

Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in Selected Hotels in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo

Musamba Ponyo Lucien, Dr. Muhammad Kibuuka, Assoc. Prof. Augustine Wandiba, Byenda Muziri Jérémie, Kasereka Sivyvalengana Trésor, Sikitu Bashonga Justin and Yassin Ndaye Chikwanine Ntwali

PhD Student in Management Science. Kampala International University, accountant and lecturer at ISIG Goma, ponyo@isig.ac.cd and lucien.musamba@studmc.kiu.ac.ug <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9112-7652>

Lecturer / Research Manager at Kampala International University, mohammed.kibuuka@kiu.ac.ug

Lecturer in Human resource and supplies management, college of economics and management at Kampala International University, augustine.wandiba@kiu.ac.ug

Lecturer at ISIG Goma byendajeremie@isig.ac.cd

PhD student in management Sciences, International Business. Kampala International University, Business Manager and Lecturer at ULPGL Butembo, tresor.kasereka@studmc.kiu.ac.ug

PhD student in management sciences. Kampala international University and Staff manager of Goma airport, justin.sikitu@studmc.kiu.ac.ug

PhD student at Kampala International University & Lecturer at ISIG Goma
Ntwali.chikwanine@studmc.kiu.ac.ug

Abstract: The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in selected hotels in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. The research was conducted in three hotels, namely CAP KIVU HOTEL, SERENA HOTEL, and IHUSI HOTEL, with a target population of 384 hotel guests selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on the SERVQUAL model, assessing five dimensions of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, along with overall customer satisfaction. The reliability and validity of the instruments were confirmed with Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7 for most constructs, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure indicating sample adequacy. Linear and multiple regression analyses revealed that all dimensions of service quality significantly and positively influence customer satisfaction, with empathy emerging as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.702$; $R^2 = 0.645$). Overall service quality, measured as a composite of all dimensions, strongly enhances customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.610$). The study provides practical insights for hotel operators in Goma, emphasizing the need to prioritize personalized customer interactions, maintain physical facilities, ensure consistent service, and strengthen staff knowledge and courtesy. These findings offer guidance for improving service quality, enhancing customer satisfaction, fostering loyalty, and supporting sustainable growth in the hospitality sector.

Keywords: Service quality, Customer satisfaction, Hotels, Goma, SERVQUAL.

Date of Submission: 25-09-2025

Date of acceptance: 05-10-2025

I. Introduction

I.1 Background to the study

The tourism and hospitality sectors have extensively integrated information technology (IT) to minimize expenses, boost operational efficacy, and primarily, elevate service standards and customer satisfaction levels (Rob, Rosanna, & Dimitrios, 2009). This adoption reflects a broader trend where technological advancements are fundamentally changing how services are delivered and experienced (Ostrom, Parasuraman, Bowen, Patrício, & Voss, 2015).

The emphasis on service quality stems from its direct impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty, which are critical for sustained success in the competitive hospitality sector (Alzoubi, Vij, & Hanaysha, 2021). Understanding and managing service quality is particularly challenging due to the psychological features inherent in service experiences (Ramanathan, Di, & Ramanathan, 2016). This challenge necessitates identifying the key determinants of service quality and their linkages with customer satisfaction to enhance customer loyalty and repurchase intentions (Nadiri & Gunay, 2013), (Richard & Dubihlela, 2014).

Customer satisfaction, in turn, plays a pivotal role in influencing various post-purchase behaviors, including word-of-mouth recommendations and revisit intentions (Nadiri & Gunay, 2013). Therefore, hotels must focus on improving service attributes to achieve a high degree of customer satisfaction, which ultimately leads to business profitability (Hue, Thu, Chi, & Yoshiki, 2015). This focus extends to understanding how customer characteristics moderate the relationship between service factors and satisfaction, allowing for more effective resource allocation and service customization (Ramanathan, Di, & Ramanathan, 2016).

I.2 Statement of the problem

Despite the recognized importance of service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry, there remains a need to investigate these factors in specific contexts, such as hotels in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. Prior research indicates that service quality significantly impacts customer satisfaction, which subsequently influences customer loyalty and behavioral intentions (Nadiri & Gunay, 2013), (Hue, Thu, Chi, & Yoshiki, 2015), (Padlee, Thaw, & Zulkiffli, 2019). However, the specific dimensions of service quality that drive satisfaction in the unique environment of Goma hotels may differ due to local conditions and customer expectations.

