SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: EVIDENCE FROM TWO LUXURY 3-STAR RATED HOTELS IN THE BONO REGION OF GHANA

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Abstract

The hospitability industry continues to face mounting pressures and demand for increased customer satisfaction by customers. The increased relevance of Supply chain management (SCM) influence on services rendered by the industry and the ripple effect on the satisfaction of customers of businesses in the value chain has been well articulated. This study examines the influence of SCM practices on customer satisfaction in two 3-Star rated hotels in the Bono Region of Ghana. Quantitative survey research methodology was adopted with data collected from a sample of 32 employees and 92 customers of the selected study hotels in the Bono Region of Ghana using a structured survey questionnaire. The outcome identified three SCM factors namely: strategic supplier partnership, inventory management and lean practices which showed significant relationship in determining customer satisfaction in the 3-Star hotel cohorts under study in the region. The results also showed an overall positive significant relationship between SCM factors and customer satisfaction in the facilities studied. The factors, thus: strategic supplier partnership, inventory management and lean practices were found to be significant in predicting best fit equation for customer satisfaction. The study recommended that practitioners should maintain accurate databases of suppliers to facilitate effective information sharing and routine training of their employees.

Keywords: Supply Chain Management, Customer Satisfaction, 3-Star Hotels, Hospitality Industry, Ghana

Introduction

In today's global market environment, every business irrespective of the scale, category or geographical location faces more demanding consumers, increasing competition and expenditure that hinders growth (Goebel, Reuter, Pibernik, Sichtmann, & Bals, 2018). As a result, businesses are compelled to experiment with different approaches in managing their operations in order to remain profitable and competitive, while delivering consumer needs at reasonable prices. To achieve this, businesses have started turning their attention on Supply Chain Management (SCM) practices to increase efficiency and deliver value to customer (Adam, Ibrahim,

Ikramuddin & Syahputra, 2020). The competitive ecosystem, evolution and rapid changes have triggered businesses to overcome competition by paying more attention to systems and processes that influence the progress of business activities (Foerstl, Azadegan, Leppelt & Hartmann, 2015). Consequent to this, new ideas and perspectives have begun to emerge on SCM practices. The supply chain (SC) in general, comprises two or more businesses linked through information and financial flows (Chkanikova, 2016). The concept of SCM emerged in the 1980s and has evolved with substantial number of transformations. Balasubramanian and

Charmaine, (2020) indicated that a robust SCM system is an enabler to achieving competitive advantage throughout the value chain. According to Tang (2018), the primary objective of SCM systems aims to integrate members interconnected activities along the supply chain with the aim to achieve optimum levels of customer satisfaction and competitive advantage in the long term.

The hotel industry according to Taha, Espino-Rodríguez and Gil-Padilla (2021) refers to services provided by the hotel, restaurant, resort, and entertainment sub-sectors of the economy. The hospitality industry is an enabler of job creation, a source of innovation and entrepreneurship, harnesses individual creativity endeavours, creates competitive edge and a potential for future business opportunities (Karami & Read, 2021). The hotel industry is noted as major contributor to economic development and vital sector of most country's economies (Suprayitno & Heng, 2021). In Ghana, hotel, travel and tourism industry's contribution to GDP was 3% in 2016 and will remain same annually (Danso, Osei-Tutu, Whyte & Ocquaye, 2020).

The hotel sector has always been one of the most competitive, especially in the twenty-first century (Kangogo, Musiega, & Manyasi, 2013). Global hotel chains have begun opening branches to tap the emerging market opportunities worldwide.

Businesses in developing countries are facing increasing competition that demands optimum level of satisfaction with the aim to preventing corporate failures (Jana & Chandra, 2016). Customer satisfaction has widely gained prominence in the hotel industry globally. Unlike other business sectors, the hospitality industry flourishes due to their customer retention strategies (Jana & Chandra, 2016). When customers are satisfied with business brands and products, they eventually become loyal customers and promoters of the hotel brand (Manha & Tukamushaba, 2015). Customers are more often delighted when they feel the hotel is committed to improving their service experience (Kangogo et al., 2013). Customer satisfaction ensures that clients'

needs, desires and expectations are met or exceeded (Jana & Chandra, 2016). As Jana and Chandra (2016) intimated, customers have become more knowledgeable and interconnected making customer service more demanding. Recent advancement in technology such as; the social media, online customer reviews, discussion boards and internet search have recently tipped and shifted the power clients (Kangogo et al, 2013). Customer happiness boosts institutional profitability, according to Manha and Tukamushaba (2015). According to these authorities, customer happiness has generally been regarded as a significant concept in marketing and used to assess a company's performance.

