts and several leisure centers and health tourism in the country (Okech, 2014). According to Okech (2014), the components spawning intensified the call for the spa leisure industry in Kenya are; persons longing to grow and stay robust and in good physical shape, an energetic mature cohort, the continual pursuit for the flawless body as well as the spending on well-being, magnificence products, and cures to attain flawless health.

In recent times, spas have transformed far away from the limited usage of 'cleansing in warm air stream for healing reasons' to inclusive diversity of layout, provision, amenity, and product categories. This includes steam baths, workout and wellbeing, training (e.g. yoga training) and bodywork to individual beautification services for instance, hairdressing, manicures and cosmetic treatment.

According to Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, 2016), product quality consumed in delivering spa therapies should be carbon-based and/or biological, should be biodegradable, should be ethically sourced and manufactured, should not be exaggerated, and without exploitation of people or the environment clients. Apart from the distinctive bodywork varieties and therapies executed by proficient and well-qualified therapists, spas also offer herbal products and treatments for their customers. Presently, body scrub and beauty treatments as well as Thai massage, aromatherapy and foot pressure massage are the frequently employed therapies in a majority of spas (Bordoloi, Begado, Jacka & Khiewsanun, 2014). Customers have high expectations when it comes to product and the most important is to maintain the generally accepted level of quality standards. Terry (2007) postulates that spa product quality, which entails the attribute of the products consumed and the therapies presented in spas, are as well key influential attributes of spa selection decisions amongst spa-goers. The fragrance of scented oils would ring a bell to a spa visitor of an incident at a spa.

Majority of spa customers consider natural and organic spa products along with the prices offered as an important determining factor when purchasing spa products

(Bordoloi *et al.*, 2014). The brand name and brand identity of products is also used as a standard for predicting the quality of a spa. The brand name element is regarded as being of significant importance to spa consumers (De Chernatony, 2010; Esch, Langner, Schmitt & Geus, 2006; Gázquez-Abad & Martínez-López, 2016; Keller, Parameswaran, & Jacob, 2011). Fitzsimons, Chartrand and Fitzsimons (2008) postulated that the nature of a product and buyers' intuitions of the product can sway their behavior. The use of a specific product brand by a spa indicates the level of quality a customer may expect from the spa.

Consequently, spas should offer products that suit every diversity of spa customer. The oils, creams and actual lotions signify a critical factor for spa consumption, particularly when customers' choice decisions are influenced by the promise of spa products, so much that the customer is motivated for spa consumptions in the first place. Hence, the study sought to assess the influence of product quality on customers' spa choice decisions in Eldoret town Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a mixed methodological approach that included the use of qualitative and quantitative research design. Questionnaires were used to collect data. The content, construct, and face validity of the questionnaires were verified to capture the needed data. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. The scores were then correlated and the coefficient of reliability was found to be at 0.807(80.7%), hence, an adequate reliability index. The instrument was thus found to be valid and reliable.

The research was carried out in Eldoret town, Kenya. The target population comprised of 4004 spa customers from four well-established spa facilities currently offering spa services in Eldoret town. Six hundred and ten respondents from spa A, 1,344 respondents from spa B, 710 respondents from spa C and finally 1,340 respondents from spa D were surveyed. Three hundred and fifty-one spa customers from the four spas were randomly selected to participate in this study where a representative sample of 53 respondents from spa A, 119 respondents from spa B, 63 respondents from spa C and finally 116 respondents from spa D were included in the research study.

The questionnaires used to collect data were anonymous thus brought the aspect of confidentiality amongst respondents. This, therefore, ensured respondents' freedom to give their honest perceptions. The researchers visited all the four spas at different times collecting data from the respondents within 3 months. Out of the three hundred and fifty-one questionnaires issued, three hundred and eleven (88.6%) spa customers responded. Information gathered from the respondents was examined. Descriptive and inferential statistics which included Pearson correlation and regression analysis were used to analyze data collected using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The findings obtained were presented descriptively using tables and charts.

