

**CUSTOMER ORIENTATION, SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN
THE HOTEL INDUSTRY IN GULU CITY**

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**A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND
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DECLARATION

I Ojok Gerald hereby declare that this report is my original work and has not been presented in any other University for the award of masters, degree or diploma or any other equivalent.

Sign  ate

10/09/2020

Ojok Gerald

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this research report entitled "Customer orientation, service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in Gulu city" was developed under our guidance and is now ready for submission to the Institute of Research and Graduate Studies for assessment with my approval.



Sign

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10/09/2025

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DEDICATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>DECLARATION</u>	i
<u>APPROVAL</u>	ii
<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u>	v
<u>LIST OF TABLES</u>	viii
<u>LIST OF FIGURES</u>	ix
<u>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ ACCRONYMS</u>	x
<u>CHAPTER ONE</u>	1
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
<u>1.0 Introduction</u>	1
<u>1.1 Background</u>	1
<u>1.2 Problem Statement</u>	4
<u>1.3 Purpose of the Study</u>	5
<u>1.4 Objectives of the Study</u>	5
<u>1.5 Research Questions</u>	5
<u>1.6 Scope of the study</u>	5
<u>1.6.1 Content scope</u>	5
<u>1.6.2 Geographical Scope</u>	6
<u>1.6.3 Time Scope</u>	6
<u>1.7 Significance of the Study</u>	6
<u>1.8 Conceptual Framework</u>	7
<u>CHAPTER TWO</u>	8
<u>LITERATURE REVIEW</u>	8
<u>2.0 Introduction</u>	8
<u>2.1 Theoretical Review</u>	8

<u>2.1.1 The SERVQUAL model</u>	8
<u>2.2 Customer Orientation</u>	9
<u>2.2.1 Customer Centric Orientation</u>	9
<u>2.2.2 Product Based Orientation</u>	10
<u>2.2.3 Relationship Based Orientations</u>	11
<u>2.3 Service Quality</u>	11
<u>2.3.1 Reliability</u>	11
<u>2.3.2 Tangibility</u>	12
<u>2.3.3 Empathy</u>	13
<u>2.3.4 Responsiveness</u>	13
<u>2.3.5 Assurance</u>	14
<u>2.4 Customer Satisfaction</u>	15
<u>2.4.1 Customer Retention</u>	15
<u>2.4.2 Customer Commitment</u>	15
<u>2.4.3 Customer Referrals</u>	16
<u>CHAPTER THREE</u>	18
<u>METHODOLOGY</u>	18
<u>3.0 Introduction</u>	18
<u>3.1 Research Design</u>	18
<u>3.2 Study Population</u>	18
<u>3.3 Sample Size</u>	19
<u>3.5 Sampling Techniques</u>	19
<u>3.6 Data Sources</u>	19
<u>3.7 Data Collection methods</u>	19
<u>3.7.1 Survey Method</u>	19
<u>3.7.2 Interview Method</u>	20
<u>3.8 Data Collection Instruments</u>	20
<u>3.8.1 Questionnaires</u>	20
<u>3.8.2 Interview Guide</u>	20
<u>3.9 Data quality control</u>	20
<u>3.9.1 Reliability</u>	21

<u>3.9.2 Validity</u>	21
<u>3.10 Data Analysis</u>	22
<u>3.11 Study limitations and Delimitations</u>	22
<u>3.11. Ethical considerations</u>	23
<u>CHAPTER FOUR</u>	24
<u>DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION</u>	24
<u>4.0 Introduction</u>	24
<u>CHAPTER FIVE</u>	44
<u>DISCUSSION</u>	44
<u>5.0 Introduction</u>	44
<u>5.1 Customer orientation</u>	44
<u>5.2 customer satisfaction</u>	45
<u>5.3 Service Quality</u>	46
<u>5.4 Customer orientation and customer satisfaction</u>	47
<u>CHAPTER SIX</u>	50
<u>SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION</u>	50
<u>6.0 Introduction</u>	50
<u>6.1 Summary of Key Findings</u>	50
<u>6.2 Conclusion</u>	50
<u>6.3 Recommendations</u>	51
<u>6.4 Areas of Future Studies</u>	53
<u>APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE</u>	58
<u>APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HOTEL MANAGERS</u>	63
<u>Appendix III: Morgan Table. Sample Sizes(S) for the Given Population Sizes (N)</u>	64

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table 1: Computation of Cronbach's alpha</u>	21
<u>Table 2: CVI Computation</u>	22
<u>Table 3: Description of Characteristics of Respondents</u>	25
<u>Table 4: Responses on Customer Centric Orientation</u>	26
<u>Table 5: Responses on Customer Centric Orientation</u>	27
<u>Table 6: Responses on relationship-based orientation</u>	29
<u>Table 7: Responses on Reliability of Service</u>	30
<u>Table 8: Responses on Responsiveness</u>	31
<u>Table 9: Responses on assurance</u>	32
<u>Table 10: Responses on empathy</u>	34
<u>Table 11: Responses on empathy</u>	35
<u>Table 12: Responses on tangibility</u>	36
<u>Table 13: Responses on customer commitment</u>	37
<u>Table 14: Responses on customer referrals</u>	38
<u>Table 15: Responses on customer retention rates</u>	39
<u>Table 16: Analysis of Correlation</u>	41
<u>Table 17: Model Summary</u>	42
<u>Table 18: Mediation Analysis</u>	43

LIST OF FIGURES

[Figure 1: Conceptual Framework](#)

7

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ ACCRONYMS

ACSI	American Customer Satisfaction Index
CRM	Customer relationship management
CVI	Content validity index
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

ABSTRACT

Customer orientation has evolved through shifts in business practices and consumer expectations, transitioning from product-centric approaches to a focus on long-term relationships. This evolution is particularly relevant in Uganda's growing hospitality sector, where understanding the impact of customer orientation on satisfaction is vital for enhancing competitiveness in the tourism industry. This study examined the effect of customer orientation and service quality on customer satisfaction in Gulu City's hotel industry.

Utilizing a descriptive and cross-sectional research design with a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from employees, managers, and customers of 314 registered hotels, with a sample of 169 hotels determined through Krejcie and Morgan's formula. Structured questionnaires and face-to-face interviews provided quantitative and qualitative insights, ensuring data reliability and validity through statistical analysis via SPSS.

Findings indicated a high-level of customer satisfaction and implementation of customer orientation among hotels in Gulu City. The study found a significant positive relationship between customer orientation (customer centric orientation, product-based orientation, relationship based orientation) and customer satisfaction in hotels in Gulu city. According to the result, all the dimensions of customer orientation, except product-based orientation have significant effect on customer satisfaction in hotels in Gulu city. Service quality has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between customer orientation and customer satisfaction in the hotels in Gulu city.

The study concludes that customer orientation is crucial for ensuring customer satisfaction with interplay of service quality. To enhance customer satisfaction in Gulu City's hotel industry, it is recommended that hotels strengthen their customer-centric strategies by prioritizing relationship-building and continuous improvement of service quality. Additionally, investing in staff training to better understand and meet customer needs will further elevate the guest experience and loyalty.

Key words: Customer Orientation, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Hospitality Industry Gulu City.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Customer orientation, defined as the strategic approach of a company towards understanding and fulfilling customer needs and preferences, is recognized as a fundamental driver of business success, particularly in fostering enhanced customer satisfaction. This research aims to examine the pivotal role of customer orientation in enhancing customer satisfaction.

The concept of customer orientation is deeply rooted in marketing theory and practice, reflecting the fundamental principle that customer satisfaction is paramount to long-term business viability. According to Narver and Slater (2015), customer orientation encompasses a proactive, market-driven approach that prioritizes understanding customer needs, delivering superior value, and building enduring customer relationships. This approach emphasizes responsiveness, empathy, and continuous adaptation to changing customer preferences as essential elements of effective customer orientation strategies.

Research highlights the significance of customer orientation in driving positive customer outcomes, particularly in the context of enhancing customer satisfaction. For instance, a study by Jaworski and Kohli (2018) highlighted the positive impact of customer orientation on customer satisfaction, emphasizing the link between customer-focused behaviors and improved customer satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, Homburg and Pflesser (2019) found that companies with a strong customer orientation achieved higher levels of customer satisfaction, resulting in increased profitability and market share. However, the role that customer orientation plays in leveraging customer satisfaction in the hotel industry remains unclear. This study will thus investigate the effect of customer orientation on customer satisfaction within the hotel industry in Gulu City.

1.1 Background

The concept of customer orientation evolved over time, reflecting shifts in business practices, market dynamics, and consumer expectations. While the term "customer

orientation" gained prominence in marketing literature in the latter half of the 20th century, its underlying principles have deep historical roots. The idea of catering to customer needs and preferences can be traced back to early market transactions and trade practices. Ancient merchants and traders recognized the importance of understanding customer demand and adapting their offerings to meet market needs (Bartels, 1962).

In the early 20th century, businesses primarily focused on product-centric approaches, emphasizing production efficiency and mass manufacturing. Companies such as Ford Motor Company exemplified this approach with the introduction of the assembly line and standardized products (Ghoshal, 2005). Following World War II, there was a shift towards sales orientation, driven by increased competition and the need to stimulate demand. Companies began to focus on aggressive sales tactics and promotional activities to drive sales volumes (Levitt, 1960).

The 1960s witnessed the emergence of marketing orientation as a response to changing market dynamics and consumer preferences. Scholars such as Peter Drucker emphasized the importance of understanding and satisfying customer needs as a core business principle (Drucker, 1954). The marketing concept, popularized in the 1970s and 1980s, emphasized the central role of customer satisfaction in achieving business objectives. Kotler and Levy (1969) defined the marketing concept as "the philosophy of customer satisfaction," highlighting the importance of identifying and meeting customer needs profitably.

In the late 20th century, there was a growing recognition of the value of long-term customer relationships. Scholars such as Berry (2013) advocated for a shift from transactional to relational marketing approaches, emphasizing the importance of building trust, loyalty, and mutual value creation. In the 21st century, the concept of customer orientation has evolved to encompass Omni channel engagement, personalized experiences, and customer-centric cultures. Companies such as Amazon, Apple, and Starbucks exemplify this approach, leveraging data analytics, digital technologies, and customer insights to deliver superior value and experiences (Rust, 2010).

In many countries, customer orientation has been deeply embedded in business practices, driven by a strong focus on customer-centricity and service excellence. Companies in the United States prioritize understanding and fulfilling customer needs to drive satisfaction and loyalty. Research by Reichheld (2003) highlights the significance of customer orientation as a key driver of customer satisfaction and profitability in the American context. In addition, a strong emphasis on customer orientations has led to the development of customer-centric business models aimed at maximizing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Research by Fornell(2016) highlights the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) as a prominent measure used to assess customer satisfaction across various industries in the United States.

Many businesses place a high emphasis on customer orientations, viewing customer satisfaction as a critical determinant of competitive advantage. Studies by Homburg et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of customer-centric strategies in European markets, where companies strive to build long-term relationships and deliver superior value to customers to achieve sustainable growth. Europe has seen a shift towards customer-centric approaches, with businesses increasingly focusing on understanding and meeting customer needs to drive satisfaction and loyalty. Studies by Verhoef et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of customer relationship management (CRM) strategies in European markets, where companies seek to build long-term customer relationships and deliver personalized experiences.

Also, customer orientations are influenced by cultural nuances and market dynamics, with companies adopting tailored approaches to meet diverse customer needs. Research by Zhang and Prybutok (2015) highlights the importance of understanding cultural differences in customer preferences and behavior in Asian markets, where relationships and trust play a crucial role in driving customer satisfaction. Rapid economic growth and changing consumer behaviors have prompted businesses to adopt customer-oriented strategies to remain competitive. Research by Lee et al. (2011) highlights the role of service quality and customer satisfaction in Asian markets, where companies prioritize customer-centric approaches to differentiate themselves and drive business growth.

Recently, customer orientations are gaining prominence as businesses recognize

the value of prioritizing customer needs and experiences. Studies by Nwankwo et al. (2018) highlight the potential of customer-centric strategies to drive economic development and social progress in African countries, where customer satisfaction is seen as a catalyst for business growth and poverty alleviation. Businesses are increasingly recognizing the importance of customer orientations in driving sustainable business growth and development. Studies by Boateng et al. (2017) emphasize the need for customer-centric strategies in African markets, where companies seek to build trust, loyalty, and brand equity by prioritizing customer satisfaction and engagement.

In Uganda, customer orientations are emerging as a strategic imperative for businesses seeking to compete effectively in domestic and regional markets. Research by Mukasa et al. (2020) elaborates the importance of customer satisfaction in the Ugandan context, where companies are increasingly investing in customer-centric approaches to differentiate themselves and drive sustainable growth. Uganda's business landscape is characterized by emerging opportunities and challenges, with businesses striving to adopt customer-oriented approaches to succeed in the competitive market environment. Research by Tumwebaze et al. (2021) highlights the impact of customer satisfaction on business performance in Uganda, where companies are investing in customer-centric strategies to enhance competitiveness and drive sustainable growth.

Over the past decade, Uganda has witnessed significant growth in its tourism industry, driven by investments in infrastructure development, marketing initiatives, and conservation efforts. The country's tourism sector has emerged as a key contributor to economic growth and employment generation, attracting both domestic and international tourists eager to experience Uganda's natural beauty and cultural attractions and this has contributed to the growth of the hotel sub industry (Luganda & Nalukenge, 2020).

The hotel sector in Uganda offers a diverse range of accommodation options to cater to the varied needs and preferences of travelers. From luxury resorts and boutique hotels to budget lodges and guesthouses, tourists have a wide array of choices available across the country. Major cities like Kampala, Mbarara, Jinja, Gulu and Lira serve as key hospitality hubs, offering a concentration of hotels and other

lodging facilities (Kasozi & Waiswa, 2019).

