

Evaluation of the level of consumer satisfaction with laundry and dry cleaning services in Kisumu city

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Abstract: Laundry and dry cleaning practices are a global process that contributes to the length and life of apparel and textile products. Therefore, it is important that the right cleaning method is selected for a given fabric because they differ in quality and use. Knowledge of these differences is very essential. Studies have indicated that consumers have raised concerns over the distortion of their clothes after laundry and dry cleaning (LDC) practices but it was not clear whether the distortion was due to poor fabric quality or poor cleaning practices. Therefore, there was a need for this study whose purpose was to evaluate the level of consumer satisfaction with LDC services. The conceptual framework borrowed ideas from the Expectation Disconfirmation Theory. Cross-sectional and descriptive surveys were employed. Seventy-two (72) respondents from commercial LDC outlets and three-hundred and twelve (312) respondents from households were selected to form the sample size (384). Quota, Census, and snowball techniques were used to determine and identify commercial LDC outlets. Quota, stratified and simple random sampling were used to identify locations and sub-locations within Kisumu City while systematic sampling was used to determine and identify the households. Lastly, purposive and convenient sampling were used to identify and qualify respondents from both households and commercial LDC outlets. Interview schedules, observations were used to gather data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics by SPSS version 20 (2007) and the findings were presented in tables and charts. On the other hand, qualitative data were grouped into themes, coded, and analyzed using the SPSS tool and the results were also presented in tables and charts. The study established that customer satisfaction and, or dissatisfaction varied among consumers and with different LDC aspects as well. The study further showed that commercial LDC consumers were more satisfied than household LDC consumers. **Keywords:** Laundry and Dry Cleaning, Consumer Satisfaction, Environmental Awareness, Sustainable Practices, Kisumu City

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Introduction

Consumer satisfaction is a critical determinant of service quality and business success in the Laundry and Dry Cleaning (LDC) industry. Understanding consumer expectations and addressing grievances are essential to improving service delivery and maintaining customer loyalty. Effective LDC services not only meet but exceed consumer expectations, thereby fostering trust and long-term relationships.

Consumer Satisfaction (CS)

Customer satisfaction (CS) has become a key intermediary objective in service operations due to the benefits it brings to organizations such as repeated purchases, loyalty, and positive word of mouth, and will also increase long-term profitability (Michael *et al.*, 2008). Shelly and Lakhwinder (2002) point out that whether the buyer is satisfied after purchase depends on the offer's performance about the buyer's expectations. Similarly, consumers have expectations about the behavior of service providers, when these are exceeded; the level of their satisfaction with the service provider is positively influenced.

According to Shaffer (2008), one key to consumer retention is CS. A satisfied consumer stays loyal, longer and loyalty drives profitability and growth. Loyal and satisfied consumers are best achieved by loyal and satisfied LDC service provider(s). Without satisfied and motivated service providers, it is impossible to produce world-class products and impossible to achieve satisfied and loyal consumers (Eskildsen & Dahlgaard, 2000). CS can be seen as the company's key performance indicator. In a market place where there is competition for a wider consumer base, CS is seen as a key differentiator from other competitors and is also viewed as a key business strategy for establishing a wide consumer base (Munusamy *et al.*, 2010). No matter the size and the nature of the company or the organization, CS is a global issue that affects all companies or institutions. Companies that have more satisfied consumers experience high profits and economic returns (Yung *et al.*, 2006). Given this, many companies should lay down strategies to ensure that consumers are satisfied, as it leads to increased economic rewards and profits, which is the core objective of the

business. CS is also important at household level since when the consumers are satisfied, even the service providers can feel better and be motivated with their work.

There are different forms of CS, which is defined as an individual feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing the perceived outcome in relation to the expectation (Loverlock *et al.*, 2001). There are two general conceptualizations of satisfaction-transaction-specific and cumulative satisfaction. Transaction-specific satisfaction is the customer's very own evaluation of his or her experience towards a particular service. This reaction is expressed by the consumers when using the service for the very first time while cumulative satisfaction refers to the consumer's overall evaluation of the consumption experience to date (Boshoff & Gray, 2004). It is from this accumulation that consumers establish a personal standard that is used to gauge service quality.

In a service industry, consumers are content if their experience exceeds or matches their anticipations. Consumer expectations vary from one consumer to another and consumer wants and needs to vary with time; thus anticipation of consumers is that service offered should vary as well with time. Consumers are likely to appreciate diverse type's contentment: satisfaction, pleasure, delight, and relief (Poku *et al.*, 2013). For instance, the consumer can experience satisfaction when regular service is offered contently, delight when a package surprises the consumer, liking when a service makes the consumer feel exited and beyond anticipation, and reprieve when a package goes beyond a potentially tough situation and offers contentment. Highly satisfied consumers can create emotional ties to a product or service. Satisfied consumers in many cases make a repeat purchase, are less price sensitive, remain consumers for a longer time, and tell others about the product(s) or the services of a particular plant or individual service provider. CS is a psychological idea that entails the sense of comfort and liking that comes from getting what one anticipates and hopes from an attractive service or product (Wachiye, 2012).