Moreover, the existing literature reveals gaps in understanding how various factors, such as employee behavior, room amenities, physical evidence, and food quality, collectively contribute to customer satisfaction in the hotel industry (Padlee, Thaw, & Zulkiffli, 2019). These factors may have varying degrees of importance in different cultural and economic settings, highlighting the necessity for context-specific studies. Additionally, there is a need to explore how potential customers' perceptions of a hotel's corporate social responsibility activities, service quality, and transparency affect relationship quality constructs such as trust, satisfaction, and customer loyalty (Sung-Bum & Dae-Young, 2016).

The problem, therefore, lies in the lack of empirical evidence and context-specific insights regarding the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in Goma hotels. This knowledge gap hinders hotel operators and decision-makers in the region from effectively improving service attributes and maximizing contributions to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, without a clear understanding of the key service dimensions and their impact on customer perceptions, hotels may struggle to develop appropriate strategies for enhancing competitiveness and achieving sustainable growth.

I.3 Significance of the study

This study holds significant importance for several reasons.

- Firstly, it addresses a critical gap in the hospitality literature by providing context-specific insights into the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in hotels located in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. By focusing on this unique environment, the study can identify the specific service dimensions that are most relevant to customer perceptions and satisfaction in the region.
- Secondly, the findings of this research can offer practical guidance to hotel operators and decision-makers in Goma, enabling them to improve service attributes and enhance customer loyalty. By understanding the key drivers of customer satisfaction, hotels can allocate resources more effectively and develop targeted strategies for enhancing competitiveness and achieving sustainable growth. Moreover, the study can inform the development of training programs for hotel staff, focusing on the specific skills and behaviors that contribute to positive customer experiences.
- Thirdly, this study contributes to the broader understanding of service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. By examining these factors in a developing country context, the research can provide valuable insights into the cultural and economic factors that influence customer perceptions and expectations. These insights can be useful for hotel chains and international tourism organizations seeking to expand their operations in similar regions. Additionally, the study can serve as a benchmark for future research on service quality and customer satisfaction in other emerging markets.

I.4 Objective of the research paper

The principal aim of this scholarly investigation is to examine the correlation between the caliber of services provided and the level of satisfaction experienced by patrons within designated hotel establishments in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. To accomplish this primary aim, the study will address the subsequent precise aims:

- Examine the impact of individual service quality dimensions on overall customer satisfaction.
- Assess the level of customer satisfaction with the service quality provided by selected hotels in Goma.

I.5 Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives, the following hypotheses will be tested in this study:

H0: There is no significant relationship between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction in selected hotels in Goma.

H0₁: Each dimension of service quality such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles has a no significant impact on customer satisfaction in selected hotels in Goma.

H0₂: The level of customer satisfaction with the quality of services offered by the selected hotels in Goma is high.

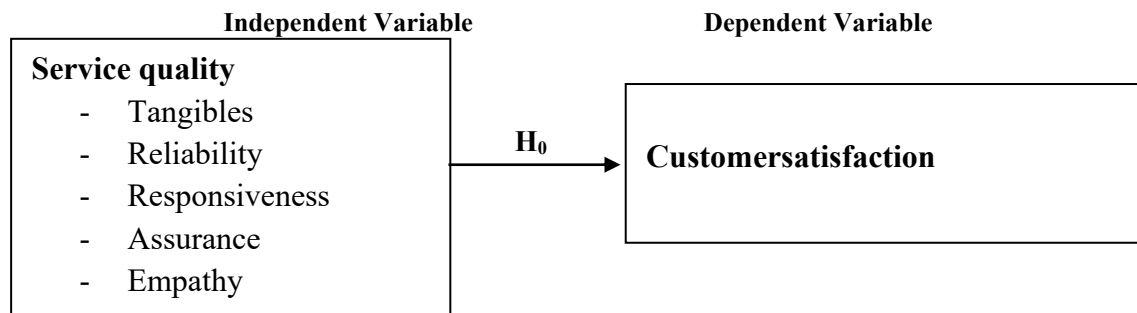


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Relating to service quality and customer satisfaction.