1.2 Problem Statement

While Uganda's hospitality sector has experienced significant growth in recent years, the level of customer satisfaction remained low reflected in limited commitment, low level of loyalty among customers as they switch from one hotel to the next, reflecting low level of customer satisfaction (Tumwebaze, 2021). In addition, reports indicate that 67% of guests revealed low level of satisfaction with their previous hotel experience in Uganda, causing high churn rates from one hotel to the next (Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife, and Antiquities, 2022). Besides, there remains a gap in understanding the influence of customer orientation on customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in Uganda, specifically in Gulu City. While there have been studies on the Ugandan hospitality sector, there is a dearth of comprehensive research specifically focusing on customer orientation and its effect on customer satisfaction levels. This study will thus examine the effect of customer orientation on customer satisfaction in the hotel industry specifically in Gulu City.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the role of customer orientation in improving customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in Gulu City.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the association between customer orientation and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in Gulu City
- ii. To examine the association between service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in Gulu City
- iii. To establish the mediating role of service quality in the relationship between customer orientation and service quality.

1.5 Research Questions

- i. What is the association between customer orientation and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in Gulu City?
- ii. What is the association between service quality and customer satisfaction

in the hotel industry in Gulu City?

- iii. What is the mediating role of service quality in the relationship between customer orientation and service quality?

1.6 Scope of the study

The study scope covered three major areas comprising of the content scope, geographical scope and time scope as explained below:

1.6.1 Content scope

The content scope of the study covered customer orientation covering the key aspects of customer centric orientation, product-based orientation and relationship-based orientation. Service quality will also be covered as a component of content scope covering reliability, tangibility, empathy assurance and responsiveness. Finally, customer satisfaction will also form key component of content scope that will comprise of customer retention, customer engagement and customer referrals.

1.6.2 Geographical Scope

The study was conducted covering hotels in Gulu city. Gulu City is bounded by latitude 02°-04°North and longitude 30°-32°east. The City is surrounded by the districts of Amuru, Nwoya, and Omoro, respectively. The study covered the hotels in Gulu City offering accommodation (lodging), food and drinks respectively. Gulu City was selected because it represents one of the cities with booming hotel businesses in the region.

1.6.3 Time Scope

Concerning the time scope, the study covered a period of five (5) years from 2019 to 2024. The time frame was justified on the grounds that it reflected the period when most hotels in Gulu city were refurbished and their concentrations increased within the city in this time period.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The significance of a study on customer orientation and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry extended to various stakeholders as explained below:

To the hotel managers, understanding customer orientation and customer satisfaction helped hotel owners and managers tailor their business strategies to meet guest expectations, ultimately that led to higher occupancy rates, repeat business, and positive word-of-mouth and overall customer satisfaction was improved.

Guests were the primary beneficiaries of improved customer orientation and satisfaction initiatives. A study that identified key factors influencing satisfaction levels helped guests make more informed decisions when choosing hotels, and led to enhanced experiences and higher levels of satisfaction during their stays.

Tourism industry associations and government agencies responsible for regulating the hospitality sector used the study findings to develop policies, guidelines, and standards aimed at promoting customer-centric practices and ensured high service quality across the industry.

Investors and financial institutions interested in the hospitality sector benefited from insights into the relationship between customer orientation, satisfaction, and service quality. The findings of the study helped investors understand the impact of customer orientation on customer satisfaction that improved overall investment decisions into the hotel sector.

To the management of the hotels, the study helped them in identifying the dimensions of customer orientations and service quality that helped in improving service quality and as such implement appropriate strategies to enhance overall customer satisfaction.

To researchers and future scholars, the study helped provide literature on customer orientations and customer satisfaction. This helped to extend research into this field of customer orientation and customer satisfaction.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable

Customer Orientation

Customer centric
orientation

Moderating Variable

Service Quality

Reliability

Dependent

Customer Satisfaction

Customer
Commitment

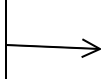


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented above reflects customer orientation as an independent variable which is composed of different dimensions of customer centric orientation, product based orientation and relationship based orientation. Service quality is the mediating variable which comprises of reliability, tangibility, empathy, responsiveness and assurance. Customer satisfaction is the dependent variable measured by customer retention, customer engagement and customer referrals.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This study focused on ICT adoption and operational performance. This chapter reviewed theory related to subject of the study. Besides, literatures on ICT adoption, employee skills and operational performance in line with what earlier scholars and researchers have studied were reviewed in this chapter. This section started with theoretical review and then review of literatures on the concepts of ICT adoption, operational performance and employee skills.

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 The SERVQUAL model

The study followed the SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), one of the most widely recognized theories that explained the relationship between customer orientation, service quality, and customer satisfaction. The SERVQUAL model emphasized five dimensions of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. It suggested that meeting or exceeding customer expectations on these dimensions leads to greater customer satisfaction.

Studies in the hospitality industry have extensively utilized the SERVQUAL model to evaluate service quality and customer satisfaction in hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality establishments. For example, a study by Choi and Chu (2011) applied the SERVQUAL model to assess service quality in the hotel industry and found that perceived service quality significantly influenced customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In the healthcare sector, researchers employed the SERVQUAL model to evaluate patient perceptions of service quality in hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare facilities. A study by Al-Borie and Damanhour (2013) used the SERVQUAL model to assess patient satisfaction with healthcare services and identified areas for improvement in service delivery. The study found that the quality of healthcare services significantly affects customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, the SERVQUAL model has also been applied in E-commerce and Online Services. With the rise of e-commerce and online services, researchers have

adapted the SERVQUALmodel to assess service quality in digital contexts. For instance, a study by Parasuraman and Colby (2015) applied an extended version of the SERVQUALmodel to evaluate service quality in online retailing and identified factors influencing customer satisfaction in the digital environment.

Similarly, financial institutions have also utilized the SERVQUALmodel to measure service quality and enhance customer satisfaction in banking, insurance, and other financial services. For example, a study by Caruana et al. (2010) applied the SERVQUALmodel to assess service quality in the banking sector and its impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. The SERVQUALmodel continues to be a valuable theoretical framework for assessing service quality and understanding its impact on customer satisfaction across diverse industries. By identifying gaps between customer expectations and perceptions of service delivery, organizations can implement strategies to improve service quality and enhance overall customer satisfaction and loyalty.

2.2 Customer Orientation

2.2.1 Customer Centric Orientation

Customer-centric orientation refers to a business approach that prioritizes understanding and fulfilling customer needs, preferences, and expectations (Narver & Slater, 2020). This approach emphasized building strong relationships with customers and delivering superior value propositions to enhance satisfaction and loyalty. Narver and Slater introduced the concept of market orientation, emphasizing its positive impact on business profitability. They argued that customer-centric strategies, characterized by a deep understanding of customer needs and preferences, lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction and financial performance.

Kohli and Jaworski (2018) elaborated customer centric orientation as a multidimensional constructs comprising interfunctional coordination. They highlighted the importance of customer-centricity in developing a market-driven culture and achieving superior business outcomes. Slater and Narver examined the relationship between market orientation, customer value, and business performance. They found that organizations with a strong customer-centric

orientation create superior value propositions, resulting in higher levels of customer satisfaction, loyalty, and financial performance.

Homburg and Pflesser (2020) proposed a multiple-layer model of market-oriented organizational culture, emphasizing the importance of customer-centric values and behaviors in driving performance outcomes. They highlighted the role of customer orientation in fostering a customer-focused culture conducive to customer satisfaction and business success.

Verhoef and Leeflang (2019) explored the influence of the marketing department within firms, emphasizing the pivotal role of customer-centric orientation in driving organizational effectiveness. They argued that marketing departments play a central role in championing customer-centric strategies and fostering a customer-focused culture across the organization. In summary, customer-centric orientation is a critical component of customer satisfaction and business success. By prioritizing customer needs, preferences, and experiences, organizations can create superior value propositions, build strong customer relationships, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage in today's dynamic marketplace.

2.2.2 Product Based Orientation

Product-based orientation refers to a business strategy that prioritizes the development and delivery of high-quality products to meet customer needs and preferences (Anderson, Fornell & Lehman, 2014). Understanding the relationship between product-based orientation and customer satisfaction is crucial for businesses seeking to enhance their competitive advantage and foster long-term customer satisfaction. Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann (2014) examined the relationship between customer satisfaction, market share, and profitability. They found that companies with a product-based orientation, focused on delivering high-quality products that meet or exceed customer expectations, tend to achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction, market share, and financial performance.

Bolton and Lemon (2019) proposed a dynamic model of customers' usage of services, highlighting the role of product quality and performance in shaping customer satisfaction and usage behavior. They emphasized the importance of product-based orientation in delivering reliable, effective, and satisfying products

that meet customers' needs and expectations. Oliver (2020) explored the drivers of consumer loyalty, including satisfaction with product performance and quality. He argued that product-based orientation, characterized by a focus on delivering superior products and experiences, plays a critical role in building trust, confidence, and loyalty among customers.

Deng et al (2010) investigated customer satisfaction and loyalty in the context of mobile instant messaging services. They found that product-based orientation, reflected in the quality, reliability, and features of the messaging platform, significantly influenced customer satisfaction and loyalty. Chen and Li (2010) conducted a review of marketing research on customer satisfaction management, highlighting the importance of product-based orientation in driving customer satisfaction and loyalty. They emphasized the need for businesses to continuously improve product quality and performance to meet evolving customer expectations.

2.2.3 Relationship Based Orientations

Relationship-based orientation emphasized building and nurturing long-term relationships with customers through personalized interactions, trust-building, and mutual value creation. Understanding the relationship between relationship-based orientation and customer satisfaction is essential for businesses aiming to foster customer loyalty and achieve sustainable success (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, 2016). Palmatier et al (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on relationship marketing effectiveness. They found that relationship-based orientation, characterized by trust, commitment, and communication between firms and customers, positively influences customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Morgan and Hunt (2014) emphasized the importance of commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing, highlighting the importance of trust and commitment in building strong, enduring relationships with customers. They argued that relationship-based orientation fosters trust and commitment, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty. Hennig & Klee (2017) examined the impact of customer satisfaction and relationship quality on customer retention. They found that relationship-based orientation, characterized by personalized service, responsiveness, and empathy, significantly contributes to customer satisfaction and retention.

Gummesson (2018) extended the service-dominant logic to emphasize the importance of balanced centricity, which includes relationship-based orientation as a key component. He argued that businesses should focus on building mutually beneficial relationships with all stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, and partners, to achieve sustainable success.

2.3 Service Quality

2.3.1 Reliability

Reliability is a critical component of service quality, representing the ability of a service provider to deliver promised services consistently and accurately. Literature emphasized the importance of reliability in building customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty (Primar, 2016). According to Parasuraman et al. (2018), reliability is defined as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Customers expect services to be delivered reliably, without errors or delays. In today's competitive marketplace, where customer expectations are continuously rising, reliability has become a key differentiator for service providers (Zeithaml et al., 2019).

Research by Cronin and Taylor (2012) found that reliability is positively associated with customer satisfaction and loyalty. When customers perceive a service provider as reliable, they are more likely to trust the provider, repeat their purchases, and recommend the service to others. Furthermore, studies have shown that reliability plays a crucial role in shaping overall service quality perceptions. For example, in a study by Sureshchandar et al. (2012), reliability emerged as the most significant factor influencing customers' overall evaluations of service quality in the banking sector.

In summary, reliability is a fundamental component of service quality, essential for building customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. Service providers must focus on consistently delivering promised services to meet or exceed customer expectations and maintain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

2.3.2 Tangibility

Tangibility refers to the physical evidence of service delivery, including the

appearance of facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. It represents the tangible cues that customers use to evaluate service quality and form perceptions about the service provider (Keller, 2014). Research highlighted the significance of tangibility in influencing customer perceptions and evaluations of service quality. According to Bitner (2015), tangible cues serve as signals of service quality and reliability, helping customers assess the service provider's capabilities and professionalism.

Research by Parasuraman et al. (2015) identified tangibility as one of the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, which measures service quality based on customer expectations and perceptions. Tangibility encompasses factors such as the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. Moreover, studies have shown that tangibility can have a significant impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. For example, in a study by Brady and Cronin (2011), tangibility emerged as a critical factor influencing customers' perceptions of service quality in the retail banking industry.

In today's digital age, where many services are delivered online, the importance of tangibility may vary across different industries and contexts. However, tangible cues remain essential for creating positive first impressions, building trust, and enhancing the overall service experience (Weber, 2018).

2.3.3 Empathy

Empathy is a fundamental component of service quality, representing the provider's ability to understand and address customers' needs, concerns, and emotions. It involves demonstrating care, concern, and attentiveness towards customers to create positive service experiences (Max, 2019). Research emphasizes the role of empathy in fostering customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. According to McColl & Patterson (2013), empathy is essential for building strong emotional connections with customers, which can lead to enhanced service quality perceptions and positive word-of-mouth.

Research by Parasuraman et al. (2018) identified empathy as one of the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, which measures service quality based on customer expectations and perceptions. Empathy encompasses factors such as the

provider's willingness to listen, understand, and respond to customer needs and concerns. In addition, studies have shown that empathy can have a significant impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. For example, in a study by Hartline and Ferrell (2016), empathy emerged as a critical factor influencing customers' perceptions of service quality in the hospitality industry.

In an increasingly competitive marketplace, where customer experiences are becoming a key differentiator, empathy has become a strategic imperative for service providers. By demonstrating empathy and understanding towards customers, service providers can create memorable and meaningful service experiences that drive customer loyalty and advocacy (Keller, 2014).