RESULTS

Respondents' Demographic Information

The respondents' demographic information included the respondent's nationality, gender, age bracket, marital status, education level and monthly income. The findings on respondents' demographic information were presented in tables and graphs.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Attributes	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Nationality		
Kenyan	265	85.2
USA	9	2.9
German	1	.3
Indian	36	11.6
Total	311	100
Gender		
Male	102	33.0
Female	209	67.0
Total	311	100
Age		
25 yrs & below	41	13.0
Between 26- 30yrs	85	27.0
Between 31-35yrs	86	28.0
Between 36-40yrs	40	13.0
above 40yrs	59	19.0
Total	311	100
Marital status		
Married	182	58.5
Single	121	38.9
Widowed	4	1.3
Divorced	3	1.0
Separated	1	.3
Total	311	100

Source: Research Data

A total of 311 spa respondents took part in the study out of which 265(85.2%) were Kenya citizens, followed by an average of 36(11.6%) who were India nationals. A few of the respondents were from the USA 9(2.9%) and German 1(0.3%). Two hundred and nine of the respondents were female while the remaining 102 were male. This accounted for 67.0% and 33.0% respectively. Most of the respondents were aged in the late 20s and early 30s. This was accounted for by 85(27.0%) and 86(28.0%) of the respondents aged between 26-30 years and 31-35 years respectively. An average of the respondents involved aged above 40 years 59(19.0%). Further, less than 13% of the respondents were aged between 25 years and below and 36- 40 years respectively. Most of the respondents were married 182(58.5%) followed by an average of 121(38.9%) respondents who were single.

Most of the spa customers had a bachelor's degree (45%). Those who had a master's degree accounted for 25% while those with technical college education accounted for 18%. The least number of respondents (1%) were from the primary education level.

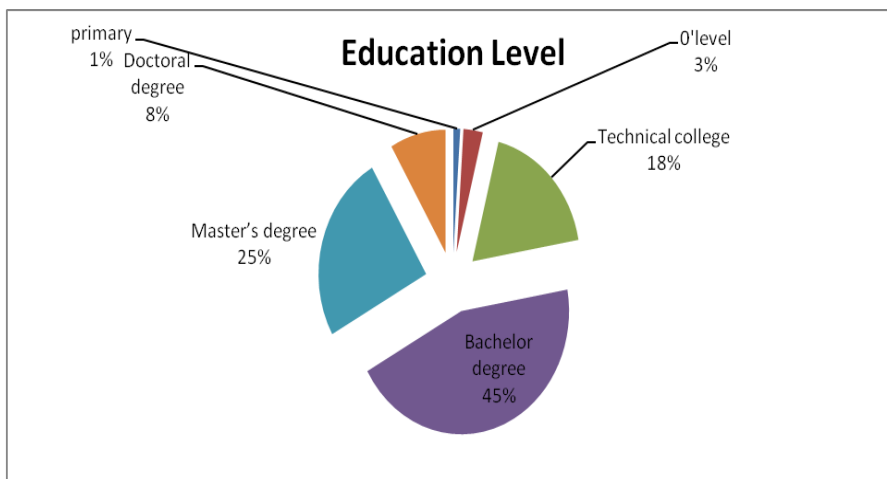


Figure 1: Respondents' Education Level

Information related to the respondents' monthly income was also sought. The findings revealed that respondents in the current study had more money that majority of them opted to use it on spa services at their own expense. This was ascertained by 38.60% who earned more than Kshs 51,000 followed by an average number of 22.50% who earned between Kshs 41,000-50,000. The least of the respondents were those who earned Kshs 10,000-20,000 and below (4.5%).