II. Literature review

Extensive scholarship exists on service quality and customer satisfaction across diverse industry sectors and contextual settings. Significantly, numerous pivotal themes and theoretical frameworks have surfaced, contributing substantially to elucidating the intricate interplay among service quality, customer satisfaction, and subsequent behavioral inclinations.

The SERVQUAL model, a prominent framework in the discipline, delineates five service quality dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Hue, Thu, Chi, & Yoshiki, 2015; Shafiq, Mostafiz, & Taniguchi, 2019).

- Reliability refers to the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
- Responsiveness is the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- Assurance encompasses the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.
- Empathy involves caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers.
- Tangibles refer to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials.

Studies applying the SERVQUAL model in the hospitality industry have found that these dimensions significantly impact customer satisfaction (Hue, Thu, Chi, & Yoshiki, 2015; Shafiq, Mostafiz, & Taniguchi, 2019). For instance, Nguyen Hue Minh et al. (2015) found that reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy significantly influence customer satisfaction in Vietnamese hotels. Similarly, Ali Shafiq et al. (2019) found that all SERVQUAL elements, except tangibility, had a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction among Generation Y customers in the Malaysian hotel industry.

Customer satisfaction, in turn, has been shown to positively influence customer loyalty and repurchase intentions (Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Padlee, Thaw, & Zulkiffli, 2019). Siti Falindah Padlee et al. (2019) indicated that improving service quality attributes can lead to increased customer satisfaction and positive behavioral intentions. Halil Nadiri and Glay Gnay (2013) found that customer satisfaction can induce positive post-purchase behavior, including word-of-mouth recommendations and revisit intentions in trendy coffee shops.

However, the specific factors that drive customer satisfaction may vary depending on the context and customer characteristics (Ramanathan, Di, & Ramanathan, 2016). Ramakrishnan Ramanathan et al. (2016) found that food was the most significant factor influencing customer satisfaction in a Chinese buffet restaurant in the UK, followed by price. Additionally, they found that age, gender, and annual income moderated the influence of service factors on customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, recent research has highlighted the importance of incorporating new elements into the study of service quality and customer satisfaction, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) and transparency (Sung-Bum & Dae-Young, 2016). SungBum Kim and Dae-Young Kim (2016) found that customers' perceptions of a hotel's CSR activities, service quality, and transparency affect relationship quality constructs such as trust, satisfaction, and customer loyalty.

The literature also emphasizes the role of technology in enhancing service quality and customer experience (Rob, Rosanna, & Dimitrios, 2009). Rob Law et al. (2009) noted that the tourism and hospitality industries have widely adopted IT to reduce costs, enhance operational efficiency, and improve service quality and customer experience. Dimitrios Buhalis and Yeyen Sinarta (2019) highlighted how brands take advantage of technology, social media, and constant connectivity to foster organic consumer engagement and co-create personalized customer service.

Despite the extensive research on service quality and customer satisfaction, there remains a need for context-specific studies that examine these factors in specific regions and industries. *This study aims to address this gap by investigating the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in selected hotels in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo.*

III. Methodology

III.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed to investigate the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in selected hotels in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. It details the research design, target population, sample size, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and the procedures used to ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments. The chapter also describes the data analysis techniques used to test the hypotheses and address the research objectives.

III.2 Research design

This study will adopt a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in selected hotels in Goma. A quantitative approach is appropriate because it allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data to test hypotheses and draw conclusions about the relationships between variables (Hue, Thu, Chi, & Yoshiki, 2015 ; Padlee, Thaw, & Zulkiffli, 2019). Specifically, a cross-sectional survey design will be used, where data will be collected from hotel customers at a single point in time (Sung-Bum & Dae-Young, 2016).

The cross-sectional design is suitable for this study because it enables the researchers to gather data from a representative sample of hotel customers and examine the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, and other relevant variables. This design is also cost-effective and time-efficient, making it feasible to collect data from a sufficient number of participants within the constraints of the research project.