2.3.4 Responsiveness

Responsiveness is a crucial component of service quality, representing the provider's willingness and ability to provide prompt assistance and support to customers. It involved being attentive, proactive, and timely in addressing customer needs, inquiries, and requests (Odonnel, 2016). Research highlighted the importance of responsiveness in shaping customer perceptions and evaluations of service quality. According to Parasuraman et al. (2018), responsiveness is defined as the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Customers expect service providers to be responsive to their needs and concerns, especially in situations requiring urgent attention or assistance.

Research by Zeithaml et al. (2019) found that responsiveness is positively associated with customer satisfaction and loyalty. When customers perceive a service provider as responsive, they are more likely to feel valued, appreciated, and satisfied with the service experience. Moreover, studies have shown that responsiveness can have a significant impact on customer retention and loyalty. For example, in a study by Johnston (2015), responsiveness emerged as a critical factor influencing customers' intentions to repurchase services in the telecommunications industry.

In the service sector and interconnected world, where customer expectations for speed and convenience are constantly evolving, responsiveness has become a key differentiator for service providers. By prioritizing responsiveness and agility in

service delivery, providers can create positive service experiences that drive customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy (Kotler, 2014).

2.3.5 Assurance

Assurance is a vital component of service quality, representing the provider's ability to instill confidence, trust, and credibility in customers. It involves demonstrating competence, reliability, and professionalism in delivering services and handling customer interactions (O'Donnell, 2016). Research highlights the significance of assurance in shaping customer perceptions and evaluations of service quality. According to Parasuraman et al. (2018), assurance is defined as the provider's ability to convey trust and confidence to customers through competent and courteous service delivery. Customers expect service providers to demonstrate assurance by offering reliable, accurate, and dependable services.

Research by Zeithaml et al. (2019) found that assurance is positively associated with customer satisfaction and loyalty. When customers perceive a service provider as trustworthy and reliable, they are more likely to feel confident and satisfied with the service experience. Furthermore, studies have shown that assurance can have a significant impact on customer loyalty and retention. For example, in a study by Rust and Zahorik (2013), assurance emerged as a critical factor influencing customers' intentions to continue using financial services.

Competitive marketplace, where trust and credibility are essential for building strong customer relationships, assurance has become a strategic imperative for service providers. By demonstrating competence, reliability, and professionalism, providers can create positive service experiences that enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy (Bitner, 2020).

2.4 Customer Satisfaction

2.4.1 Customer Retention

Customer retention refers to the ability of a business to retain its existing customers over a certain period. It is a critical component of customer satisfaction and long-term business success. Research has consistently shown that retaining existing

customers is more cost-effective than acquiring new ones (Reichheld, 2016). Additionally, loyal customers tend to spend more, refer others, and provide valuable feedback for product or service improvement (Fornell et al., 2016).

Effective customer retention strategies involve understanding customer needs, building strong relationships, and delivering exceptional value. One approach is to personalize the customer experience by offering customized products or services tailored to individual preferences (Blattberg & Deighton, 2016). This enhances customer satisfaction and fosters a sense of loyalty and commitment. Moreover, proactive communication and engagement play a crucial role in customer retention. Regularly communicating with customers through various channels, such as email, social media, or phone calls, helps businesses stay top-of-mind and address any issues or concerns promptly (Verhoef et al., 2013). Building trust and rapport with customers also encourages repeat purchases and strengthens the relationship over time (Reichheld & Schefter, 2020).

Furthermore, implementing loyalty programs and incentives can incentivize customers to remain loyal and continue doing business with a company (Liu et al., 2020). Loyalty programs offer rewards, discounts, or exclusive offers to repeat customers, providing them with additional value and reinforcing their commitment to the brand (Reinartz & Kumar, 2022). In conclusion, customer retention is a vital component of customer satisfaction and business success. By focusing on personalized experiences, proactive communication, and loyalty initiatives, businesses can enhance customer retention rates, foster loyalty, and drive long-term customer satisfaction.

2.4.2 Customer Commitment

Customer commitment refers to the emotional attachment and dedication that customers have towards a brand or company. It goes beyond mere satisfaction and involves a deeper level of engagement and loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 2014). Committed customers are more likely to continue doing business with a company, withstand competitive offers, and advocate for the brand (Moorman et al., 2012). Several factors contribute to customer commitment, including trust, perceived value, and relationship quality. Trust is fundamental in building commitment, as customers

need to feel confident and secure in their interactions with a company (Garbarino & Johnson, 2019). Businesses can foster trust by delivering on promises, being transparent and maintaining integrity in their dealings (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Perceived value is another critical driver of customer commitment. Customers are more likely to remain loyal to a company if they perceive the value they receive to be higher than the cost of the product or service (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2012). Offering high-quality products, excellent customer service, and competitive pricing enhances perceived value and strengthens customer commitment.

Additionally, relationship quality plays a significant role in fostering customer commitment. Building strong, mutually beneficial relationships with customers through personalized interactions, responsiveness, and empathy cultivates a sense of loyalty and commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 2014). Businesses that invest in relationship-building efforts are more likely to retain committed customers and benefit from their long-term patronage. Furthermore, emotional engagement and brand affinity contribute to customer commitment. Customers who feel emotionally connected to a brand are more likely to exhibit commitment and loyalty (Fullerton, 2003). Businesses can create emotional connections through storytelling, brand personality, and shared values, resonating with customers on a deeper level and fostering lasting relationships.

2.4.3 Customer Referrals

Customer referrals, also known as word-of-mouth marketing, occur when satisfied customers recommend a product or service to others. It is a powerful form of promotion that can significantly impact a company's reputation, credibility, and growth (Buttle, 2018). Research has shown that referred customers tend to be more loyal, have higher lifetime value, and are more likely to refer others themselves (Reichheld, 2013).

Effective customer referral programs leverage satisfied customers as brand ambassadors, incentivizing them to spread positive word-of-mouth and attract new business (Chen et al., 2010). Offering incentives such as discounts, rewards, or exclusive perks encourages customers to refer friends, family, or colleagues to the

company (Schmitt et al., 2011). This creates a win-win situation where both the referrer and the referee benefit from the referral.

Moreover, providing exceptional customer experiences and exceeding expectations increases the likelihood of receiving referrals (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Satisfied customers who have had positive interactions with a company are more inclined to share their experiences with others and recommend the brand (Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006). Consistently delivering outstanding service and value motivates customers to become advocates and promoters for the brand. Furthermore, building strong relationships with customers and fostering trust and loyalty are essential for generating referrals (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000). Customers are more likely to refer others to a company they trust and have a positive relationship with (Dellarocas, 2003). Investing in relationship-building efforts and maintaining open lines of communication with customers encourage them to advocate for the brand and refer others.

In conclusion, customer referrals are a valuable component of customer satisfaction and business growth. By implementing referral programs, delivering exceptional experiences, and building strong relationships with customers, businesses can harness the power of word-of-mouth marketing to attract new customers and drive long-term success

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presented the research methodology that guided the study. Research methodology is the plan or strategy that structures the entire research process from framing a research question to disseminating its findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It covered the research design, study population, sample size, data sources, data collection instruments, measurement of variables, data validity and reliability, data analysis, the limitations faced during the study, and the ethical issues that was considered in the research.

3.1 Research Design

A research design is a blueprint for conducting a study with a clearly defined path. It provides a plan for addressing research questions or hypotheses via empirical investigation (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). The study adopted a descriptive and cross-sectional research design. The design was selected because it was flexible in enabling the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Besides, the design permitted determination of the effect of Customer orientation on customer satisfaction. The study was conducted using a cross-sectional design, enabling data collection at a single point in time. A concurrent mixed-method approach was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered simultaneously to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research topic.

The quantitative data analysis focused on describing the status of customer orientation and customer satisfaction, using statistical methods to identify trends and patterns. Meanwhile, qualitative data, collected through interviews, offered in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perspectives, enriching the overall understanding of the findings. In addition, the study used a survey strategy to gather data from larger number of respondents and for wider coverage in order to capture quantitative data.

3.2 Study Population

The study population is the larger group from which a sample is selected in a research study. It represents the entire group of people or elements that the research aims to investigate or draw conclusions about (Kothari, 2014). The study population comprised of the employees, managers and customers of hotels in Gulu City. Gulu City has a total of 314 registered hotels (URSB, 2023) from where respondents were selected.

3.3 Sample Size

A sample size is the selection of a subset of the population of interest in a research study (Bryman, 2016). The sample size for respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula. Out of a total of 314 hotels, 169 were selected, and customers from these hotels were asked to complete questionnaires. For the qualitative component, the researcher interviewed hotel managers until data saturation was reached.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

The respondents were sampled using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Hotels were stratified into two divisions (Gulu West and Gulu East), from which managers and customers were purposively selected. Stratification ensured that hotels from all divisions in Gulu city were included. Purposive sampling was applied to include knowledgeable managers and customers in the study.

3.6 Data Sources

Both primary and secondary data were utilized in this study. Primary data on customer orientation and satisfaction were gathered through direct interactions with respondents. Secondary data were derived from relevant documents, such as hotel reports, published studies, and other literature on the hotel industry.

3.7 Data Collection methods

The researcher adopted both survey and interview methods to collect data, ensuring that in-depth information was gathered from a large number of respondents.

3.7.1 Survey Method

The survey method involved the use of a structured questionnaire consisting of predetermined questions in a written format to collect data from respondents. In this study, standardized questionnaires were utilized to ensure consistency in data collection across respondents, enabling the researcher to gather information from a larger sample size.

3.7.2 Interview Method

An interview is a data collection method that facilitates the direct exchange of information between a researcher and a participant. This process can occur through face-to-face or virtual conversations, where the researcher poses questions and records the responses (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). In this study, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with participants and recorded their responses using an audio recorder, enabling an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding customer orientation and satisfaction.

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

This study employed questionnaires and an interview guide as the primary data collection instruments.

3.8.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaires were designed with closed-ended questions, as they are straightforward to administer and analyze. The questionnaire consisted of four parts, covering demographic profiles, customer orientation, service quality, and customer satisfaction. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher to facilitate easy retrieval from customers who might be difficult to contact later.

3.8.2 Interview Guide

The interview guide was a structured outline of questions used by the researcher to conduct interviews. It served as a roadmap for the interviewer, ensuring that important topics were addressed and facilitating a consistent and systematic data collection process. The researcher organized the flow of the interview guide logically and coherently, beginning with an introductory section followed by key

questions on customer orientation, service quality, and customer satisfaction.

3.9 Data quality control

The researcher ensured data quality through the application of reliability and validity, as outlined below:

3.9.1 Reliability

The reliability of the questionnaires was ensured through pretesting the instruments among hotels not included in the sample size. This process allowed for the rephrasing of questions that respondents found difficult to understand. Additionally, the reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient to check for internal consistency. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.7 and above was considered reliable, as suggested by Polit and Cheryl (2006).

Table 1 : Computation of Cronbach's alpha

Variables	Anchor points	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Customer orientation	5	15	0.935
Service quality	5	25	0.976
Customer satisfaction	5	14	0.959

Reliability analysis was performed, and all Cronbach's alpha coefficient values were above 0.7, indicating that the instrument was considered reliable.

3.9.2 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which a test measures what the researcher intends to measure. It is a critical criterion, indicating the degree to which an instrument accurately measures its intended constructs. To ensure validity, the research instruments were presented to research experts for their assessment of the items. The researcher then computed the Content Validity Index (CVI) using the formula provided below:

$$CVI = \frac{\text{Number of items rated relevant by experts}}{\text{Total number of items}}$$

Total number of items in the instrument

The researcher assessed validity using the Content Validity Index (CVI). According to Amin (2005), an instrument with a CVI of 0.7 and above is considered acceptable and valid. Accordingly all the values were above 0.7

Table 2: CVI Computation

Experts	Computation	CVI
Expert 1	55/64	0.859
Expert 2	60/64	0.937
Expert 3	58/64	0.906

Source: *Primary data*

3.10 Data Analysis

Data from the field were sorted, edited, and coded to ensure quality, accuracy, and completeness. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 was utilized for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were applied to assess customer orientation and customer satisfaction, with results presented in terms of mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages. Inferential statistics were employed to examine the relationship between customer orientation and customer satisfaction. Additionally, regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the effects of customer orientation and service quality on customer satisfaction.

For the qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis was used. This involved transcribing the data, coding it, and broadly categorizing it into themes. The findings were presented in a coherent and organized manner through thematic summaries, narrative descriptions, and the use of quotes to support the identified themes.

3.11 Study limitations and Delimitations

Some respondents exhibited suspicion and were hesitant to provide the required information, fearing that the researcher might be a competitor. This concern was mitigated by assuring respondents that the information was intended solely for

research and academic purposes, and that their responses would be kept confidential.

The current study focused on a limited number of selected hotels, which may hinder the generalizability of the findings to the entire hotel sector in Northern Uganda. To address this limitation, the researcher recommends conducting future studies that encompass a broader range of hotels throughout the region. Such comprehensive research would provide more representative insights and contribute to a better understanding of the hospitality landscape in Northern Uganda.

3.11. Ethical considerations

Before conducting the study, the researcher sought and obtained the necessary approvals and permissions from relevant authorities. An introductory letter from the Faculty of Business and Development Studies at Gulu University was acquired to facilitate access to respondents by presenting it to the management of the selected hotels.

To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, the researcher ensured that their personal information and responses remained confidential and could not be linked back to individual participants. Consequently, the names of respondents were not included in any research instruments used for data collection.