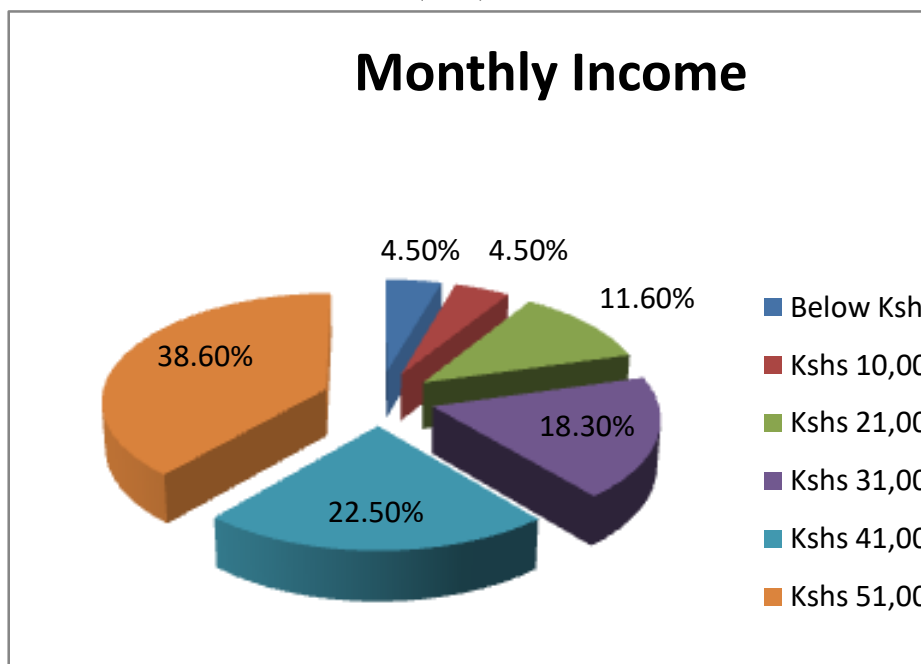


Figure 2: Respondents' Monthly Income

This finding shows that current spa clientele were largely comprised of the female gender. It could be because women were more conscious of their appearance than men hence likely to visit spas more often than men. Also, this study shows that youthful individuals of age brackets between 26 and 35 years were the top spa customers. This could be because the youthful individuals desired to stay younger by keeping their health fine by observing a healthful way of life.

Also, the findings show that most of the respondents who visited the spa of their choice had families or married and thus likely to visit the spa of their choice with their children or spouses. On the same note, the findings revealed that most of the respondents had higher education thus knowledgeable and in a better position to understand their choice decisions of visiting a spa. Further, the findings revealed that the economic ability of the respondents was good enough to afford spa services.

These findings concur with Elrod, Stanley, Cudney and Fisher (2015) who noticed that women were concerned about their skin than men since they wanted to appear youthful; hence, more likely to be the most spa-goers. Besides, Kucukusta and Guillet (2014), in their survey on spa customers in Hong Kong, the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, and North America noted that youthful individuals of age bracket between 25 and 35 years embodied the top spa customers. Also, Canadian Tourism Commission, (CTC 2006 a), stated that the most significant gains pursued by spa consumers are: to release stress and relax, be pampered, get a break from everyday life, restore one's mental health, body and spirit and socialize with their spouses and children. On the same note, Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC, 2006 b), in their search on spas revealed that the majority of the spa customers were educated with a bachelor's degree and above and thus far knowledgeable on spa facilities and are further persistent on quality and uniformity of facilities. Further, Elrod et al. (2015) confirmed that the top spa customers were the higher income earners who are probable to engage themselves with the continuing advantages of consuming spa products of good quality that made them look younger.

Factors likely to Influence Customer's Spa Choice Decisions based on Product Quality

The study sought to establish factors likely to influence customer's spa choice decisions based on product quality. To achieve this, respondents were required to express their opinion on their level of satisfaction, revisit intentions and referral on customers' spa choice decisions based on product quality. The responses were rated on a scale of 1-5. Responses were tabulated (table 2) descriptively where percentages, frequencies, mean and standard deviations were used to summarize the study variables. The analysis is as below;

Most of the respondents believed that customer satisfaction on the level of product quality offered in the spas they visited was very important. This was ascertained by 244(78.5%) of the respondents. Sixty-four (20.6%) believed it was important and a few 3(1.0%) were neutral. This attribute had a mean of 4.77 and a standard deviation of 0.441. Two hundred and nine (67.2%) respondents had the opinion that it was very important to revisit the spas of their choice based on product quality. This was followed by an average of 93(29.9%) who believed that it was important. The least of respondents 2(0.6%) thought that it was least important. Revisit intention had a mean of 4.64 and a standard deviation of 0.562. The responses on referrals due to product quality showed that a higher number of the respondents 210(67.5%) believed that it was very important to refer the spa of their choice to friends or relatives. Eighty-four (27%) believed it was important while a few 3(1.0%) believed it was least important. The mean obtained for referrals was 4.6 and a standard deviation of 0.622.