III.3 Target population

The target population for this study consists of all customers who stayed in three selected hotels in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, during the first half of 2025, i.e. from January 1 to June 30, 2025. They were customers of CAP KIVU HOTEL, SERENA HOTEL and IHUSI HOTEL.

The rationale for selecting hotel customers as the target population is that they are the primary recipients of the services provided by the hotels and are therefore best positioned to evaluate the quality of those services and their level of satisfaction. By focusing on actual customers, the study can obtain direct feedback and insights into the factors that influence service quality and customer satisfaction in the context of Goma hotels.

III.4 Sample Size

This study selected 384 respondents from the target population, i.e. 128 customers in each of the 3 selected hotels, using the following SCHWARTZ formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \pi (1 - \pi)}{\varepsilon^2}$$

Avec: n = required sample size ; Z = 95% confidence level (typical value of 1.96) ; π = 50% or 0.5, which is the probability of having the highest variance and ε = 5% margin of error (typical value of 0.05)

Based on this data, our sample size is:

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 * 0.5 * (1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2} = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} = 384.16 \approx 384$$

III.5 Sampling Techniques and Procedures

The sample was selected using simple random sampling. Simple random sampling, where individuals are chosen by chance (Oso & Onen, 2009), was applied to customers to ensure the generalizability of the findings.

The following steps will be taken to implement the sampling procedures:

- Determine the number of participants to be selected from each hotel.
- Contact the management of selected hotels to obtain permission to conduct the study on their premises.

- Approach customers at each hotel and invite them to participate in the study.
- Administer the questionnaire to those customers who agree to participate.
- Collect the completed questionnaires and ensure that all data is properly recorded.

III.6 Data collection Instruments

This study utilized a questionnaire. The questionnaire was preferred for its ability to collect a wide range of views, opinions, and perceptions. It consisted of two main sections:

- **Sociodemographic characteristics:** This section was collected basic demographic data from the participants, such as age, gender, education level, occupation, income and nationality.
- **Likert scale**
- **Service Quality:** This section was measured the perceived service quality using a modified version of the SERVQUAL scale (Hue, Thu, Chi, & Yoshiki, 2015; Shafiq, Mostafiz, & Taniguchi, 2019). The scale was included items assessing the five dimensions of service quality: *reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles*. Participants were asked to rate their perceptions of the service quality provided by the three selected hotels on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”
- **Customer Satisfaction:** This section was measured overall customer satisfaction using a multi-item scale. Participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with various aspects of their hotel experience, such as *the quality of the room, the friendliness of the staff, and the overall value for money*. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied.”

III.7 Validity And Reliability Of The Instruments

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments, the following steps will be taken:

- **Content Validity:** The questionnaire was developed based on a thorough review of the relevant literature and established scales, such as the SERVQUAL model (Hue, Thu, Chi, & Yoshiki, 2015 ; Shafiq, Mostafiz, & Taniguchi, 2019). The items included in the questionnaire were carefully selected to ensure that they accurately measure the constructs of interest.
- **Face Validity:** The questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts in the field of hospitality management to assess its face validity. The experts will be asked to evaluate whether the questions are clear, concise, and relevant to the research objectives.
- **Construct Validity:** Construct validity was assessed using factor analysis. Factor analysis was used to determine whether the items in the questionnaire load onto the expected factors (e.g., the five dimensions of service quality).
- **Reliability:** The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha. Cronbach’s alpha is a measure of internal consistency that indicates the extent to which the items in a scale are measuring the same construct. A Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.70 or higher will be considered acceptable, indicating that the scale is reliable.
- **Pilot Testing:** The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of KIVU LODGE customers in Goma to identify any potential problems with the wording, clarity, or format of the questions. The feedback from the pilot test was used to refine the questionnaire before it is administered to the main sample.