Additionally, informed consent was obtained from all participants before administering the questionnaires and conducting interviews. This process ensured that no respondent was interviewed against their will, upholding ethical standards in the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Introduction

This study investigated the effect of customer orientation on customer satisfaction. This chapter presents the analysis of the findings and is structured according to the study's objectives, with the exception of the demographic section. It comprises a descriptive analysis of customer orientation, a descriptive analysis of the level of customer satisfaction, and correlation and regression analyses to determine the effect of customer orientation on customer satisfaction.

4.1 Demographic Background

The age distribution of hotel customers in Gulu City revealed that 47.9% were aged 31-40, indicating that middle-aged individuals constituted the primary clientele, likely due to their financial stability. The second largest group was aged 26-30 (26.6%), while those above 40 represented 16%, and young adults (18-25) accounted for just 9.5%.

In terms of gender, males made up 59.9% of hotel customers, suggesting that men frequented hotels more than women, though the disparity was not extreme. Regarding education, 52.7% of customers held a degree or higher, indicating a well-educated clientele, while those with diplomas (24.3%) and secondary education (14.2%) followed.

Regarding customer loyalty, 55% had been customers for 1-5 years, and 27.2% for 6-10 years, indicating moderate loyalty. Marital status showed that married individuals comprised the largest group (30.8%), followed by divorced (28.4%) and widowed individuals (21.9%), with single customers making up the smallest group at 18.9%. This distribution suggested that married and divorced individuals frequented hotels more, likely due to personal circumstances driving their demand for such services.

Table 3: Description of Characteristics of Respondents

Categories	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18-25	16	9.5
26-30	45	26.6
31-40	81	47.9
Above40	27	16.0
Gender		
Male	99	59.9
Female	70	40.1
Education		
Primary	15	8.9
Secondary	24	14.2
Diploma	41	24.3
Degree and above	89	52.7
Duration as a customer		
Less than one year	23	13.6
1-5 years	93	55.0
6-10 years	46	27.2
Above10 years	7	4.1
Marital Status		
Single	32	18.9
Married	52	30.8
Widowed	37	21.9
Divorced	48	28.4
Total	169	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024

4.2 Customer Orientation`

Customer orientation comprises of three major elements which include customer centric orientation, product-based orientation and relationship-based orientation as indicated below

4.2.1 Customer Centric Orientation

The data analysis of customer-centric orientation, as a component of customer orientation in hotels in Gulu City, is presented in the table below:

Table 4: Responses on Customer Centric Orientation

CUSTOMER CENTRIC ORIENTATION	SD	D	SD+ D	N	A	SA	A+S A
This business put customers' interest first in its operations	10.7%	10.1%	20.8%	6.5%	10.7%	62.1%	72.8%
This business strives to fulfill my needs whenever I visit this hotel.	2.4%	7.1%	9.5%	7.7%	21.9%	60.9%	82.8%
This business values my interest whenever I utilize their services	1.2%	7.7%	8.9%	6.5%	28.4%	56.2%	84.6%
My priorities are usually fulfilled by this hotel	3.4%	5.5%	8.9%	6.5%	29.4%	59.2%	80.6%
This hotel pays keen attention in fulfilling my aspirations	1.8%	8.3%	10.1%	3.6%	29.0%	57.4%	86.4%
Average	3.70%	7.94%	11.62%	6.16%	23.68%	58.56%	81.44%

Source: Primary data, 2024

The study revealed that 86.4% of respondents strongly agreed that hotel businesses pay keen attention to fulfilling customer aspirations. Additionally, 82.8% valued customer interests when utilizing services and the same percentage agreed that businesses strive to meet customer needs during their visits. Overall, the study confirmed that, on average, 81.44% of respondents agreed there is a high level of customer-centric orientation.

The qualitative analysis highlights several emerging themes that highlight customer-centric focus among hotel businesses, revealing a commitment to enhancing guest experiences, valuing customer interests, and fostering long-term relationships. This dedication to customer satisfaction, seen through personalized service delivery and a deep understanding of guest needs, resonates with findings in similar studies

within the hospitality sector. Among the key themes identified includes:

Deep Commitment to Customer Satisfaction

A prominent theme that emerged is the deep commitment hotel businesses exhibit toward customer satisfaction, recognizing that positive experiences foster customer loyalty and repeat business. Many hotel managers and staff articulated their focus on proactively meeting guest expectations, as one manager noted, "Our goal is to make every guest feel valued and ensure they leave with a memorable experience. We listen to their feedback and continually improve our offerings." This emphasis on customer satisfaction aligns with findings from Mohsin & Lockyer (2020), who observed that customer-centric practices enhance loyalty and build positive word-of-mouth in the hospitality industry. Consistent with this, hotel employees often show a willingness to adapt their services based on guest feedback, with one hotel owner expressing, "We take every review seriously, whether it's online or in-person, and ensure that our services evolve to keep up with guest expectations." This finding demonstrates commitments of hotels to drive customer satisfaction through customer centric approach.

Personalized Service and Attention to Detail

Another key theme is the prioritization of personalization, where hotels tailor services to align with individual guest preferences. This focus on a customized approach is echoed by various managers who highlighted how anticipating customer needs adds value to the guest experience. "Our staff is trained to notice the little things – whether a guest prefers a specific type of pillow or has dietary restrictions – and ensure these preferences are met without them having to ask," shared one manager. This commitment to detail is substantiated by research from Kandampully & Suhartanto (2020), which shows that personalization in service delivery contributes to higher satisfaction and

customer retention. Staff training programs are often designed to reinforce this mindset, with another manager adding, "We empower our team to think creatively and address each guest's needs individually, and making them feel like VIPs." This further elaborates into detail the customer-centric approach of hotels in Gulu city.

Anticipating Customer Needs through Proactive Engagement

Proactive engagement emerged as a third theme, where hotel staff takes deliberate steps to anticipate customer needs. Managers expressed a sense of pride in "going above and beyond" to fulfill unspoken needs. As one manager described, "We strive to understand what our customers might want even before they express it, from offering extra amenities to recommending local experiences." This proactive approach is also supported by insights from peer-reviewed studies, which emphasize that anticipating customer needs can lead to heightened satisfaction and stronger brand loyalty (Kim & Ok, 2019). For example, staff may reach out with recommendations on local attractions or events that align with a guest's interests, enhancing their overall experience and helping them feel more connected to the area.

Overall, the qualitative analysis reveals that hotel businesses prioritize a customer-centric approach through personalized service, proactive engagement, and relationship building. These efforts not only contribute to immediate guest satisfaction but also foster long-term loyalty. This alignment with findings from hospitality research suggests that customer-centric practices remain central to achieving excellence and sustaining competitiveness in the industry.

4.2.2 Product Based Orientation

The data analysis of product-based orientation, as a component of customer orientation in hotels in Gulu City, is presented in the table below:

Table 5: Responses on Customer Centric Orientation

PRODUCT BASED ORIENTATION	S D	D	SD +D		A	SA	A+ SA
This hotel places a strong emphasis on the features and specifications of its products.	3. 0 %	9. 5 %	12. 4%	4. 7 %	32. 5%	50. 3%	82. 8%
This hotel focuses primarily on promoting the features and benefits of its products.	2. 4 %	5. 9 %	8.3 %	2. 4 %	39. 6%	49. 7%	89. 3%
This hotel puts strong emphasis on product innovation	1. 8 %	5. 9 %	7.7 %	4. 7 %	33. 1%	54. 4%	87. 6%
This hotel puts strong emphasis in highlighting the uniqueness and superiority of its products.	2. 4 %	5. 9 %	8.3 %	3. 6 %	31. 4%	56. 8%	88. 2%
This hotel consistently improves on its product functionality.	3. 0 %	5. 3 %	8.3 %	5. 3 %	29. 0%	57. 4%	86. 4%
Average	2.5 2%	6.5 0%	9.00 %	4.1 4%	33.1 2%	53.7 2%	86.8 6%

Source: Primary data

The study indicated that 89.3% of respondents strongly agreed that the hotel primarily focuses on promoting the features and benefits of its products. Following this, 88.2% of respondents emphasized the importance of highlighting the uniqueness and superiority of the hotel's offerings, while 87.6% agreed that the hotel places strong emphasis on product innovation. Overall, the study found that, on average, 86.86% of respondents recognized a high level of customer-centric orientation.

The qualitative findings reveal key themes around the importance of showcasing

product features, the strategic emphasis on innovation, and the role of differentiation in meeting customer expectations in the hotel industry. These themes elaborate how hotel businesses approach product presentation and continuous improvement to maintain a competitive edge and ensure customer satisfaction. During the analysis process, the following themes emerged:

Emphasis on Showcasing Unique Features and Benefits

A significant theme is the strong focus on highlighting the unique qualities and advantages of their offerings. Hotels view showcasing their product features as essential to conveying value to customers, enabling them to distinguish their brand in a competitive market. This approach aligns with the findings of Kwortnik (2015), who asserts that effective product differentiation in the hospitality sector plays a crucial role in shaping guests' perceptions of quality and value. Many hotel managers emphasized the importance of making guests aware of their amenities and services, as one manager noted, "We invest a lot in ensuring our guests know about our facilities – the bar, the rooftop lounge, even the locally-sourced dishes in our restaurant. These are our strengths, and we want guests to see the value in choosing us."

The focus on product features extends to ensuring these aspects are effectively communicated at all guest touch points. As another staff member highlighted, "From the booking process to the check-in experience, we make sure our guests are fully aware of what makes our offerings stand out. We want them to experience the unique qualities that differentiate us from other hotels."

This commitment to showcasing benefits resonates with notion of perceived value, suggesting that detailed communication of features can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Continuous Innovation as a Competitive Strategy

Innovation is a recurring theme, with respondents emphasizing the need to regularly improve and refresh offerings to maintain customer interest and market relevance. Many hotel operators regard innovation as an ongoing process that is essential for both customer satisfaction and brand reputation. This view aligns with research from Ottenbacher and Gnoth (2015), which highlights that innovation in hospitality settings positively impacts service quality and brand loyalty.

Hotel staff often described their proactive approach to innovating their products and services, as one respondent shared, "We're constantly looking for new ways to surprise our guests – whether it's adding new local flavors to the menu or introducing technology-driven amenities that make their stay more convenient. We don't want our guests to feel like they're experiencing the same thing every time they visit."

Another hotel manager emphasized, "Innovation is part of our brand ethos. It keeps us relevant and shows our guests that we care about providing fresh and meaningful experiences." The above expressions emphasize the need for strict implementation of product-based orientation by hotels in Gulu city.

Differentiation and Value Creation

Differentiation emerged as a third theme, where hotel businesses recognize the importance of setting themselves apart by offering distinctive products and experiences. This focus on differentiation is a way to demonstrate value and foster stronger connections with guests. As one manager expressed, "There are so many choices out there, so we need to make it clear why guests should choose us. We highlight our local partnerships, unique amenities, and personalized services to create a memorable experience that's different from what they'd find elsewhere."

Differentiation is seen as key to retaining guests in a market where customers often

seek unique experiences. One guest, reflecting this sentiment, shared, "I come back here because they know my preferences and make each stay feel special. They don't just give a standard experience – it's tailored and thoughtful, and that keeps me coming back." The importance of tailoring products to the needs of guests has been strongly emphasized.

The qualitative analysis highlights that hotel businesses prioritize product excellence, innovation, differentiation, and consistent quality as integral strategies in delivering value to guests. These themes reveal a broader commitment to exceeding customer expectations and building meaningful connections. This approach not only attracts new guests but also fosters loyalty among existing customers, ultimately supporting long-term growth and brand strength in a competitive hospitality industry.

4.2.3 Relationship Based Orientation

Data analysis of relationship-based orientation as a component of customer orientation in hotels in Gulu city is as presented in the table below:

Table 6: Responses on relationship-based orientation

RELATIONSHIP BASED ORIENTATION	SD	D	SD+ D	N	A	SA	A+S A
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This hotel values building long-term relationships with its customers.	2. 4%	10. 7%	13. 0%	6. 5%	30. 2%	50. 3%	80. 5%
This hotel encourages open communication and feedback between customers and employees.	3. 6%	8.9 %	12. 4%	3. 6%	30. 8%	53. 3%	84. 0%
This hotel resolves customer issues and complaints promptly and effectively.	3. 0%	10. 1%	13. 0%	2. 4%	29. 6%	55. 0%	84. 6%
Customers are recognized and rewarded for their loyalty and repeat business.	2. 4%	7.7 %	10. 1%	4. 7%	24. 9%	60. 4%	85. 2%
The company places importance on building trust and rapport with customers.	1. 8%	5.3 %	7.1 %	5. 9%	28. 4%	58. 6%	87. 0%
Average	2.6 4%	8.54 %	11.1 2%	4.6 2%	28.7 8%	55.5 2%	84.2 6%

Source: Primary data

The study indicates that, 87.0% of the respondents strongly agree that, hotel businesses places importance on building trust and rapport with customers, followed by the fact that 85.2% of respondents who values are recognized and rewarded for their loyalty and repeat business while 84.6% of the respondents were in agreement that the hotel business resolves customers' issues and complaints promptly and effectively. From the study it was confirmed that, on average 84.26% of the respondents agree that there is high level of relationship-based orientation.

4.3 Service Quality

Data analysis of service quality in the hotels in Gulu city comprised of the reliability of service, responsiveness, empathy, tangibility and assurance as handled in the

following sections.