The high response given by the respondents who were satisfied with product quality, likely to revisit and refer the spa of their choice to friends or relatives may be accredited to the fact that the majority of the respondents were female (67%) as compared to male respondents (33%). The mean difference showed that customer

satisfaction (4.77) on product quality had a strong influence on customer's spa choice decisions compared to revisit intention (4.64) and referrals (4.61). Overall, the mean on responses on factors likely to influence customers' spa choice decisions based on product quality was 4.67 implying that customer's spa choice decisions on product quality had an impact on customer satisfaction, revisit and referrals. Therefore, the spa operators should pay more attention to meeting their customer's needs and expectations to ensure customers are contented and thrilled with spa experiences which could lead to more revisit intention and referrals.

Table 2: Responses on factors likely to influence customer's spa choice decisions based on product quality.

Statements on the factors likely to influence customer's spa choice decisions		N.I	L.I	N	I	V. I	Mean	Std. Deviation
Level of customer satisfaction with product quality	F	0	0	3	64	244		
	%	0	0	1.0	20.6	78.5	4.77	0.441
Revisit intentions based on product quality	F	0	2	7	93	209		
	%	0	0.6	2.3	29.9	67.2	4.64	0.562
Referrals due to product quality to friends or relatives	F	0	3	14	84	210		
	%	0	1.0	4.5	27	67.5	4.61	0.622
Composite value							4.67	0.541
n=311								

Key: Scale 1=Not Important (N.I); 2=Least Important (L.I); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Important (I); 5=Very Important (V.I).

These findings are in line with findings by Mandelbaum and Lerner (2008) who postulated that customer satisfaction in customer's choice decisions relies on a measure of how the product quality offered meets or exceeds customer expectations and then forms an opinion on spa selection. Also, Chi and Qu (2008) and Santouridis and Trivellas (2010) perceived that the complete fulfillment of service is a key predecessor of revisiting purpose. Further, Van Hyfte (2009), cited that travelers who were thrilled with spa services in their whole journey were probable to recommend the area to others rather than revisiting it in the future.

The study further sought to establish the attributes related to product quality that influenced customer's spa choice decisions. The interpretation of the findings was done in terms of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The mean difference was used to explain the product attribute considered the most or not important on the respondents' spa choice decisions. The statements were on a scale of 1-5. The implication of the findings was summarized in relation to other studies done on product quality.

Table 2: Respondents Perceptions towards Attributes Related to Product Quality

Attributes Related to Product Quality		N.I	L.I	N	I	V.I	Mean	Std. Deviation
Product scent	F	12	18	17	53	211		
	%	3.9	5.8	5.5	17.0	67.8	4.39	1.078
Product friendliness	F	7	10	9	55	230		
	%	2.3	3.2	2.9	17.7	74	4.58	0.876
Product effectiveness	F	3	5	9	46	248		
	%	1.0	1.6	2.9	14.8	79.7	4.71	0.692
Product brand type	F	3	13	17	49	229		
	%	1.0	4.2	5.5	15.8	73.6	4.57	0.851
Product ease of use	F	3	5	13	59	231		
	%	1.0	1.6	4.2	19.0	74.3	4.64	0.727
Product availability	F	3	3	13	49	243		
	%	1.0	1.0	4.2	15.8	78.1	4.69	0.687
Composite values							4.60	0.819
n=311								

Key: Scale 1=Not Important (N.I); 2=Least Important (L.I); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Important (I); 5=Very Important (V.I)

Most of the respondents had the opinion that product scent 211(67.8%), product friendliness 230(74.0%), product effectiveness 248(79.7%), product brand type 229(73.6%), product ease of use 231(74.3%) and product availability 243(78.1%) were very important attributes in their spa choice decisions. The least of the respondents were those who had the opinion that product scent 12(3.9%), product friendliness 7(2.3%), product effectiveness 3(1.0%), product brand type 3(1.0%), product ease of use 3(1.0%) and product availability 3(1.0%) were not important attributes in spa choice decisions.