IV. Data Analysis

IV.1. Construct reliability and validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO	Sig.	% of Total Variance	No. of Extracted Factors	No. of Items
Tangible	0.829	0.565	0.000	66.185	1	4
Reliability	0.721	0.671	0.000	66.683	1	3
Responsiveness	0.800	0.608	0.000	72.208	1	3
Assurance	0.871	0.647	0.000	72.377	1	4
Empathy	0.607	0.598	0.000	57.009	1	3
Customer satisfaction	0.769	0.749	0.000	57.485	1	4

Source: Primary Data, (2025)

The internal consistency of the measurement scale is confirmed by Cronbach’s alpha values. The recommended threshold for Cronbach’s alpha is 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). In this table, the constructs Tangible (0.829), Reliability (0.721), Responsiveness (0.800), Assurance (0.871), and Customer satisfaction (0.769) all

exceed the minimum requirement, thereby confirming acceptable internal consistency. However, the construct Empathy (0.607) falls slightly below the threshold, indicating relatively weaker reliability, though still considered acceptable in exploratory research.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values range from 0.565 to 0.749, with the overall values being above the acceptable minimum of 0.5, which indicates that the sample is adequate for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant ($p = 0.000$), confirming the suitability of the data for factor extraction.

The percentage of total variance explained by the extracted factors ranges from 57.009% (Empathy) to 72.377% (Assurance). These values exceed the minimum recommended threshold of 50%, suggesting good construct validity. Moreover, only one factor was extracted per construct, which supports unidimensionality.

In summary, the measurement model demonstrates acceptable reliability and validity. Despite the relatively low Cronbach's alpha for Empathy, the constructs overall meet the recommended thresholds for internal consistency, sampling adequacy, and factor validity, confirming the robustness of the survey instrument.

IV.2 Descriptive statistics

VI.2.1. SERVQUAL

Codes	Items on SERVQUAL	N	Mean	Std.
T	TANGIBLE			
T1	Comfortable facilities and equipment	384	3.27	0.926
T2	Appealing decoration	384	3.42	0.938
T3	Neat appearance staff	384	3.92	0.978
T4	Visually presented brochures and directories	384	3.94	0.981
	Average mean	384	3.64	0.96
R	RELIABILITY			
R1	Performs service accurately	384	3.40	1.030
R2	Provides service on time	384	3.09	0.957
R3	Keeps confidential records	384	3.21	0.942
	Average mean	384	3.24	0.98
S	RESPONSIVENESS			
S1	Willingness to serve guests	384	4.25	1.113
S2	Availability to respond to guests' requests	384	4.34	1.040
S3	Flexibility according to guests' demands	384	4.86	0.592
	Average mean	384	4.48	0.92
A	ASSURANCE			
A1	Guests feel safe and secure in their stay	384	2.20	0.802
A2	Staff with knowledge to provide guests information about surrounding areas (shopping, museum, place of interest...)	384	2.23	0.721
A3	Staff with occupational skills	384	2.61	0.882
A4	Staff are courteous and polite	384	2.65	0.885
	Average mean	384	2.42	0.82
E	EMPATHY			
E1	Provides guests individual attention	384	3.65	1.326
E2	Understands guest specific needs	384	3.13	1.090
E3	Positive attitude when receive feedback from guests	384	2.98	0.953
	Average mean	384	3.25	1.12
	Overall Mean of SERVQUAL	384	3.41	0.96

Sources: Primary Data, 2025

The results show the assessment of service quality dimensions (SERVQUAL) in selected hotels in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. The overall mean score of 3.41 indicates a moderate perception of service quality among customers. This suggests that while certain dimensions of service are appreciated, there

remain important gaps that need improvement for enhanced customer satisfaction. Among the five SERVQUAL dimensions, Responsiveness recorded the highest average mean score (4.48). This reflects that hotel staff are generally willing, available, and flexible in responding to guests' needs and demands, which is a strong positive aspect of service delivery in Goma hotels. Similarly, Tangibles obtained a relatively high average mean (3.64), suggesting that facilities, equipment, staff appearance, and promotional materials are fairly appreciated by the customers. On the other hand, Assurance scored the lowest average mean (2.42). This highlights a serious concern regarding customers' confidence in hotel services. Guests expressed low satisfaction with safety, staff knowledge of surrounding areas, and occupational skills. Such a weakness undermines the overall credibility and professionalism of the hotels. Reliability (average mean = 3.24) and Empathy (average mean = 3.25) also scored moderately, indicating that hotels need to improve consistency in service delivery and personalized customer care. The results therefore suggest that, although hotels in Goma demonstrate strengths in responsiveness and tangible aspects of service, weaknesses in assurance, reliability, and empathy hinder the overall service quality. To overcome these challenges, hotel management should invest in staff training, security assurance, and customer care enhancement while maintaining their responsiveness and tangible strengths. Strengthening these weaker dimensions would improve not only the perceived service quality but also the overall customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector of Goma.