CS can also be defined based on a process or result. The outcome definition of CS characterizes satisfaction as the end state resulting from the experience of consumption. This end state may be a cognitive state of reward or an emotional response to an experience or a comparison of rewards and costs to the anticipated consequences. The definition of CS is based on the process takes the processes of perceptual, evaluative, and psychological; all of which contribute to CS. In all these processes, an assessment of satisfaction is made during the service delivery process.

Factors Influencing Consumer Satisfaction with Laundry and Dry Cleaning Services

Image, price, perceived quality, tangibles, reliability, empathy, assurance, and responsiveness as factors that influence consumer satisfaction with laundry and dry cleaning (LDC) services (Jiao, 2013). *Image* is based upon the consumers' beliefs about a brand or outlook and its associations held in memory and that image comes from the perceptions of the consumers. In marketing services, image is identified as a significant factor in a company's overall evaluation and has been described as individual knowledge such as an attitude or a combination of product characteristics that are identified by the product and is different from the product physical characteristics. An image has also been described as the overall impression left in the minds of consumers. Image is defined as a filter that affects the perception of a company's operation. The overall image of the institution is affected by perceived value, service quality and CS. *Price* is also a major determinant of consumer choice. It is the cost incurred in making a purchase that, together with perceived service quality and perceived value, influences spending behavior. Consumers will determine what price can be paid based on the factors affecting their satisfaction with LDC services. How much a consumer is willing to pay depends on what they need what they expect and their evaluation of the quality of service at its given time and place. High-priced products and services are believed to be high-quality and their prices are normally higher than lower-quality equivalent products or services as price impacts perceived quality. If consumers have no experience in obtaining a service, they, therefore, make a decision based on their expectations, image, perception of quality, and price. *Perceived quality* is the judgment of superiority by consumers about a product's overall excellence or it is like an attitude. Perceived quality is defined as the consumers' comparison between their expectations and perception of service performance. *Reliability* refers to the ability of a firm to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. *Tangibles* refer to personal appearance, physical facilities like shop/house decorations, display and equipment, interiors and exteriors, the appearance and condition of the shelf space, the physical appearance of the staff, the appearance and design of the brochure, the shop/plant sign and its advertisements, are also key to CS. The. *Empathy* refers to the firms' personalized attention to their consumers and in giving them care and assistance. Empathy has several ways that can be shown to consumers such as knowing the consumer's name, preferences, and needs. Many institutions use this competence to provide customized services as a competitive advantage over others. *Responsiveness* or the employees' expression of willingness to help consumers and provide quick service is a dimension that is concerned with dealing with the consumer's requests, questions, and complaints promptly and attentively. When it communicates to its consumers, a firm need to know how to be responsive and how long it would take to get answers and solve problems. If institutions want to be successful, they need to look at the view point of the consumer rather than the institutions' perspective. *Assurance*, which is the trained courtesy of employees and also the ability to inspire trust and confidence in them, is another factor that influences CS.

Quality services, access, and a nice atmosphere are also factors that influence consumer satisfaction (The National Business Research Institute, 2016). CS is primarily affected by employee satisfaction in contact institutions (Terhi, 2013), this is because satisfaction of the employee(s) is highly important in creating an intensive consumer relationship. It is also possible that employee satisfaction mediates how well the employee performs in consumer orientation behavior. The premise of the course is that a happy employee does a better job and an employee's positive mood has a positive effect on the performance leading to consumer satisfaction. When an employee starts work in either a positive or a negative mood, the performance can be affected and therefore performance can be influenced by affective reactions (Rothbard and Wilk, 2011). Suree (2007) and Weeraya (2009) aver that a marketing mix that includes service, process, place, product, people, and promotion also influences CS in one way or another. Studies by Watchara and Yisuntes (2012) also demonstrate that consumers used LDC services because they do not have enough time to do it by themselves. The consumers can as well be influenced by the advertising boards in front of the shops, discount coupon promotions, chose shops that are near their residence, and also by the marketing mix factors. In summary, there are more positive benefits of CS than negative benefits in all the service institutions and that consumers get satisfaction at different levels.

Methodology

Research Design

A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was adopted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide comprehensive insights into consumer satisfaction and service provider practices.