4.3.1 Reliability

Data analysis on reliability as a key aspect of service quality in hotels in Gulu city is as presented in the table below:

Table 7: Responses on Reliability of Service

RELIABILITY	SD	D	SD +D	N	A	SA	A+ SA
This hotel delivers its services on time as promised.	1.8 %	4.7 %	6.5 %	5.3 %	25.4%	62.7%	88.2%
I can depend on this hotel in fulfilling its commitments.	3.6 %	4.7 %	8.3 %	4.7 %	26.6%	60.4%	87.0%
This hotel services are available whenever required	3.0 %	7.1 %	10.1%	4.1 %	27.2%	58.6%	85.8%
This hotel offers prompt services as per customer expectation	4.1 %	4.7 %	8.9 %	4.7 %	30.2%	56.2%	86.4%
This hotel has a reputation for being reliable among its customers.	4.1 %	4.1 %	8.3 %	4.7 %	25.4%	61.5%	87.0%
Average	3.32%	5.06%	8.42%	4.70%	26.96%	59.88%	86.88%

Source: Primary data

The study indicated that 88.2% of respondents strongly agreed that the hotel delivers its services on time as promised. This was followed by 87.0% of respondents who noted that the hotel has a strong reputation for reliability among its customers, while 86.4% agreed that the hotel offers prompt services that meet customer expectations. The study confirmed that, on average, 86.88% of respondents recognized a high level of reliability, indicating a strong level of service quality in terms of reliability within the hotel sector in Gulu City.

The qualitative findings highlight a key theme of reliability in service delivery as central to the hotel sector in Gulu City, where trustworthiness and consistent service delivery shape guest perceptions and contribute to customer satisfaction. Several sub-themes emerge under this overarching focus on reliability, such as service timeliness, promise fulfillment, and the development of a trustworthy reputation. These aspects collectively suggest a strong emphasis on ensuring a dependable experience for clients, supporting previous research on the critical role of reliability in service quality. Among the themes identified were:

Consistency and Fulfillment of Promises

Reliability, as perceived by guests, is primarily driven by the hotel's ability to fulfill promises and provide consistent service quality. Many respondents emphasized how consistently the hotels deliver on their advertised services and amenities, noting that these establishments reliably meet their expectations during every stay. This theme of fulfilling promises is significant in hospitality literature, where reliability is considered a fundamental aspect of perceived service quality. One guest, for example, expressed, "Every time I stay here, I find everything exactly as described—no surprises, just the quality I expect."

Hotels in Gulu City appear dedicated to establishing a stable level of service quality that guests can rely upon, particularly valued among corporate clients who require assured, uninterrupted service. This sentiment resonates with findings from Enz and Siguaw (2013), which suggest that consistency in service quality is a powerful tool for retaining corporate clients and fostering loyalty.

Timeliness of Service Delivery

Another critical dimension of reliability in the findings is timeliness. Many guests specifically highlighted the hotel's ability to deliver services on time, such as prompt room service, punctual check-in processes, and adherence to any special requests without delays. This aspect of timeliness is crucial in building trust, as it reduces customer anxiety and enhances the perception of efficient service. One corporate client noted, "I can always rely on the hotel for quick responses and on-time service, whether it's room service or handling specific requests. They never keep you waiting."

Research supports the importance of timeliness in reinforcing customer satisfaction, especially in the hospitality industry where delays can significantly detract from the guest experience (Gronroos, 2014). By prioritizing timely service, hotels reinforce their commitment to reliability, aligning with customers' expectations for efficiency and contributing to a seamless experience.

Trustworthiness and Reputation

The findings reveal that trustworthiness has become a cornerstone of the hotel's reputation in Gulu City, with guests frequently acknowledging the hotel's dependable nature as a differentiator. This widespread perception that the hotel is reliable not only enhances guest loyalty but also builds a positive reputation that attracts new clients. One guest remarked, "This hotel is known for its reliability. I have confidence in their services, and I'd recommend it to others without hesitation." Another shared, "Trusting that a hotel will meet your needs without fail is why I come back. They've built a reputation for delivering on their promises."

Trustworthiness in service delivery has a powerful effect on guest satisfaction and long-term loyalty, as studies suggest that the perception of reliability fosters positive word-of-mouth and return visits (Oh, 2019). The hotel's commitment to

trustworthiness reinforces guests' belief in its reliability, creating a positive feedback loop where dependable service attracts repeat business, bolstering the hotel's market position.

The qualitative analysis emphasizes the crucial role of reliability as a defining feature of service quality in Gulu City's hotel sector. Through consistent fulfillment of promises, a focus on timeliness, trustworthiness, and satisfaction-driven operations, these hotels have cultivated a reputation for dependability that resonates with their clientele. This reliability not only supports customer satisfaction but also positions these hotels favorably within the industry, demonstrating the long-term value of a reliable service approach.

4.3.2 Responsiveness

Table 7 below presents data on the responsiveness of hotels in Gulu City, which is a key component of service quality. The data reflects customer perceptions based on five key indicators of responsiveness:

Table 8: Responses on Responsiveness

RESPONSIVENESS	SD	D	SD+ D	N	A	SA	A+ SA
This hotel responds promptly to customer inquiries or requests.	5.3 %	2.4 %	7.7 %	5.9 %	29. 6%	56.8 %	86. 4%
I receive timely assistance from this when I need help.	4.1 %	0.6 %	4.7 %	5.3 %	31. 4%	58.6 %	89. 9%
This hotel is quick to acknowledge and address customer concerns.	3.0 %	1.8 %	4.7 %	4.1 %	30. 2%	60.9 %	91. 1%
This hotel is courteous in dealing with customers	2.4 %	4.1 %	6.5 %	2.4 %	25. 4%	65.7 %	91. 1%
This hotel demonstrates a sense of urgency in resolving customer problems.	2.4 %	5.3 %	7.7 %	3.0 %	24. 9%	64.5 %	89. 3%

Average	3.44 %	2.84 %	6.26 %	4.14 %	28.3 0%	61.3 0%	89.5 6%
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Source: Primary data

The study reveals that 91.1% of respondents strongly agree that the hotel is courteous in dealing with customers. Similarly, 91.1% of respondents reported that the hotel is quick to acknowledge and address customer concerns. Additionally, 89.9% of respondents agreed that the hotel provides timely assistance whenever they need help, highlighting the hotel's commitment to fulfilling customer needs during their stay.

On average, 89.57% of respondents agreed that there is a high level of responsiveness in the hotels. This high percentage of agreement reflects a significant level of service quality regarding responsiveness in Gulu City hotels.

The qualitative analysis reveals an essential dimension of service quality in Gulu City's hotel sector, centering on the theme of responsiveness. A strong emphasis on staff courtesy, attentiveness, and swift issue resolution emerged as defining characteristics of these hotels' commitment to providing exceptional customer service. This focus on responsiveness aligns with broader service quality research, which defines responsiveness as a key determinant of customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 2018). During the analysis process, key dimensions identified were:

Courtesy and Attentiveness of Hotel Staff

An integral part of service responsiveness is the courtesy and attentiveness displayed by hotel staff, which several respondents praised. The courteous interactions with hotel staff create a welcoming environment, and guests reported

feeling valued from the moment they arrived. A corporate client shared, “The moment I walk through the door, I feel that the staff genuinely value my presence, always greeting me warmly and checking if I need anything. It’s a wonderful feeling to be treated so well.”

Attentiveness is often associated with recognizing and meeting guests’ unexpressed needs, which contributes to a personalized experience. This focus on attentiveness emphasize that attentiveness and courtesy help create memorable guest experiences. Another guest remarked, “The staff seems to anticipate my needs, sometimes even before I realize them myself. It’s a level of service that I don’t often experience in other hotels.” This attentiveness demonstrates a customer-centric approach, which enhances guest satisfaction and fosters loyalty.

Proactive and Swift Issue Resolution

Another critical theme is the hotel’s commitment to swiftly resolving customer issues. Respondents frequently noted that any concerns or complaints were addressed promptly, demonstrating the hotel’s proactive approach to ensuring a positive guest experience. One manager explained, “Our goal is to make sure every customer leaves happy. When issues arise, we handle them immediately to prevent any disruption to their stay.” This proactive stance reinforces trust in the hotel and reflects a strong commitment to meeting guests’ expectations, pointing to timely issue resolution as a key component of service recovery.

From the guest perspective, this responsiveness is essential for maintaining satisfaction, as timely handling of issues minimizes potential dissatisfaction. A guest explained, “If I ever have a question or concern, the hotel staff addresses it right away. It shows they genuinely care about my experience and aren’t willing to compromise on quality.” This responsiveness

reflects a commitment to preserving service quality and maintaining a high level of guest satisfaction, an approach showing that rapid service recovery leads to higher levels of customer trust and loyalty.

Timely Assistance and Availability

The findings further highlight the availability of hotel staff and their readiness to provide assistance, reinforcing the hotels' responsive service model. Many guests emphasized that staff were always available when needed, which helped make them feel supported throughout their stay. This ready availability was viewed as essential to a seamless guest experience. One guest shared, "Whenever I need something, someone is always nearby and ready to help. It's as if they understand how valuable my time is."

Hotels' commitment to timely assistance contributes to a sense of security for guests, who appreciate knowing that support is available at any moment. This study identified staff availability as an important factor in hospitality satisfaction. The staff's eagerness to assist also reflects a proactive attitude towards service quality, with a guest mentioning, "No matter the request, the staff respond quickly and make sure everything is sorted without delay."

The qualitative data revealed responsiveness as a foundational element of service quality in Gulu City's hotel sector. By prioritizing courtesy, attentiveness, proactive issue resolution, and availability, these hotels have created an environment where guests feel consistently supported and valued. This customer-centric approach to service, coupled with a dedication to timely and effective assistance, positions these hotels as leaders in providing reliable and responsive service. By going above and beyond to meet guest needs, the hotels enhance guest satisfaction and build

long-term loyalty, affirming the importance of responsiveness as a critical factor in the hospitality experience

4.3.3 Assurance

Data analysis on service assurance as a key aspect of service quality in hotels in Gulu city is as presented in the table below:

Table 9: Responses on assurance

ASSURANCE	SD	D	SD +D	N	A	SA	A+S A
This hotel assures customers of the right time services are offered.	1.2 %	5.3%	6.5 %	5.9 %	30.2 %	57.4 %	87.6 %
The hotel customers are assured of the accuracy of records provided to them.	2.4 %	5.3%	7.7 %	2.4 %	27.2 %	62.7 %	89.9 %
Customers of this hotel are assured of the promises made to them.	1.8 %	4.7%	6.5 %	4.1 %	32.0 %	57.4 %	89.3 %
Customers of this hotel are assured of prompt services	1.8 %	5.4%	7.1 %	2.4 %	32.7 %	57.7 %	90.5 %
Customers are assured of service quality while interacting with this hotel	1.8 %	5.3%	7.1 %	2.4 %	29.6 %	60.9 %	90.5 %
Average	1.80 %	5.20%	6.98 %	3.44 %	30.3 4%	59.2 2%	89.5 6%

Source: Primary data, 2024

From the table above, the study revealed that 90.5% of respondents strongly agree that customers are assured of service quality while interacting with the hotel. Similarly, 90.5% of respondents indicated that customers are assured of receiving prompt service, while 89.9% agreed that hotel customers are assured of the accuracy of records provided to them. These findings indicate a very high level of assurance as a key dimension of service quality in the hotel sector in Gulu City.

The qualitative analysis places a strong emphasis on assurance as a fundamental

component of service quality in Gulu City's hotel sector, particularly focusing on the themes of prompt service, accuracy, and a commitment to high standards. Assurance, in the context of service quality, refers to the confidence and trust a business can inspire in its customers through reliability, accuracy, and attentive service. The study findings reveal that hotel managers take immense pride in their ability to provide guests with a sense of certainty and confidence in their services. The following key themes were identified:

Prompt Service and Efficiency

An overarching theme in the qualitative data is the importance placed on prompt service by hotel management and staff. Many hotel managers conveyed their dedication to minimizing wait times, recognizing that time is valuable to guests, especially those visiting for business or tourism purposes. This emphasis on promptness is seen as a mark of professionalism and respect for the customer's schedule. One manager commented, "Our staff is trained to anticipate guest needs and respond immediately—there's no room for delay because we know how much guests appreciate quick and efficient service."

Guests echoed this appreciation, with several noting that the quick response times made them feel valued and respected. For example, a guest remarked, "As soon as I made a request, the staff acted on it within minutes. This is the kind of efficiency I value, especially when I have a tight schedule." This approach means that prompt service not only enhances the customer experience but also reinforces a hotel's reputation for professionalism and reliability.

Accurate Record-Keeping and Attention to Detail

Accurate record-keeping emerged as another key theme contributing to the sense of assurance among guests. Hotel managers reported a strong commitment to precision in handling reservations, billing, and other administrative processes, viewing accuracy as essential for building trust with customers. As one manager explained, “We make sure that every transaction and every booking is recorded meticulously. This way, guests know they can trust us with their reservations and billing.”

Accuracy in record-keeping contributes to guest trust by ensuring there are no misunderstandings or errors in charges, which can be a major factor in customer dissatisfaction. A guest noted, “I appreciate that the hotel keeps accurate records—I never have to worry about discrepancies in my bill. This level of transparency is so important.” This result highlights accuracy as a cornerstone of trust-building in service industries.

Commitment to High Standards and Customer Confidence

A third significant theme is the hotel's commitment to maintaining high standards, which contributes to a feeling of security and confidence among guests. Many hotel managers expressed pride in their ability to deliver consistently high-quality service, reinforcing guests' confidence in choosing their establishment. This focus on high standards and customer assurance aligns with the concept of “service assurance,” which encompasses the knowledge, courtesy, and confidence conveyed by employees to foster a sense of trust (Grönroos, 2017).

One manager remarked, “From the moment guests arrive, we want them to feel assured that they will receive top-notch service. We hold ourselves to very high standards, and our goal is always to exceed customer expectations.” This dedication to maintaining quality is appreciated by guests, who feel that the hotel genuinely cares about delivering a superior experience. A returning

guest mentioned, “Every time I come back, I know the quality will be just as good, if not better. They’ve earned my trust by delivering consistent, high-quality service.”