However, there are less empirical studies on SCM practices effect on customer satisfaction relating 3-Star hotels in Ghana. This study therefore focuses on addressing this obvious research gap by exploring the level of impact of the SCM factors on customer satisfaction in 3-Star hotels in Ghana. The study thus examines the individual SCM factors influence on customer satisfaction in 3-Star hotels in the Bono Region of Ghana.

Supply Chain Management Practices

The extant literature espouses many definitions for SCM practices (Azmi, Abdullah, Bakri, Musa & Jayakrishnan, 2018). According to Janaki, Izadbakhsh, and Hatefi (2018) it is a set of activities undertaken in an organisation to promote effective management of its supply chain. Thoo, Tan, Sulaiman and Zakuan (2017) posit that, SCM practices encompasses approaches and activities applied by an organisation to successfully balance supply and demand with the aim of enhancing the performance of its supply chain.

In this turbulent business environment, SCM becomes an important area of business management. This therefore require equally corresponding management practices such as creating effective SCM practices that promote agility and adaptability which are linked to the dynamic environmental conditions with the aim of achieving sustainable competitive advantage. According to Janaki et al. (2018)

these practices may include: supplier partnership, outsourcing, minimizing cycle time, continuous improvement of process flow, and information sharing. Rasib, KalianiSundram and Noranee (2021) identifies these practices as; just in time, integration of supply chain, information sharing, customer service management, postponement, lean practices and geographical proximity whereas Spina, Seiro and Brito (2015) recognise these practices to include collaboration, supply and demand management, inventory management, logistics management, customer management, suppliers' management, information sharing and supply chain integration.

SCM practices provide strategies and methods of making organisations work in unison thereby leading to mutual benefits such as lower inventories, lower costs, higher productivity, greater agility, shorter lead times, higher profits and greater customer loyalty which may lead to competitive advantage. In exploring the role of SCM on customer satisfaction and value creation in the hotel industry in the Bono Region, the study was limited to the practices discussed below.

Relationship Quality of Supply Chain Management
SC relationship quality refers to the party's ability to mutually reduce the perception of uncertainty (Qian, Seuring & Wagner, 2021). As Xuan, Shuwei, Yiyang and Jinyang (2020) rightly stated relationship expectations, customer satisfaction and customers' trust and their commitment to products and staff in customers' view depict the level of quality of the SCM. SCM relationship and quality may well be viewed as the depth of communication, cooperation, commitment and trust, customer satisfaction and the services offered (Yumurtacı Hüseyinoğlu, Kotzab & Teller, 2020). SCM relationship quality apart from the correlated process of relationship and behavioural factors could be extended to include environmental and contingency factors of any economy (Ali, 2020; Le, Wu & Zhong, 2021). Similarly, the SC atmosphere and adaptability has the tendency to influence supply chain relationship quality of the partners

and their behaviour (Ben-Daya, Hassini, Bahroun & Banimfreg, 2020). Consequently, in the context of SC relationship quality, the depth of participation in the SC partnership and interaction among members in the SC and the collective assessment of the perception of trust are critical. Very important in the SC relationship is members' willingness to trust and sustain the relationship with each other by maintaining elaborate communication. Hence, SCM relationship quality tends to be influenced by communication, commitment and trust, cooperation, customer satisfaction, environmental and contingency factors, atmosphere and adaptability.