Study Area

The research was conducted in Kisumu City, Kenya, a vibrant urban area with diverse LDC service providers, ranging from household-level operations to large-scale commercial enterprises.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

- Population: 312 household consumers and 72 commercial LDC service providers.
- Sampling Methods:
 - Quota and stratified random sampling to identify respondents.
 - Snowball sampling to locate smaller, informal service providers.
 - Systematic sampling for household participants.
- Sample Size: A total of 384 respondents were surveyed.

Data Collection Methods

1. Structured Questionnaires: For consumers, focusing on service quality, timeliness, and satisfaction levels.
2. Observation Checklists: To assess service provider adherence to environmental and safety standards.
3. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with LDC providers to evaluate their awareness and practices related to environmental protection and self-care.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Version 20, employing descriptive statistics such as means, percentages, and frequencies. Qualitative data was coded into themes and analyzed to highlight key trends.

Results and Discussion

Consumers' Level of Satisfaction with Services Offered by LDC Service Providers

Levels of consumer satisfaction with services offered by LDC service providers are summarized and presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Levels of consumer satisfaction with services offered by LDC service providers

| Parameter | Household Consumers | | | | | Commercial Consumers | | |
|--|---------------------|-----------|--------------|------------------------|-------------|----------------------|------------|--------------|
| | Extremely satisfied | Satisfied | Dissatisfied | Extremely Dissatisfied | Total | Extremely satisfied | Satisfied | Dissatisfied |
| General cleanliness of the laundered or drycleaned clothes | 6% | 89% | 5% | 0% | 100% | 12% | 85% | 3% |
| Absence of stain | 4% | 9% | 86% | 0% | 100% | 9% | 66% | 25% |
| Absence of creases | 5% | 8% | 87% | 0% | 100% | 9% | 88% | 3% |
| Packaging | 5% | 42% | 53% | 0% | 100% | 10% | 88% | 2% |
| Delivery | | | NA | | | 10% | 52% | 38% |
| A personal relationship with the service Provider | 8% | 89% | 3% | 0% | 100% | 10% | 85% | 5% |
| Repair of clothes | 3% | 9% | 63% | 25% | 100% | 7% | 7% | 86% |
| Storage | 4% | 37% | 59% | 0% | 100% | 12% | 86% | 2% |
| Absence of fading to the clothes | 4% | 29% | 66% | 1% | 100% | 9% | 74% | 17% |
| Absence of shrinkage to the clothes | 4% | 8% | 88% | 1% | 100% | 9% | 81% | 10% |
| Price charged | | | NA | | | 7% | 29% | 64% |
| The general outlook of the Working Environment | 4% | 9% | 86% | 1% | 100% | 10% | 55% | 35% |
| Dress code of the service provider | 6% | 10% | 6% | 79% | 100% | 10% | 24% | 66% |
| Reception | | | NA | | | 10% | 85% | 5% |
| Reliability | 62% | 33% | 4% | 1% | 100% | 10% | 83% | 7% |
| Accessibility | 79% | 16% | 4% | 1% | 100% | 5% | 53% | 42% |
| Mode of communication | 22% | 73% | 4% | 1% | 100% | 9% | 80% | 11% |
| Retention of color | 4% | 43% | 52% | 1% | 100% | 9% | 79% | 12% |
| Tearing | 3% | 86% | 8% | 3% | 100% | 9% | 80% | 11% |
| Burnt article (apparel/textile) | 10% | 24% | 66% | 0% | 100% | 12% | 81% | 7% |
| <u>Inability to remove stains</u> | <u>4%</u> | <u>9%</u> | <u>86%</u> | <u>0%</u> | <u>100%</u> | <u>7%</u> | <u>64%</u> | <u>29%</u> |

(Source: Field data from household and commercial LDC service providers)

Most, (89%) of household consumers were satisfied with the general cleanliness of the laundered or dry-cleaned clothes, 89% were satisfied with the personal relationship with the service providers while 73% with a mode of communication, and 86% with tearing prevention. On the other hand, the majority were dissatisfied with the following LDC procedures; 86% with the presence of stains, 87% with the presence of creases, 53% with packaging, and 63% with the repair process. In addition, 59% were dissatisfied with storage, 66% with fading of fabric, 88% with shrinkage of the cloth, 86% with the general outlook of the environment, 52% with retention of color, 66% with burnt articles, while 86% were dissatisfied with the inability to remove the stain. Extreme satisfaction was only seen in reliability at 62% and accessibility at 79% and extreme dissatisfaction was in dress code at 79% by HSP.