VI.2.2. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Codes	Items on CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	N	Mean	Std.
CS	CUSTOMER SATISFACTION			
CS1	Satisfaction with the cleanliness and maintenance of the hotel facilities	384	3.13	1.090
CS2	Satisfaction with the cleanliness and maintenance of the hotel facilities	384	2.98	0.953
CS3	Satisfaction with the friendliness and helpfulness of the staff	384	3.22	0.827
CS4	Satisfaction with the value for money (price fairness)	384	3.36	0.967
	Average mean	384	3.17	0.96

Source: Primary Data, (2025)

The results present the assessment of customer satisfaction among guests of selected hotels in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. The overall mean score of 3.17 indicates a moderate level of satisfaction, suggesting that while customers are fairly content with certain aspects of hotel services, there are still areas that require improvement to fully meet guest expectations. Among the items, the highest-rated aspect is satisfaction with value for money (mean = 3.36), which implies that customers perceive hotel pricing as relatively fair compared to the quality of services received. Similarly, satisfaction with the friendliness and helpfulness of staff (mean = 3.22) is above the overall average, highlighting staff behavior as a positive factor influencing guests' experiences. On the contrary, the lowest satisfaction levels are reported in cleanliness and maintenance of facilities (mean = 2.98). This is a critical area since cleanliness is a fundamental determinant of hotel service quality and a strong predictor of customer loyalty. The other cleanliness-related item (mean = 3.13) is also relatively low, reinforcing the need for hotels to prioritize maintenance and hygiene standards to improve overall guest satisfaction. In summary, the findings reveal that although pricing and staff helpfulness contribute positively to customer experiences, issues of cleanliness and facility maintenance weaken overall satisfaction levels. To enhance guest satisfaction, hotels in Goma should focus on improving facility maintenance and hygiene, while consolidating the strengths related to fair pricing and staff friendliness.

IV.2 Linear regression

IV.2.1 Simple linear regression

DV	IV	Regression model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	Sig.
CS	T	CS=1.071+0.578T	0.607	0.368	0.366	222.300	0.000
CS	R	CS=1.521+.511R	0.549	0.301	0.299	164.599	0.000
CS	S	CS=1.458+.382S	0.412	0.169	0.167	77.922	0.000
CS	A	CS=2.758+.171A	0.162	0.026	0.024	10.306	0.001
CS	E	CS=.891+.702E	0.803	0.645	0.644	694.273	0.000
CS	SERVQUAL	CS=-.613+ 1.112 SERVQUAL	0.781	0.610	0.609	596.336	0.000

CS= Customer Satisfaction; T= Tangible; R= Reliability; S= Responsiveness; A= Assurance; E= Empathy and SERVQUAL= Service Quality.

The findings reveal that all five dimensions have a statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction, since the p-values (Sig.) are all less than 0.05, thereby leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis H_{01} which stated that the dimensions of service quality have no significant impact on customer satisfaction.

- Tangibles (T) exhibit a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.578$; $R^2 = 0.368$), meaning that better facilities, staff appearance, and physical resources significantly enhance customer satisfaction.
- Reliability (R) is another important factor ($\beta = 0.511$; $R^2 = 0.301$), showing that consistent and dependable service delivery significantly predicts customer satisfaction.
- Responsiveness (S) has a moderate effect ($\beta = 0.382$; $R^2 = 0.169$), confirming that the willingness and ability of staff to respond to customer requests contribute positively, but less strongly than empathy, tangibles, and reliability.
- Assurance (A) shows the weakest impact ($\beta = 0.171$; $R^2 = 0.026$). Although significant, its explanatory power is minimal, suggesting that aspects such as staff knowledge, courtesy, and instilling customer confidence are currently weak and do not strongly influence overall satisfaction in the studied hotels.
- Empathy (E) shows the strongest influence on customer satisfaction, with the highest coefficient ($\beta = 0.702$), the strongest correlation ($R = 0.803$), and the largest proportion of explained variance ($R^2 = 0.645$). This means that 64.5% of the variation in customer satisfaction can be explained by empathy alone. This result highlights the critical role of personalized attention and understanding of customer needs in shaping satisfaction in Goma hotels.
- Service Quality (SERVQUAL) exhibits a very strong positive effect ($\beta = 1.112$; $R^2 = 0.610$), indicating that higher overall service quality measured as a composite of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy significantly enhances customer satisfaction. This suggests that improvements across all dimensions of service quality collectively have a substantial impact on guests' satisfaction in the selected hotels in Goma. The high correlation ($R = 0.781$) and significant F-value ($F = 596.336$; $p = 0.000$) confirm that the model reliably explains a major portion of the variation in customer satisfaction.