Customer Expectations and Satisfaction
Customers at all times will seek to satisfy a set of essential needs and wants. These expectations of customers eventually drive services offered by businesses and the impression customers have of the service delivery (Alzaydi, Al-Hajla, Nguyen & Jayawardhena, 2018). Arguably, the performance of every organization depends on how well it satisfies its customers. Dissatisfied customers of a product or service may eventually opt for substitutes or patronise a competitor's services or spread negative information about the service by 'word-of-mouth' (Hinson, Adeola, Nkrumah, Agyinasare, Adom & Amartey, 2019)).

According to Ali, Leifu, Yasirrafig and Hassan (2015), information of customer expectation is important because of its influence on the behaviour of customers and as a result, management owe it a duty to channel resources to manage the expectations of their customers. Normally, expectations a customer have about a product or service depend upon the information gathered from the available resources. Customer expectations could be influenced by advertising, promotions and positive word of mouth (Sweeney, Payne, Frow, & Liu, 2020). Customers will be unhappy and likely rank their experience as less than satisfactory if they have high expectations and the reality falls short. Luxury resorts may earn a lower satisfaction rating than a budget

motel, despite the fact that its facilities and service are higher in 'absolute' terms (Qian, Seuring & Wagner, 2021).

Ali et al. (2021) stated some notable expressions of customer expectations as "It is necessary to exceed customer expectations". This emphasises the importance of a product or service to fulfil the expectation of a customer to give more preference to such products or services next time. His second expression was "If a customer expects a bad level of quality and receives it, he or she will reduce his or her level of preference for the brand". This stresses that excellent customer service and high customer satisfaction should start with understanding customer expectations. Thus, it makes business sense to know and understand your customers. Customer expectation thus plays a vital role in customer satisfaction and their overall behaviour and attitude regarding future repurchase decisions (Ali et al., 2015).

Customer Satisfaction in the Hotel Industry
Customer satisfaction refers to a complete evaluation of accumulated purchase and consumption experience which reflects a comparison between the sacrifice experienced and perceived reward (Jana & Chandra, 2016). Sacrifice includes monetary cost of purchasing as well as intangible costs such as waiting. Business enterprises are becoming customer-centric and innovative in the way a customer receives a product that better fit their needs (Frank, Poll, Roeglinger & Lea, 2020). A common rationale involves using service differentiation to take advantage of strategic, financial and marketing opportunities. Past studies unanimously emphasised the importance of linking internal (employee) satisfaction to external (customer) satisfaction (Manha & Tukamushaba, 2015; Frank, Poll, Roeglinger & Lea, 2020). There exists a positive relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction and businesses achieve this by ensuring employee motivation and loyalty (Budur & Poturak, 2021). Motivated employees achieve customer satisfaction by being flexible in their approach to their work and thus likely to make fewer mistakes and be more initiative. Jana and

Chandra (2016) mentioned that the satisfaction of internal customers is the fundamental basic factor to satisfying external customers as they are in a position to deliver superior products or services when they are well motivated internally.

Customer satisfaction is a corporate strategy that focuses on providing value to customers, anticipating and managing their expectations, and demonstrating the ability and responsibility to meet their requirements. Customer happiness and service quality are essential components in any business's success (Abubakar & Mavondo, 2014). Delivering high-quality service that result in delighted consumers is the key to achieving long-term benefit (Chen & Tung, 2014). In the quest for a competitive advantage and customer retention, service quality and customer happiness are critical. When compared to the value expected from transactions or relationships with competing vendors, customer satisfaction is the result of the customer's impression of the value received in a transaction or relationship, where value equals perceived service quality. It is critical to detect and anticipate consumers' wants, as well as to be able to satisfy them, in order to attain customer satisfaction. As a result, businesses that are able to quickly recognise and meet the demands of their clients make high returns than firms that are unable to do so. Due to the high cost usually associated with recruiting new customers relative to the cost of retaining existing customers, managers must focus their efforts on retaining existing customers by developing effective customer satisfaction and loyalty strategies. This is particularly true in the hotel business.