The qualitative findings identified assurance as a critical component of service quality in Gulu City’s hotel industry, with an emphasis on prompt service, accuracy, high standards, and personalized attention. By excelling in these areas, hotels foster trust and confidence among their guests, which contributes significantly to customer satisfaction and loyalty. The focus on accuracy in record-keeping, timely responses to requests, and a strong commitment to quality standards aligns with best practices in service quality management and highlights the importance of assurance as a means of building and maintaining guest loyalty.

4.3.4 Empathy

Data analysis on empathy as a key aspect of service quality in hotels in Gulu city is as presented in the table below:

Table 10: Responses on empathy

EMPATHY	SD	D	SD +D	N	A	SA	A+S A
This hotel has the best interest of customers at heart.	1.2 %	6. 5%	7.7 %	2. 4%	29. 6%	60. 4%	89.9 %
This hotel understands the specific needs of its customers.	1.2 %	6. 5%	7.7 %	2. 4%	32. 5%	57. 4%	89.9 %
This hotel gives personal and individualized attention to its customers.	2.4 %	3. 6%	6.0 %	6. 0%	31. 0%	57. 1%	88.1 %
This hotel has the ability to respond to customers’ queries.	1.2 %	7. 1%	8.3 %	4. 1%	33. 1%	54. 4%	87.6 %
This hotel takes into	3.6	5.	9.5	3.	27.	59.	87.0

consideration customers' feelings while serving them.	%	9%	%	6%	8%	2%	%
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Source: Primary data, 2024

The study indicates that 89.9% of respondents strongly agree that hotel businesses have the best interests of customers at heart. Additionally, 89.9% feel that the hotel understands the specific needs of its customers, while 82.8% agree that the hotel strives to fulfill customers' needs during their visits. On average, 88.50% of respondents agreed that there is a high level of empathy present. This overall high level of agreement underscores empathy as a crucial component of service quality in hotels in Gulu City.

4.3.5 Tangibility

Data analysis on tangibility as a key aspect of service quality in hotels in Gulu city is as presented in the table below:

Table 12: Responses on tangibility

TANGIBLES	SD	D	SD+ D	N	A	SA	A+S A
This hotel has modern and up-to-date equipment or facilities.	4.1 %	5.3%	9.5 %	7.7 %	24.9 %	58.0 %	82.8 %
The physical appearance of this hotel's facilities is clean and well-maintained.	2.4 %	8.3%	10.7 %	3.6 %	29.0 %	56.8 %	85.8 %
This hotel offers attractive and visually appealing materials resources or equipment.	1.2 %	8.9%	10.1 %	5.3 %	30.8 %	53.8 %	84.6 %
The design and layout of this hotel's physical environment is impressive	2.4 %	5.3%	7.7 %	4.1 %	36.1 %	52.1 %	88.2 %
The appearance of this hotel's employees reflects positively on the overall service quality.	3.6 %	4.7%	8.3 %	3.0 %	34.9 %	53.8 %	88.8 %
Average	2.74 %	6.50%	9.26 %	4.74 %	31.1 4%	54.9 0%	86.0 4%

Source: Primary data, 2024

The study indicates that 88.8% of respondents strongly agree that the appearance of hotel employees positively reflects on overall service quality. Additionally, 88.2% of respondents feel that the design and layout of the hotel's physical environment are impressive, while 85.8% agree that the hotel's facilities are clean and well-maintained. On average, 86.04% of respondents confirmed a high level of tangibility as a component of service quality in hotels in Gulu City.

A detailed qualitative analysis of hotel employees' appearance, service positivity, design, layout, cleanliness, and overall tangibility was conducted based on interview results. Hotel managers in Gulu City overwhelmingly praised the positive impact of employees' appearance on service quality. One manager noted: "The professional and well-groomed appearance of our hotel staff really sets a positive tone for the entire guest experience. It reflects our commitment to excellence and attention to detail."

Similarly, the managers were highly impressed with the design and layout of the hotel's physical environment. As one manager commented: "The modern, open floor plan and thoughtful placement of furnishings and decor create a really inviting and visually appealing atmosphere for our guests. It's a big part of what makes our hotel stand out."

Regarding the cleanliness and well-maintained condition of the hotel's facilities, the managers were equally enthusiastic. From the interview results, most respondents consistently remarked on how clean and well-kept their hotel is, from the gleaming lobby to the spotless guest rooms.

Generally, the respondents recognized the tangible aspects of the hotel, including employee appearance, physical design, and facility maintenance, were of a very high quality and contributed significantly to the overall service experience.

4.4 Customer Satisfaction

Data analysis on customer satisfaction in hotels in Gulu city comprises of customer commitment, customer referrals and customer retention rate as presented in the following section.

4.4.1 Customer Commitment

Data analysis on customer commitment which constitutes a key element of customer satisfaction is presented in the table below:

Table 13: Responses on customer commitment

CUSTOMER COMMITMENT	SD	D	SD+ D	N	A	SA	A+S A
I am committed to continuing my relationship with this hotel in the future.	3.6 %	3.6 %	7.1 %	4.7 %	30.8 %	57.4 %	88.2 %
I am always willing to spend a lot of money accessing this hotel services	1.8 %	4.7 %	6.5 %	7.1 %	33.1 %	53.3 %	86.4 %

I am willing to invest time and effort in maintaining a relationship with this hotel	1.8 %	6.5 %	8.3 %	3.6 %	31.4 %	56.8 %	88.2 %
I am committed to supporting this hotel through my continued patronage.	1.8 %	4.1 %	5.9 %	3.6 %	32.0 %	58.6 %	90.5 %
Average	2.25 %	4.73 %	6.95 %	4.75 %	31.83 %	56.53 %	88.33 %

Source: Primary data, 2024

The study shows that 90.5% of respondents strongly agree that they are committed to supporting the hotel through their continued patronage. Additionally, 88.2% of respondents are dedicated to maintaining a positive relationship with the hotel in the future, while 86.4% are willing to spend significant amounts on hotel services. On average, 88.33% of respondents indicated a high level of customer commitment, reflecting strong customer satisfaction in hotels in Gulu City.

4.4.2 Customer Referrals

Data analysis on customer referrals which constitutes a key element of customer satisfaction is presented in the table below:

Table 14: Responses on customer referrals

CUSTOMER REFERRALS	SD	D	SD+ D	N	A	SA	A+ SA
I am likely to recommend this hotel to friends, family, or colleagues.	3.6 %	4.1 %	7.7 %	3.0 %	29.0%	60.4 %	89.3%
I have referred others to this hotel based on my positive experiences.	1.8 %	4.1 %	5.9 %	4.1 %	30.2%	59.8 %	89.9%
I trust this hotel enough to recommend it to others.	1.8 %	3.0 %	4.7 %	4.7 %	25.4%	65.1 %	90.5%
I have encouraged others to use this hotel's products/ services.	3.0 %	3.0 %	5.9 %	3.0 %	25.4%	65.7 %	91.1%
I usually share my positive experience about this hotel	1.8 %	4.1 %	5.9 %	4.7 %	22.5%	66.9 %	89.3%

with other friends.							
Average	2.4 0%	3.66 %	6.02 %	3.90 %	26.5 0%	63.58 %	90.0 2%

Source: Primary data, 2024

The study indicates that 91.1% of respondents strongly agree that they encourage others to use the hotel, followed by 90.5% who trust the hotel enough to recommend it to others. Additionally, 89.9% of respondents frequently share their positive experiences about the hotel with friends. On average, 90.02% of respondents agree that there is a high level of customer referral, reflecting a strong level of customer satisfaction.

The qualitative findings reveal a deep-rooted belief among hotel managers in Gulu City in the strength of customer loyalty cultivated through exceptional service, which manifests in high rates of customer referrals and advocacy. A thematic analysis of these responses highlights several key dimensions related to customer loyalty: active customer advocacy, trust in service quality, and the perceived reputation of the hotel. These themes demonstrate how confidence in service delivery translates into strong word-of-mouth referrals and builds a cycle of trust and loyalty that benefits both the hotels and their clients. Key themes highlighted include the following:

Active Customer Advocacy and Word-of-Mouth Referrals

One prominent theme is the perceived role of guests as active advocates for the hotel. Many managers described their customers as loyal patrons who go beyond expressing satisfaction by recommending the hotel to others. This reflects research by Shoemaker and Lewis (2019), who argue that customer loyalty in the hospitality sector extends beyond repeated patronage to include word-of-mouth advocacy, which significantly enhances the hotel's visibility and reputation.

One manager confidently stated, "Our customers don't just enjoy their stay, they actively encourage friends and family to choose us, which is the best endorsement we could ask for." This view was echoed by another manager who noted, "Our guests often leave glowing reviews online or tell us they've recommended us to colleagues. This kind of word-of-mouth promotion is invaluable." These findings align with studies showing that loyal customers act as informal brand ambassadors, spreading positive feedback that influences potential clients. This advocacy reflects a high level of satisfaction and loyalty that the hotel has earned through consistent, high-quality service, creating a ripple effect of positive referrals within the community and beyond.

Trust and Confidence in Service Quality

Another central theme is the level of trust that hotel managers believe customers have in the quality of service offered. This trust is seen as a fundamental component of customer loyalty, particularly in the hospitality industry, where guests rely on the promise of reliability and comfort. Research supports that trust in service quality is pivotal for customer loyalty, especially when hotels maintain consistency in meeting customer expectations (Kim, Vogt, & Knutson, 2015).

One manager remarked, "Our clients trust us to deliver the same exceptional experience every time they stay here. This trust is what brings them back and makes them confident to recommend us." This confidence reflects an ongoing relationship where customers feel secure in the value they receive, resulting in higher customer retention and loyalty. Another manager highlighted the seamless experience provided to guests: "From check-in to check-out, we make sure our guests experience smooth and efficient service. This consistency is why they come

back and spread the word.” Trust, as echoed in these statements, fosters loyalty by reinforcing a reliable and high-quality brand image that guests feel proud to endorse.

The qualitative findings demonstrate the role of customer loyalty as a cornerstone of the hotel sector’s success in Gulu City, driven by active advocacy, trust in consistent service quality, and a strong, positive reputation. The analysis suggests that managers view these elements as interlinked, each contributing to a robust cycle of loyalty where satisfied guests become informal ambassadors, promoting the hotel and fostering a steady stream of referrals.

4.4.3 Customer Retention Rate

Data analysis on customer retention rate which constitutes a key element of customer satisfaction is presented in the table below:

Table 15: Responses on customer retention rates

CUSTOMER RETENTION RATE	SD	D	SD+ D	N	A	SA	A+S A
I am likely to continue using this hotel's products/services in the future.	2.4 %	4.1 %	6.5 %	5.9 %	29.6 %	58.0 %	87.6 %
I have been a loyal customer of this hotel for an extended period.	0.6 %	4.7 %	5.3 %	7.7 %	29.6 %	57.4 %	87.0 %
I am committed to transacting with this hotel	3.0 %	4.1 %	7.1 %	4.7 %	29.6 %	58.6 %	88.2 %
I have not considered switching to a different provider because I am satisfied with the service, I receive from this hotel	2.4 %	3.0 %	5.3 %	6.5 %	28.4 %	59.8 %	88.2 %
I am satisfied with the overall experience I receive from this hotel, which makes me want to continue using its products/	1.8 %	3.6 %	5.3 %	3.6 %	31.4 %	59.8 %	91.1 %

services.							
Average	2.40 %	3.66 %	6.02 %	3.90 %	26.5 0%	63.5 8%	90.0 2%

Source: Primary data, 2024

The study indicates that 91.1% of respondents strongly agree that customers are satisfied with the overall experience they receive from the hotel, making them want to continue using its products and services. Additionally, 88.2% of respondents have not considered switching to a different provider due to their satisfaction with the hotel's services, which was affirmed by 87.6% of respondents. On average, 90.02% of respondents agree that there is a high customer retention rate, reflecting a very high level of customer satisfaction.

The interview results show that hotel businesses in Gulu City are experiencing strong customer retention, which is a clear indicator of high customer satisfaction.

One hotel manager expressed this by stating: "Our guests are extremely satisfied with the experience we provide, so much so that they keep coming back. It's a testament to our commitment to excellence."

Another manager emphasized the loyalty of their customer base by saying:

"We have customers who haven't even considered switching to another hotel because they're so pleased with our services. Their loyalty speaks volumes about the quality we offer."

Additionally, a sense of satisfaction among customers emerges as a recurring theme in these hotels. The consistent positive feedback and return visits noted in the interviews confirm that hotels are effectively meeting customer expectations. The results indicate that most hotels prioritize maintaining a high level of satisfaction, ensuring that guests have no reason to seek alternatives. This overall

sentiment among managers highlights a robust customer retention rate, which they directly attribute to the satisfaction customers derive from their hotel experiences.

4.5 Correlation Analysis

The correlation result above shows the relationship between the different dimensions of customer orientation and service quality with customer satisfaction.

The result is as described below;

Table 16: Analysis of Correlation

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Customer Centric Orientation (1)	1								
Product Based Orientation (2)	.708	1							
Relationship Based Orientation (3)	.508	.630	1						
Reliability (4)	.503	.527	.618	1					
Responsiveness (5)	.622	.656	.699	.684	1				
Assurance (6)	.507	.547	.650	.713	.830	1			
Empathy (7)	.554	.573	.720	.587	.834	.783	1		
Tangibility (8)	.538	.535	.669	.654	.774	.723	.815	1	
Customer Satisfaction (9)	.513	.527	.666	.644	.740	.754	.798	.785	1
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									

Source: Primary data

There is a moderate significant positive relationship between customer centric orientation and customer satisfaction as shown by ($r=0.513^{**}$; $p<.05$). This implies that improvement in customer centric orientation has an associated improvement in customer satisfaction.