IV.2.2 Multiple linear regression

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.852 ^a	0.726	0.722	0.3904
a. Predictors: (Constant), EMPATHY, ASSURANCE, RESPONSIVENESS, RELIABILITY, TANGIBLE				

The analysis reveals a robust positive correlation between the independent variables, denoting service quality dimensions, and the dependent variable, which is customer satisfaction, as demonstrated by the correlation coefficient ($R = 0.852$). Moreover, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.726$) illustrates that 72.6% of the variability in customer satisfaction can be elucidated by the collective influence of the five service quality dimensions. The residual 27.4% of the variability is attributed to unaccounted factors within this analytical framework. Notably, the adjusted R^2 value of 0.722 affirms the model's stability and reliability, even following adjustments for the included predictors.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	152.636	5	30.527	200.343	0.000 ^b
	Residual	57.598	378	0.152		
	Total	210.234	383			
a. Dependent Variable: TANGIBLE						
b. Predictors: (Constant), EMPATHY, ASSURANCE, RESPONSIVENESS, RELIABILITY, TANGIBLE						

The results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant with an F-value of 200.343 and a p-value (Sig.) of 0.000, which is well below the 0.05 threshold. This means that the set of predictors (empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and tangibles) collectively explains a significant proportion of the variance in the dependent variable.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-0.192	0.140		-1.371	0.171
	TANGIBLE	0.153	0.033	0.160	4.641	0.000
	RELIABILITY	0.138	0.032	0.148	4.338	0.000
	RESPONSIVENESS	0.088	0.029	0.094	3.028	0.003
	ASSURANCE	0.091	0.029	0.086	3.149	0.002
	EMPATHY	0.538	0.029	0.616	18.698	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: TANGIBLE						

The regression constant ($B = -0.192$, $p = 0.171$) is not statistically significant, indicating that in the absence of the predictors, the model does not meaningfully explain customer satisfaction. What matters, therefore, are the contributions of the independent variables.

- Empathy emerges as the strongest predictor, with the highest standardized coefficient ($Beta = 0.616$) and a highly significant effect ($p = 0.000$). This means that personalized attention, understanding of guest needs, and staff sensitivity are the most influential drivers of customer satisfaction in the hotels studied.
 - Tangibles ($Beta = 0.160$, $p = 0.000$) also significantly predict satisfaction, showing that the physical environment, facilities, and staff appearance contribute positively to guests' experiences.
 - Reliability ($Beta = 0.148$, $p = 0.000$) is another significant factor, confirming that the ability of hotels to deliver services accurately and dependably enhances satisfaction.
 - Responsiveness ($Beta = 0.094$, $p = 0.003$) and Assurance ($Beta = 0.086$, $p = 0.002$) both have weaker but still significant effects. These results suggest that while prompt service and staff courtesy/knowledge matter, they do not weigh as heavily as empathy, tangibles, and reliability in shaping customer satisfaction.
- Overall, the results strongly support the rejection of the null hypotheses (H_0 and H_{0i}) by confirming that each service quality dimension exerts a significant and positive impact on customer satisfaction. The dominance of empathy implies that in the Goma hotel industry, strengthening customer-oriented interactions and personalized services should be prioritized to boost overall satisfaction.