Customer satisfaction has become a significant part of the hotel industry, according to Jana and Chandra (2016). The hotel industry, unlike other industries, thrives on customer retention. Customer satisfaction is one sure way for a hotel to keep its clients (Zeleke & Kumar, 2020). Customer loyalty is mostly determined by the level of services provided by a hotel. Furthermore, the hospitality business has seen an influx of investors that are eager to meet all of their consumers' expectations. Customers

will seek better services elsewhere if they are dissatisfied with the services they obtain in one hotel (Jana & Chandra, 2016). One difficult task confronting hotel managers in this current business environment has to do with maintaining and sustaining customer satisfaction levels. Industry players in the tourist business have noticed an increase in customer demand for high-quality products and services (Abubakar & Mavondo, 2014). Customer satisfaction is the central point of corporate objectives as guest relationships become a strategic asset of hotel businesses. Positive customer interactions can foster commitment and enhance their retention rate. The favourable association between guests' overall satisfaction levels and the likelihood of them returning to the same hotel, long-term and mutually beneficial partnerships between consumers and hotels are becoming increasingly crucial (Jana & Chandra, 2016). Hotels are expanding their investments in order to increase service quality and perceived value for guests, resulting in higher customer satisfaction and improved customer relationships (Myo, Khalifa & Aye, 2019). The quality of hotel's customer relationship is of immense benefit and impact on guests' behaviour and generates good "word of mouth" and guest retention rate.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative research design technique in achieving the research objectives. The technique afforded an opportunity to determine the study objectives and subsequently designed a suitable research strategy that gave appropriate responses to the study's research questions. The study basically also employed a quantitative research technique in data collection. The technique enabled a quantifiably evaluation of emotions, assumptions or causes of actions of participants using statistical analysis (Apuke, 2017).

The population of the study comprised all 3-Star hotels in the Bono Region of Ghana. Data was collected from CEO/managing directors, general managers, senior managers, managers, accounts officers/accountants, procurement/purchasing officers, inventory and logistics officers who were involved in the SC function of the selected hotels. The sampling technique was purposive in nature and included 32 employees of the two hotels from a population of 56. We also employed a convenience sampling technique in deriving 92 customers from a population of 192 customers who visited or lodged in the two hotels within a certain timeframe.

The research instrument contained 52 and 47 questions for the hotel staff and customers respectively using a 5-point Likert scale to measure 3-Star hotels SCM factors effect on customer satisfaction with six questions for each section. Similar previous studies on SCM factors impact on customer satisfaction (Zeleke & Kumar, 2020; Wahid, Dangi, Jabar, Muhamed, & Paino, 2017) guided the choice and structure of the research instrument. Two unique instruments for customers and employees were used. The instrument developed for collection of data from hotel customers had sections for; demographics of respondents, patronage of hotel services by respondents, SCM practices and customer satisfaction. This comprised sections for demographics of respondents, hotel SCM practices and customer satisfaction. Data was analysed using statistical techniques such as descriptive, correlation and regression to ascertain the significance level of the research attributes pertaining to 3-Star hotels' SCM practices and its impact on customer satisfaction.

Results and Discussion
Demographic Statistics

The results analysed showed that 11 participants held secondary school certificate, 68 were either HND and/or first-degree holders, 28 had other academic qualifications (diploma, certificate, professionals), whereas 13 were Master's degree level holders. From the results of the analysis, the 2 general managers of the participating hotels provided responses to our study instrument. Responses were also received from 6 senior managers, 7 managers and 7 accounts officers.

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

Demographics	Participating 3-Star Hotels		N
	Eusbett	**Tyco**	
1. Common Relevant Demographic			
Educational Background			
Secondary	8	7	11
HND/First Degree	36	32	68
Master's degree	7	6	13
Other (Diploma, Certificate, Professionals)	13	15	28
Total	**64**	**60**	**124**
2. Staff Related Demographics			
Position			
CEO/ Managing Director			
General Manager	1	1	2
Senior Manager	3	3	6
Manager	3	4	7
Accounts Officer/ Accountant	4	2	6
Purchasing, Inventory, Logistics etc.	5	6	11
Total	**16**	**16**	**32**
Professional Experience			
Less Than 1 year	3	2	5
1 - 5 years	5	7	12
6 - 10 years	6	5	11
Over 10 years	2	2	4
Total	**16**	**16**	**32**
3. Customers' Related Demographics			
Days spent in the hotel			
3 to 5 days	24	18	42
6 to 9 days	16	17	33
10 days to 14 days	5	5	10
More than 2 weeks	3	4	7
Total	**48**	**44**	**92**
Services of Value in the Hotel			
Transport	2	2	4
Casino	1	0	1
Swimming Pools	2	3	5
Conferencing	24	20	44
Spa	1	2	3
Kids Club and other kids' friendly activities	2	2	4
Business Centre	11	6	17
Fitness Centre (Gym)	4	4	10
Club	0	2	2
Others	1	1	2
Total	**48**	**42**	**92**