The correlation result reveals that there is a moderate significant positive relationship between product-based orientation and customer satisfaction as shown by ($r=0.527^{**}$, $p<.05$). And this implies that improvement in product-based orientation has an associated improvement in customer satisfaction.

The correlation result shows there is a significant strong positive relationship between relationship-based orientation and customer satisfaction as shown by ($r=.666^{**}$, $p<.05$). This implies that improvement in relationship-based orientation has an associated improvement in customer satisfaction.

The correlation result shows that there is a significant strong positive relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction as shown by ($r=.644^{**}$, $p<.05$). This implies that improvement in reliability has an associated improvement in customer satisfaction.

The correlation result shows that there is a significant strong positive relationship between responsiveness and customer satisfaction as shown by ($r=.740^{**}$, $p<.05$). This implies that improvement in reliability has an associated improvement in customer satisfaction.

The correlation result indicates that there is a significant strong positive relationship between assurance and customer satisfaction as shown by ($r=.754^{**}$, $p<.05$). This implies that improvement in assurance has an associated improvement in customer satisfaction.

The result reveals that there is a significant strong positive relationship between empathy and customer satisfaction as shown by ($r=.798^{**}$, $p<.05$). This implies that improvement in assurance has an associated improvement in customer satisfaction.

The correlation result shows that there is a significant strong positive relationship between tangibility and customer satisfaction as shown by ($r=.785$, $p<.05$). This implies that improvement in tangibility has an associated improvement in customer satisfaction.

Regression Analysis

Table 17: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.697a	.485	.476	.53728

a. Predictors: (Constant), Relationship based orientation, Customer centric orientation, Product based orientation

As presented in the table of model summary above, the result indicates that customer orientation as the predictor variable with all its dimensions (product based orientation, customer centric orientation and relationship based orientation) explains variation in customer satisfaction by 48.5% as revealed by ($R^2=0.485$).

Table 16: ANOVA

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	44.895	3	14.965	51.842	.000b
	Residual	47.630	165	.289		
	Total	92.525	168			
a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Relationship based orientation, Customer centric orientation, Product based orientation						

Source: Primary Data, September 2024

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) table above shows that the selected model ((product based orientation, customer centric orientation and relationship based orientation) significantly explains variation in customer satisfaction. The strong F-statistics and low p-value indicate that the model provide a good fit to the data, capturing a substantial amount of variability in the dependent variable in this case customer satisfaction as shown by ($F=51.842$; $p<.05$).

Table 17: Regression Coefficients

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.575	.239		6.594	.000
	C.C. Orientation	.173	.064	.214	2.693	.008
	P.B. Orientation	.035	.078	.039	.447	.656
	R.B. Orientation	.455	.062	.532	7.353	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction						

Source: Primary Data, September 2024

The findings indicate that, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between customer-centric orientation and customer satisfaction. A unit increase in customer-centric orientation leads an increase of 0.173 in customer satisfaction.

This implies that Customer-Centric Orientation have a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction as shown by significance value ($P=.000$; $p<0.05$). Additionally, the analysis revealed that, there is a strong positive effect of relationship-based orientation on customer satisfaction. This implies that, a unit increase in relationship-based orientation leads to a significant increase of 0.455 in customer satisfaction shown by ($P=.000$; $p<0.05$).

The findings indicate that both customer-centric orientation and relationship-based orientation positively influence customer satisfaction, with relationship-based orientation showing a particularly strong effect. In contrast, product-based orientation does not appear to significantly affect customer satisfaction as shown by significance level of ($p=0.656$; $p>0.05$). These results highlight the importance of prioritizing customer and relationship-focused strategies in enhancing overall satisfaction.

Table 18: Mediation Analysis

Direct Effect of X on Y					
Effect	Se	T	p	LLCI	ULCI
.0290	.0660	.4394	.0469	.1014	.1594
Indirect effect					
Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
.6174	.010	.4131	.8092		

Mediation analysis was performed to determine the mediation effect of service quality on the relationship between customer orientation and customer satisfaction.

The analysis of the direct effect indicates that customer orientation has a significant

effect on customer satisfaction as shown by $p=0.0469$; $p<0.05$). The analysis of the indirect effect revealed that service quality mediates the relationship between customer orientation and customer satisfaction since the bootstrapped Lower Level and Upper-level Confidence Interval does excludes Zero (0) as reflected by (LLCI=.1014; ULCI=.1594).

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter delves into comprehensive discussion of the findings pertaining to the Customer Orientation, Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in hotel industry in Gulu City. This chapter covers discussion in line with research findings compared with what previous researchers and scholars have ascertained on customer orientation and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in Gulu City.

5.1 Customer orientation

The study finding indicates a high level of customer orientation among hotels in Gulu City. For instance, a majority of respondents in Gulu City's hotels strongly agree that a hotel's ability to tailor services to individual preferences enhances their overall satisfaction. This finding aligns with the Boris (2019) who asserts that personalized service is a key driver of customer contentment.

In addition, a significant portion of respondents noted that their hotels consistently show a high level of customer orientation. This finding align with Anderson and Fornell (2022) supports this observation, emphasizing that lapses in customer orientation can lead to decreased satisfaction and loyalty. This therefore emphasizes the importance of customer centric approach as a component of customer orientation. This finding is in line with Kohli and Jaworski (2018) who elaborated that customer centric orientation as a multidimensional constructs comprising inter-functional coordination affect to customer satisfaction. From an interview conducted, one of the respondents had to say this '*customers are the heart of the business, and therefore hotels should treat customers as a king*'. This finding

point to customer centric approach as being crucial as a component of customer orientation

The study also found in the context of Gulu City hotels, a substantial proportion of respondents strongly agree that relationship-based orientation provides tailored experiences that meet customer specific needs for purposes of long lasting relationship. This finding aligns with Prima (2023) who emphasizes the positive impact of relationship in promoting long lasting customer relationship, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Service quality is another crucial determinant of customer satisfaction. This finding corroborates with established research, which links superior service quality with increased customer satisfaction and repeat business (Chen & Zhang, 2023).

However, the study also disagrees with Goh et al., (2022) who observed that product-based orientation alone does not meet customer satisfaction criteria. This suggests that while product quality is important, it may not be sufficient if other aspects of service and customer orientations are lacking. This finding elaborates the need for hotels to balance product quality with other factors to enhance overall satisfaction.

The study also revealed that relationship-based orientation focuses on building long-term relationships with customers through consistent service and personalized interactions. This study finding is in line with Kumar & Agarwal (2024) who emphasized that in hotel industry, relationship-building efforts, such as personalized follow-ups and loyalty programs, positively impact their satisfaction reflect the importance of long-term engagement in fostering customer loyalty. This is consistent with research indicating that strong relational ties between service

providers and customers contribute significantly to satisfaction and repeat business (Feng et al., 2024).

5.2 Customer satisfaction

The finding indicates that there is high level of Customer retention among hotel industry in Gulu city which is a key measure of customer satisfaction. This aligns with the work of (Asler & Green, 2024), who found out that high customer satisfaction is driven by effective customer orientation and superior service quality, leads to increased customer retention. This finding further aligns with findings from research, which suggests that satisfied customers are more likely to return and maintain loyalty.

This research found that Customer commitment among hotels in Gulu city remained high. This finding is in line with Chen & Zhang, (2023) who observed that Customer commitment reflects the level of interaction and involvement customers have with the hotel brand. In Gulu City, many respondents agreed that moderate level of engagement, facilitated by personalized service and proactive communication, enhance their satisfaction and likelihood to remain engaged. Engaged customers are generally more satisfied and loyal, as they feel more connected to the brand (Harrison & Van Hoek, 2022).

The study disagrees with Wilson & Adams, (2023) that Customer referrals is not the only important factor for customer satisfaction its impact on overall satisfaction may vary depending on other service aspects or personal preferences (Goh et al., 2022). This suggests that while improving retention, engagement, and referrals is beneficial, the effectiveness of these efforts may depend on other contextual

factors such as competitive offerings or market conditions. In summary, customer satisfaction in Gulu City's hotel industry is closely linked to customer retention, engagement, and referrals. High satisfaction generally correlates with increased retention and positive referrals.

5.3 Service Quality

The study finding revealed a high level of service quality in the hotel sector in Gulu city. This finding is supported by Dumba (2021) which indicates that consistent performance in service delivery fosters greater customer trust and satisfaction. However, a portion of respondents disagree with the assertion that their hotels consistently meet reliability standards, suggesting that inconsistencies in service delivery may detract from overall customer satisfaction (Lee et al., 2023).

This research found that tangibility among hotel's industry in Gulu city remained high. This finding is in line with Chen & Zhang, (2023) who observed that *tangibility* involves the physical aspects of the service environment, including the appearance of facilities, equipment, and staff. The importance of physical cues in shaping customer perceptions of service quality has also been emphasized in this study context (Harrison & Van Hoek, 2022). Nevertheless, a minority of respondents disagree that the tangibility of their hotel's services meets their expectations, indicating that most hotels have improved and better physical environment to enhance satisfaction (Goh et al., 2022).

The findings indicate high level of empathy among hotels in Gulu City. This is in line with Kumar & Agarwal, (2024) who emphasized that empathy contributes to their

satisfaction highlight the value of personalized service and attentive staff (Feng et al., 2024). This aligns with findings that emphasize empathy as a key factor in creating positive customer experiences and fostering loyalty (Kumar & Agarwal, 2024). In addition, a notable portion of respondents disagree with the statement that their hotels effectively demonstrate empathy, suggesting that there may be gaps in personalized service and guest care (Wilson & Adams, 2023).

The study that indicates responses to customer needs contribute to higher levels of satisfaction and perceived service quality. This is in line with Chen & Zhang, (2023) who emphasized the importance of addressing customer needs. However, some respondents disagree with the notion that their hotels are responsive, highlighting potential delays or inefficiencies in addressing guest issues (Goh et al., 2022). Hotel's willingness and ability to promptly address customer needs and concerns is crucial in ensuring customer satisfaction is achieved.

This finding aligns with Boris (2022) suggesting that assurance contributes significantly to customer satisfaction by providing a sense of security and trust. Nevertheless, a very small portion of respondents disagree that their hotels provide sufficient assurance, indicating that most hotels are providing assurance to customers which reveals a high level of customer satisfaction.

5.4 Customer orientation and customer satisfaction

The study revealed that customer orientation directly enhances customer satisfaction. This aligns with the finding that customer-centric practices, such as personalized service and responsiveness to customer feedback, are positively correlated with high levels of satisfaction (Kotler & Keller, 2016). For instance, hotel

industry, establishments that prioritize understanding and addressing specific guest preferences tend to receive higher satisfaction ratings. This correlation elaborates the effectiveness of adopting a customer-oriented approach to achieving superior service outcomes.

Conversely, the study disagrees with the finding that customer orientation does not have any significant relationship with customer satisfaction. This disagreement may be attributed to the view that customer satisfaction is influenced by a myriad of factors beyond customer orientation, such as price, convenience, and overall service quality (Sweeney & Soutar, 2021). In the context of Gulu City's hotel industry, while customer orientation is important, other elements like value for money and room comfort also play significant roles in determining customer satisfaction.

The research findings revealed a significant positive relationship between products-based orientation and customer satisfaction in Gulu City's hotel industry. While a strong customer orientation is generally associated with higher levels of customer satisfaction, its finding agrees with Druciri, (2020) who observed that tailoring products to customer needs contribute massively to customer satisfaction.

5.5 Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

The study found out that service quality has a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction. Studies have confirmed that when customers get services of good quality and there is professionalism of service providers, their overall satisfaction significantly increases. For instance, this aligns with a study by Hussain et al. (2023) who found that service quality is a key determinant of customer satisfaction in the banking sector, where customers value the trustworthiness and

reliability of the services provided. This finding further aligns with the current study's results, highlighting the importance of service quality in enhancing customer satisfaction. This consensus among scholars suggests that service quality is a universally recognized driver of satisfaction across various service industries.

Service quality also plays a significant role in shaping customer perceptions and satisfaction. The study's finding that there is a positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction is consistent with existing literature. This is in agreement with other studies that suggest that the physical environment in which a service is delivered can greatly affect customer perceptions and, consequently, their level of satisfaction. The alignment with existing research elaborates the importance of maintaining high standards of service quality to ensure customer satisfaction.

5.6 Mediating Effect of Service Quality

The study finding shows that service quality mediates the relationship between customer orientation and customer satisfaction. This finding is widely recognized in the literature, with customer orientation often being identified as a key determinant of service quality. However, recent research has explored the role of service quality as a mediator in this relationship, proposing that the impact of customer orientation on customer satisfaction may be indirect, mediated by the quality of service provided (Sirdeshmukh, 2022).

The study finding is also in line with the fact that customer-oriented businesses are more likely to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction by consistently meeting or exceeding customer expectations (Kaur & Soch, 2021). Service quality, on the

other hand, is the perceived overall excellence of a service, encompassing dimensions such as reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness (Parasuraman et al., 2020).

The current study suggests that service quality plays a significant mediating role between customer orientation and customer satisfaction. This means that while customer orientation directly influences customer satisfaction, its effect is largely channeled through the level of service quality provided. In other words, customer orientation enhances service quality, which in turn drives higher levels of customer satisfaction. The finding of this study is in line with previous research that has highlighted the importance of service quality as a mediator in the customer orientation-satisfaction relationship. For instance, a study by Singh and Sirdeshmukh (2022) found that service quality significantly mediates the relationship between customer orientation and customer satisfaction in the retail sector. Their research demonstrated that customer-oriented practices lead to improved service quality, which subsequently results in higher customer satisfaction. This supports the notion that the pathway from customer orientation to customer satisfaction is indirect, with service quality serving as a crucial intermediary.