The findings indicated that product effectiveness was considered a very important product attribute to majority of the spa respondents. This was supported by a mean of 4.71 which was the highest mean compared to other product attributes. This implied that majority of the respondents' spa choice decisions on product quality were influenced by the promise brought by a spa product on its effectiveness after use during spa treatments. Therefore, spas should consider using products that are of good quality on their customers' treatments that assure effective results. Overall, product quality had an average mean of 4.60 and a standard deviation of 0.819. This implied that product scent, product friendliness, product effectiveness, product brand type, product ease of use and product availability influenced the respondent's spa choice decisions. This shows that product quality was a very important attribute for the majority of respondent's spa choice decisions. This simply implies that spa customers would reject spas that offered inferior products over those that offered products of good quality.

The findings concur with Kucukusta et al. (2013) who postulated that the oils, creams and actual lotions signify a critical factor for spa consumption, particularly when customer's choice decisions are influenced by the promise of spa products, so much that the customer is motivated for spa consumptions in the first place. In addition, the findings are consistent with the results from Terry (2007) who postulate that spa product quality, which entails the attribute of the products consumed and the therapies presented in spas, are as well key influential attributes of spa selection decisions amongst spa-goers. The same is true for Bordoloi et al (2014) in their study on spas

who found a significant and positive relationship between product quality and spa-goers' choice decisions.

The correlation results revealed that product quality had a fairly strong significant relationship with customer's spa choice decisions ($r = .768$, $p\text{-value} < .05$). This hence meant that the respondents had similar perceptions towards attributes related to product quality that influenced customer's spa choice decisions, hence the significant relationship. Further analysis of the relationship between product quality and customer's spa choice decisions revealed that a unit change in product quality would result in a 1.088 change in customer's spa choice decisions. The t-value results also revealed that product quality had a positive significant relationship with customer's spa choice decisions ($t=7.438$, $p=0.000$) at $p<0.05$. These findings imply that a customer's choice decisions on spas of their choice were influenced by the quality of products offered and its promising results thus spas that offered inferior products were disregarded. Therefore, whether a customer was in a different spa of their choice, their feelings towards product quality were similar hence spa operators should pay attention to products they offer to their customers to meet their customers' product expectations and demands.

The researchers also sought to find out respondents' future expectations based on product quality on customer's spa choice decisions. This was meant for the respondents to air out their views, comments or suggestions on what needs to be done or improved in the spa industry in the future. The findings revealed that respondents' future expectations had varied key changes and advancements based on their choice decisions in regards to spas. Out of the total respondents, 217 (70%) of the respondents' future expectation was that there should be product consistency, that is, spa operators should use similar products every other time for customers of varied diversity. Also, 251 (81%) of the respondents' desired separate product treatments for men and female gender that served the same purpose in the provision of spa services. In addition, 198 (64%) of the respondents' wished for spa products based on their skin type. This implied that respondents were more concerned about their physical appearance such that they wanted spa operators to offer products that nourished their skin. These findings are consistent to De Chernatony et al (2010) who postulated that the nature of a product and buyers' intuitions of the product can sway their behavior and that spas should offer products that entreaty every diversity of spa customers.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to assess the influence of product quality on customers' spa choice decisions. From the findings, the study concludes that product quality influences customers' spa choice decisions. Majority of the respondents visited a spa of their choice because the treatments and products offered met their expectations. Further, respondent's value for the quality of spa products and brands of therapies meant that they turned down those spas that offered inferior products. This could imply that product quality signified a critical factor for spa consumption, particularly when the customers' choice decision was influenced by the promise of the products.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that spa operators follow up on their customers' level of contentment with the quality of products offered in spas especially after customers consume spa treatments to find out if they met their expectations and demands. They should also strive to ensure product consistency and the quality of spa products offered

to meet customers' expectations from varied diversity. By doing so, the spa operators will be assured of more customer revisits, referrals, and business growth.

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