Source: Field data (2021)

The results also indicated that 5 of the respondents had less than one-year professional experience, 12 had 5 years professional experience, 11 had 6 to 10 years professional experience whereas 4 had over 10

years professional experience in their respective professions.

The respondents (customers) of the participating hotels were asked to indicate the number of times they had visited the hotels within the past year. The results show that 33 respondents were visiting the hotels for the first time, 32 had visited the hotels a second time, and 18 respondents had been there the third time while 8 visited four times. Finally, customers were asked to indicate the services they cherished most in the hotels they patronised. The analysis indicated that 44 respondents found conference rooms as their service of value, 17 opined the business centres were of high value, 11 opted for fitness centre (Gym) as the service of value. Other services of value to the respondents were: swimming pools (5), kids club and other kids' friendly activities (4), spa (3), transport (4), casino (1), and restaurant and bar services. These details are summarized in Table 1.

Descriptive statistics
The descriptive analysis of SCM factors showed a fairly distributed outcome ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 0.88$), ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 0.97$), ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 0.87$) and ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 0.98$), with an average variance of $Var = 3.15$. The descriptive analysis of customer satisfaction showed similar fairly distributed results ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 0.83$), ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.84$), ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.95$), ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.95$) and ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 0.97$), with an average variance of $Var = 3.08$. The test of skewness between the factors was generally normal for the purpose of this study. See Tables 2 and 3 for the details.

Table 2: Descriptives of SCM Practices Determinats

Variable	N	M	SD	Var
Strategic Supplier Partnership	124	2.18	0.88	3.23
Information Sharing about Products and targeting strategies	124	2.61	0.97	3.26
Inventory Management	124	2.53	0.87	2.92
Lean Practices	124	2.06	0.98	3.18

Source: Field data (2021)

Table 3: Descriptives of Customer Satisfaction Determinats

Variable	N	M	SD	Var
Tangibility	124	2.07	0.83	3.27
Reliability	124	2.45	0.84	2.84
Responsiveness	124	2.17	0.95	3.72
Safety and Security	124	2.80	0.95	2.71
Empathy	124	2.33	0.97	2.88

Source: Field data (2021)

Correlation Analysis
The correlation results of four variables: hotel inventory management, quality and variety of services that delight clients, hotel strategic supplier partnership and lean practices, showed high to medium positive correlation effect of $r = .574$, $r = .385$, $r = .313$ and $r = .283$ respectively. The variable; Effective Integration and Suppliers Trust showed virtually no correlation effect of $r = .007$ while the variable; Information Sharing about products and services showed negligible negative correlation effect of $r = -.02$. The relative degree of association between the factors relating to the independent variables and the dependent variable (customer satisfaction) was significant at $p < .01$ and $p < .05$ as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of Correlation Analysis.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	M	SD
(1) Customer Satisfaction	-	.385*	.313*	.574**	0.283*	-0.021	0.007	1.58	0.88
(2) Quality and Variety of Services that delight clients	.385*	-	.353*	.294*	.541*	-0.073	-0.024	2.36	0.74
(3) Strategic Supplier Partnership	.313*	.353*	-	.319*	.588*	-0.069	-0.061	2.03	1.00
(4) Inventory Management System	.574**	.294*	.319*	-	.798**	0.038	0.089	2.19	0.99
(5) Lean Inventory Practices.	.283*	.541*	.588*	.798**	-	.740**	.528**	2.3	0.91
(6) Information Sharing about products and services	-0.021	-0.073	-0.069	0.038	.730**	-	-.670*	2.95	0.78
(7) Effective Integration and Suppliers Trust	0.007	-0.024	-0.06	0.089	.528**	-0.670*	-	3.01	0.81
M	1.58	2.36	2.03	2.19	2.3	2.95	3.01	-	
SD	0.88	0.74	1.00	0.99	0.91	0.78	0.81		