VI.3 Discussion

The results join the conclusions of Nguyen Hue Minh et al. (2015) and Shafiq et al. (2019), which found that all the dimensions of the servqual, with the exception of tangibles, positively influence satisfaction in the hotel sector. In addition, the strong importance of empathy observed in this local context of Goma illustrates the central role of service personalization, an aspect also underlined by Nadiri & Gunay (2013) and Padlee et al. (2019), which show that customer satisfaction is strongly linked to positive post-purchase behavior, such as loyalty and word of mouth.

V. Conclusions

This study investigated the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in selected hotels in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship, confirming that higher service quality enhances customer satisfaction. These results align with prior research by Nguyen Hue Minh et al. (2015) and Shafiq et al. (2019), which found that all dimensions of SERVQUAL, except occasionally tangibles, positively influence satisfaction in the hotel industry.

Empathy emerged as the strongest predictor of satisfaction, indicating that personalized attention and understanding of customer needs play a critical role in shaping guests' experiences. Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance also contribute positively, though to varying degrees, confirming that physical resources, consistent service delivery, staff responsiveness, and assurance matter in the overall guest experience.

Effective management of service quality enables hotels to meet guest expectations, foster loyalty, and enhance word-of-mouth promotion. By aligning service practices with customer needs, hotels in Goma can improve operational performance, attract and retain clientele, and maintain a competitive advantage in the hospitality sector (Nadiri & Gunay, 2013; Padlee et al., 2019).

Overall, service quality assessment is vital for boosting customer satisfaction, improving hotel performance, and promoting sustainable business growth. Enhancing empathy and personalizing interactions should be a priority for hotels aiming to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction and long-term success in Goma.

VI. Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, the subsequent suggestions are proposed for hotel operators and stakeholders in Goma.

- **Focus on improving the key dimensions of service quality:** Hotels should prioritize their efforts and allocate resources effectively to improve the service attributes that have the greatest impact on customer

satisfaction. This may involve investing in training programs for staff, upgrading facilities, and implementing quality control measures.

- **Monitor customer satisfaction levels regularly:** Hotels should implement systems for monitoring customer satisfaction levels on a regular basis. This can be done through surveys, feedback forms, online reviews, and other methods. The data collected should be analyzed to identify trends and areas for improvement.
- **Develop customer loyalty programs:** Hotels should develop customer loyalty programs to reward repeat customers and encourage them to return in the future. These programs can include discounts, special offers, and personalized services.
- **Encourage positive word-of-mouth recommendations:** Hotels should encourage satisfied customers to recommend their services to others. This can be done through social media, online review sites, and other channels.
- **Invest in technology to enhance service quality and customer experience:** Hotels should invest in technology to improve service delivery and enhance the customer experience. This may involve implementing online booking systems, mobile apps, and other digital tools.

By implementing these recommendations, hotels in Goma can improve service quality, enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, and achieve sustainable growth.

VII. Suggestions for further research

The following suggestions are made for further research:

- **Conduct longitudinal studies:** Subsequent investigations ought to engage in longitudinal inquiries to scrutinize the enduring impacts of service quality on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and behavioral intentions. Such an approach would yield a more holistic comprehension of the interplay among these factors.
- **Explore the role of cultural factors:** Subsequent studies ought to investigate the impact of cultural variables on the formation of customer assessments regarding service excellence and contentment in the locale of Goma. Such endeavors would yield valuable perspectives on the distinct requirements and anticipations of clientele with diverse cultural heritages.
- **Investigate the impact of employee attitudes and motivation:** Subsequent studies ought to delve into the influence of employee attitudes and motivation on service quality and customer satisfaction within Goma's hospitality sector. Such inquiries would yield valuable perspectives on the significance of human resource management strategies in this industry.
- **Compare service quality and customer satisfaction across different types of hotels:** Subsequent studies ought to examine the disparities in service quality and customer satisfaction among various hotel classifications in Goma (e.g., three-star, four-star, five-star), elucidating the distinct service benchmarks and patron anticipations corresponding to each hotel tier.
- **Examine the effectiveness of different service recovery strategies:** Subsequent studies ought to investigate the efficacy of varied service recovery tactics within the hospitality establishments of Goma. Such inquiries could illuminate optimal approaches for hotels to address service deficiencies and reinstate customer contentment.

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