Similarly, Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (2021) also emphasized the mediating role of service quality in the service industry, particularly in the context of hospitality. Their research indicated that service quality is a critical link that transforms customer-oriented efforts into actual customer satisfaction, thereby reinforcing the findings of the current study.

While there is substantial agreement with existing literature, some studies have reported different perspectives. For example, Wu and Tsai (2022) argued that in certain industries, particularly those with less direct customer interaction, the mediating role of service quality might be less pronounced. They found that in the tech industry, customer orientation could directly influence customer satisfaction without the need for high levels of perceived service quality. This divergence highlights the context-dependent nature of the mediation effect and suggests that the strength of service quality as a mediator may vary across different sectors.

Some scholars have pointed out that the influence of service quality as a mediator might be contingent on other factors, such as the complexity of customer needs or the competitive environment (Kang & Hyun, 2020). The finding therefore suggest that while service quality generally mediates the customer orientation-satisfaction relationship, the extent of this effect can vary based on specific industry characteristics and external factors.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

6.0 Introduction

This study investigated the effect of customer orientation and customer satisfaction. However, this chapter presents the summary of key findings from the study, conclusion and recommendations in line with research findings and areas that should be considered for future research.

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

Based on the study focusing on customer orientation and customer satisfaction in hotels in Gulu city, the following results are summarized.

- ✓ The study revealed that there is high-level of implementation of customer orientation in line with (customer centric orientation, product-based orientation, relationship based orientation) among hotels in Gulu City.
- ✓ The study revealed there is high level of customer satisfaction among in hotels in Gulu city.
- ✓ The study found a significant positive relationship between customer orientation (customer centric orientation, product based orientation, relationship based orientation) and customer satisfaction in hotels in Gulu city.
- ✓ According to the result, all the dimensions of customer orientation, except product-based orientation have significant effect on customer satisfaction in hotels in Gulu city.

- ✓ Services quality has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between customer orientation and customer satisfaction in the hotels in Gulu city.

6.2 Conclusion

The study highlights that hotels with a strong customer orientation demonstrated through personalized service, attentiveness, and responsiveness to customer needs tend to achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction. In Gulu City, where the hospitality sector is evolving, the study concludes that hotels that prioritize understanding and meeting individual customer expectations stand out as leaders in customer satisfaction.

The analysis confirms that service quality is a fundamental determinant of customer satisfaction. Key dimensions such as reliability, assurance, empathy, and tangibles significantly influence how customers perceive their stay. Thus the study concludes that hotels that consistently deliver high-quality service across these dimensions are more successful in enhancing customer satisfaction. This demonstrates the necessity for hotels in Gulu City to focus on continuous improvement in service delivery to maintain and elevate their competitive edge.

The research reveals that a positive correlation exists between high service quality and increased customer satisfaction, which in turn influences customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. The study provides conclusion that, ensuring both customer orientation and service quality is essential for achieving and sustaining high levels of customer satisfaction.

The study also revealed a significant mediation effect of service quality in the

relationship between customer orientation and customer satisfaction. This means that while customer orientation directly influences customer satisfaction, the effect is significantly amplified through the quality of service delivered. The study provides conclusion that service quality acts as a crucial intermediary that translates customer-oriented strategies into tangible customer satisfaction. This finding aligns with the broader body of research that emphasizes the importance of maintaining high service quality standards to fully capitalize on customer orientation efforts. By mediating the relationship between customer orientation and customer satisfaction, service quality plays a pivotal role in ensuring that customer-oriented practices translate into positive customer experiences. The research highlights that businesses cannot solely rely on customer orientation; they must also focus on consistently delivering high-quality services to achieve optimal customer satisfaction outcomes.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, several actionable recommendations are proposed for enhancing customer orientation, improving service quality, and ultimately increasing customer satisfaction as expressed below:

Based on the research findings, hotels should prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive customer orientation training programs for their staff. Such training should focus on personalized service, active listening, and responsiveness to ensure that staff can effectively address individual guest needs and preferences.

Secondly, it is crucial for hotels to establish and enforce rigorous service quality

standards across all operational areas. Regular monitoring and evaluation of these standards will help maintain high levels of service consistency and excellence and in the end ensure overall customer satisfaction.

Given the significant positive relationship between customer-centric orientation and customer satisfaction, hotels in Gulu City should prioritize and further enhance their customer-centric strategies. This includes actively seeking and responding to customer feedback, personalizing services to meet individual customer needs, and continuously adapting to changing customer preferences. By fostering a culture that puts the customer at the center of all operations, hotels can strengthen customer loyalty and satisfaction. Regular training for staff on customer-centric practices should be implemented to ensure consistent and high-quality customer interactions.

The study highlights the importance of relationship-based orientation in driving customer satisfaction. Hotels should focus on building and maintaining strong relationships with their customers, which can be achieved through loyalty programs, personalized communication, and regular engagement activities. Establishing long-term relationships with customers not only enhances satisfaction but also encourages repeat business and positive word-of-mouth. Hotels should invest in customer relationship management (CRM) systems that help track and manage customer interactions effectively, ensuring that each customer feels valued and recognized.

The finding that product-based orientation does not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction suggests that while product offerings are important, they may not be the primary driver of satisfaction in the hotel industry. Hotels in Gulu City

should reevaluate their product-focused strategies and consider integrating them more effectively with customer-centric and relationship-based approaches. This could involve customizing product offerings to better align with customer preferences or focusing on how products are delivered and experienced by the customer, rather than just the products themselves.

Since service quality has been found to have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between customer orientation and customer satisfaction, it is crucial for hotels to consistently deliver high-quality services. This involves maintaining high standards in all aspects of service delivery, from the cleanliness and comfort of hotel facilities to the professionalism and responsiveness of staff. Regular assessments and improvements in service quality should be a continuous process.

To maximize customer satisfaction, hotels should integrate their customer orientation strategies with service quality initiatives. This means aligning customer-centric, product-based, and relationship-based strategies with a commitment to delivering exceptional service quality. For instance, personalized services should not only be tailored to individual customer needs but also delivered with the highest level of professionalism and care. Hotels should establish clear standards for service delivery that reflect their customer orientation goals and ensure that all staff members are trained to meet these standards.

6.4 Areas of Future Studies

- ✓ This study focused on Customer orientation and customer satisfaction. However, future studies can focus on customer orientation and performance of hospitality sector in Gulu city.

- ✓ This study only focused on Gulu city however, future studies should focus on customer orientation and customer satisfaction in the cities in northern Uganda.
- ✓ The effect of Employee Motivation and service quality on Customer satisfaction in Gulu City.

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APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear respondent. This questionnaire is designed to assist in collecting data to conduct an investigation on “Customer orientation, service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in Gulu City”. Please note that the findings of this research are solely meant for academic purposes and all the responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. You are therefore requested to spare few minutes of your time to complete this questionnaire.

PART A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1 Gender

a. ☐ Male b. Female

2 Education Level

☐ formal education n b. Primary c. Secondary ☐ d. Diploma ☐
☐ university degree and above

3 Marital Status

a. ☐ Single b. Married c. Widow d. Divorced ☐

4 Age Category In Completed Years

a. ☐ 25 ☐ b. 26-30 c. 31-40 d. Above 40 years ☐

5 For how long have you been a customer to this hotel?

☐ less than 1 year b. 1-5 years c. 6 – 10 years d. above
10 years



PART B: CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements on customer orientation where: SD – Strongly Disagree, D – Disagree, N – Neutral, A – Agree and SA – Strongly Agree

Code	Customer centric orientation	SD	D	N	A	SA
CSO1	This business put customers' interest first in its operations					
CSO2	This business strives to fulfill my needs whenever I visit this hotel.					
CSO3	This business values my interest whenever I utilize their services					
CSO4	My priorities are usually fulfilled by this hotel					
CSO5	This hotel pays keen attention in fulfilling my aspirations					
	Product Based Orientation	SD	D	N	A	SA
PBO1	This hotel places a strong emphasis on the features and specifications of its products.					
PBO2	This hotel focuses primarily on promoting the features and benefits of its products.					
PBO3	This hotel puts strong emphasis on product innovation					
PBO4	This hotel puts strong emphasis in highlighting the uniqueness and superiority of its products.					
PBO5	This hotel consistently improves on its product functionality.					
	Relationship Based Orientation	SD	D	N	A	SA
RBO1	This hotel values building long-term relationships with its customers.					
RBO2	This hotel encourages open communication and feedback between customers and employees.					
RBO3	This hotel resolves customer issues and complaints					

RBO4	promptly and effectively.					
RBO5	The company places importance on building trust and rapport with customers.					

PART C: SERVICE QUALITY

On a scale of 1 to 5 indicate by ticking the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements on Service Quality where (SD – Strongly Disagree, D – Disagree, N – Neutral, A- Agree and SA – Strongly Agree)

Reliability	SD	D	N	A	SD
This hotel delivers its services on time as promised.					
I can depend on this hotel in fulfilling its commitments.					
This hotel services are available whenever required					
This hotel offers prompt services as per customer expectation					
This hotel has a reputation for being reliable among its customers.					
Responsiveness					
This hotel responds promptly to customer inquiries or requests.					
I receive timely assistance from this when I need help.					
This hotel is quick to acknowledge and address customer concerns.					
This hotel is courteous in dealing with customers					
This hotel demonstrates a sense of urgency in resolving customer problems.					
Assurance					

This hotel assures customers of the right time services are offered.					
The hotel customers are assured of the accuracy of records provided to them.					
Customers of this hotel are assured of the promises made to them.					
Customers of this hotel are assured of prompt services					
Customers are assured of service quality while interacting with this hotel					
Empathy					
This hotel has the best interest of customers at heart.					
This hotel understands the specific needs of its customers.					
This hotel gives personal and individualized attention to its customers.					
This hotel has the ability to respond to customers' queries.					
This hotel takes into consideration customers' feelings while serving them.					
Tangibles					
This hotel has modern and up-to-date equipment or facilities.					
The physical appearance of this hotel's facilities is clean and well-maintained.					
This hotel offers attractive and visually appealing materials resources or equipment.					
The design and layout of this hotel's physical environment is impressive					
The appearance of this hotel's employees reflects positively on the overall service quality.					

PART D: CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

On a scale of 1 to 5 indicate by ticking the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements on customer satisfaction where (SD – Strongly Disagree, D – Disagree, N – Neutral, A- Agree and SA – Strongly Agree)

Customer Commitment	SD	D	N	A	SD
I am committed to continuing my relationship with this hotel in the future.					
I am always willing to spend a lot of money accessing this hotel services					
I am willing to invest time and effort in maintaining a relationship with this hotel					
I am committed to supporting this hotel through my continued patronage.					
Customer referrals					
I am likely to recommend this hotel to friends, family, or colleagues.					
I have referred others to this hotel based on my positive experiences.					
I trust this hotel enough to recommend it to others.					
I have encouraged others to use this hotel's products/ services.					
I usually share my positive experience about this hotel with other friends.					
Customer retention rate					
I am likely to continue using this hotel's products/ services in the future.					
I have been a loyal customer of this hotel for an extended period.					
I am committed to transacting with this hotel					

I have not considered switching to a different provider because I am satisfied with the service I receive from this hotel					
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The End

Thank you for your time

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HOTEL MANAGERS

Dear participant, this interview guide is designed to assist in collecting data to conduct an investigation of Customer orientation, service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel sector in Gulu City. Please note that the findings of this research will be solely meant for academic purposes and all the responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Please spare a few minutes of your time to respond to a few interview questions that will provide useful information for this study.

1. Background Information:

- a) Can you please tell me about your role and responsibilities in this hotel?
- b) How long have you been working in the hotel sector, and what is your experience in dealing with customers?

2. Customer Orientation:

- a) How would you describe the customer orientation culture within this hotel?
- b) In your opinion, what are the key aspects of customer orientation that this hotel prioritizes?
- c) Can you provide examples of initiatives or strategies implemented by hotels to enhance customer orientation?
- d) How has customer orientation affected customer satisfaction in this hotel?

3. Service Quality:

- a) From your experience, describe the different dimensions of service quality applicable to this hotel?
- b) How does this hotel ensure consistency in service quality?
- c) How has service quality affected customer satisfaction in this hotel?

4. Customer Satisfaction:

- a) How do hotels in Gulu city measure customer satisfaction?
- b) What are some common indicators of customer satisfaction in this hotel?
- c) Describe the status of customer satisfaction in this hotel

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME

Appendix III: Morgan Table. Sample Sizes(S) for the Given Population Sizes (N)

N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	100	80	280	162	800	260	2800	338
15	14	110	86	290	165	850	256	3000	341
20	19	120	92	300	169	900	269	3500	346
25	24	130	97	320	175	950	274	4000	351
30	28	140	103	340	181	1000	278	4500	354
35	32	150	108	360	186	1100	285	5000	357
40	36	160	113	380	191	1200	291	6000	361
45	40	170	118	400	196	1300	297	7000	364
50	44	180	123	420	201	1400	302	8000	367
55	48	190	127	440	205	1500	306	9000	368
60	52	200	132	460	210	1600	310	10000	370
65	56	210	136	480	214	1700	313	15000	375
70	59	220	140	500	217	1800	317	20000	377
75	63	230	144	550	226	1900	320	30000	379
80	66	240	148	600	234	2000	322	40000	380
85	70	250	152	650	242	2200	327	50000	381
90	73	260	155	700	248	2400	331	75000	382
95	76	270	159	750	254	2600	335	100000	384