On the other hand, commercial consumers showed satisfaction in almost all aspects ranging from 53% to 88%. Dissatisfaction was only seen in three aspects which were repair of clothes at 60%, price charge at 60%, and dress code at 66%. Aggregate satisfaction of household consumers was low as compared to those of commercial consumers and aggregate dissatisfaction of household consumers were also higher than those of commercial consumers. Satisfaction is an individual feeling toward a product acquired or from the services received. Levels of satisfaction differ from one individual consumer to another. In LDC, consumers get satisfaction with different aspects and at different stages, for example, one can be satisfied with the way his or her clothes are dried up and the other person can be satisfied with the way his or her clothes are ironed. In this study, the researcher looked at different aspects that make the consumer satisfied or dissatisfied as discussed above. The findings were that commercial LDC consumers were found to be satisfied with most LDC aspects with over 50% while most household LDC consumers were dissatisfied with most aspects with over 50%. This was further supported when most households' LDC consumers recommended further training for the LDC service providers as in figure 4.9 with 72%. Michael *et al* (2008), Shelly and Lakhwinder (2002), Shaffer (2008) Eskildsen and Dahlgaard (2000), Yung *et al.* (2006), and Poku *et al.* (2013) revealed the benefits of consumer satisfaction as repeated purchase, loyalty, positive word of mouth, good behavior of service providers, staying longer, high profits and economic returns. Jiao (2013), The National Business Research Institute (2016), Terhi (2013), Rothbard and Wilk (2011), Suree (2007), and Weeraya (2009) on the other hand pointed out factors that influence consumer satisfaction as price, image, perceived quality, tangibles, reliability, empathy, assurance, quality services, access, a nice atmosphere, employee's satisfaction, marketing mix, personal relationship, mode of communication, accessibility, reliability and general outlook of the working environment.

Levels of Consumer Satisfaction with Laundry and Dry Cleaning Services

Satisfaction is an individual feeling toward a product acquired or from the services received. Consumer satisfaction is a key objective in most service operations due to the benefits that it brings to individuals or organizations. Most (89%) of household consumers were satisfied with the general cleanliness of the laundered or dry cleaned clothes, 89% with a personal relationship with the service providers, 73% with a mode of communication, and 86% with tearing prevention whereas the majority (88%) with of shrinkage of the cloth , 87% with presence of creases, 86% presence of stains 53% with packaging, 63% with the repair process, 59% with storage, 66% with fading of fabric, 86% with the general outlook of environment, 52% with retention of color, 66% with burnt articles, and 86% with the inability to remove a stain. Extreme satisfaction were seen in reliability at 62% and accessibility at 79% and extreme dissatisfaction was in dress code at 79% by HSP. Commercial LDC consumers showed satisfaction in almost all aspects ranging from 53% to 88%. Dissatisfaction was only seen in three aspects which were repair of clothes at 60%, price charge at 60%, and dress code at 66%. Aggregate satisfaction of household consumers was low as compared to those of commercial consumers and aggregate dissatisfaction of household consumers were also higher than those of commercial consumers. The study looked at different aspects that make the consumer be satisfied or dissatisfied. The findings were that commercial LDC consumers were found to be satisfied with most LDC aspects with over 50% while most household LDC consumers were dissatisfied with most aspects with over 50%. This was further supported when most households' LDC consumers recommended further training for the LDC service providers. Studies by Michael *et al.* (2008), Shelly and Lakhwinder (2002), Shaffer (2008) Eskildsen and Dahlgaard (2000), Yung *et al.*, (2006), and Poku *et al.* (2013) mentioned the benefits of consumer satisfaction and Jiao (2013), The National Business Research Institute (2016), Terhi (2013), Rothbard and Wilk (2011), Suree (2007) and Weeraya (2009) pointed out factors that influence consumer satisfaction. In summary, the study looked at aspects that could lead to consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction while from the literature review, the different authors looked at the benefits of consumer satisfaction and factors that influence consumer satisfaction. Factors that influence consumer satisfaction such as price, accessibility, reliability, personal relationship, mode of communication, and general outlook of the working environment were found to be similar to some of the consumers' rating levels of satisfaction in the study. This could be since consumer behaviour is the same in all regions of the world. Levels/stages of satisfaction differed from one individual consumer to another. In LDC, a consumer got satisfaction with different aspects and at different stages and this was why there were different percentages on different aspects, for example, one could be satisfied with the way his or her clothes were dried up and the other person could be satisfied with the way his or her clothes were ironed.

Conclusion

Satisfaction/dissatisfaction of consumers varied from one consumer to another and with different LDC aspects as well.

Recommendations

- Comprehensive Training Programs: Equip service providers with advanced cleaning techniques, emphasizing modern equipment usage.
- Structured Feedback Systems: Establish mechanisms to address consumer complaints, incorporate suggestions, and track service quality improvements.
- Enhanced Quality Control: Implement regular audits of LDC practices, focusing on adherence to industry standards and consumer feedback.
- Pricing Strategies: Develop tiered pricing models to cater to diverse consumer segments.

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