Regression Coefficient

From the analysis in Table 5, the results indicated an overall high level of significant influence of all the SCM factors with *p* value *p* = .000. The factors; Strategic Supplier Partnership, Inventory Management and Lean Practices revealed high significance levels of effect on customer satisfaction in the two hotels at *p* value *p* = .001, *p* = .023 and *p* = .000 respectively. The factor; Information Sharing about Products and targeting strategies with p value *p* = .072 was not significant in influencing customer satisfaction in the two hotels.

Table 5: SCM Regression Coefficient

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	B	-95% CI	95% CI	T	P
(Constant)	-1.273	3.07		-10.535	7.374	0.407	0.000
Strategic Supplier Partnership	0.196	0.302	0.121	-0.497	0.750	2.504	0.001
Information Sharing about Products and targeting strategies	-0.087	0.22	0.058	-0.201	0.391	1.105	0.072
Inventory Management System	0.118	0.039	0.124	-0.025	0.177	2.7	0.023
Lean Inventory Practices	0.175	0.192	0.120	-0.554	0.287	-0.85	0.000

The results indicated an overall high level of significant influence of all the customer satisfaction factors with *p* values *p* = .000. The factors; tangibility, responsiveness and safety and security displayed high levels of influence on the satisfaction of customers in the two hotels at *p* value *p* = .002, *p* = .000 and *p* = .000 respectively. The factors; reliability and empathy with p values *p* = .062 and *p* = .094 respectively were not a significant determinant of customer satisfaction in the two hotels. The details are found in Table 6.

Table 6: Customer Satisfaction Factors Regression Coefficient.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	B	-95% CI	+95% CI	T	P
(Constant)	8.086	41.018		-91.806	113.599	0.138	0.000
Tangibility	0.293	3.156	0.335	-7.505	7.894	0.067	0.002
Reliability	1.032	1.130	0.188	-2.705	4.383	0.486	0.062
Responsiveness	0.551	0.247	0.755	-0.594	1.954	0.981	0.000
Safety and Security	1.107	1.085	0.621	-6.392	3.720	1.827	0.000
Empathy	0.408	0.518	0.992	-5.008	4.018	0.207	0.094

Source: Field data (2021)

Best Fit Equation.
The results of the regression analysis displayed notable similarities with the results of the correlation analysis with significant outcome and the level of positive correlation effect. The best fit regression equation for customer satisfaction is;

$Y_{CS} = a + \beta_{SSP} + \beta_{IMS} + \beta_{LIP},$

Where Y_{CS} = customer satisfaction (predictor variable),

> a = constant value
> β_{SSP} = strategic supplier partnership factor (independent variable),
> β_{IMS} = inventory management system factor (independent variable), and
> β_{SSLIP} = lean inventory practices factor (independent variable).

Hence regression equation for $Y_{CS} = -1.273 + 0.121\beta_{SSP} - 0.124\beta_{IMS} + 0.120\beta_{LIP}$.
The regression analysis determined the best regression equation by including all variables with coefficient higher than zero and *p* value of *p* < .05 significant levels which also supported the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0).

Discussion
The literature on supply chain management practices points mainly to customer perceptions, satisfaction and attitudes towards sustainable practices in the hospitality sector with limited geographical scope (Chin, Chin, & Wong, 2018; Xu & Gursoy, 2015). The study generally found high to medium level of correlation and significant impact between SCM practices and customer satisfaction in hotels as supported by Budur and Poturak (2021) and Modica, Altinay, Farmaki Gursoy and Zenga (2020). This seems to support the tenets of the current study as it focuses on SCM practices impact on customer satisfaction of 3-Star hotels in Bono Region of Ghana.

First of all, the study found that strategic Supplier Partnership, Inventory Management and Lean practices were significant in assessing the effectiveness of SCM practices in 3-Star hotels in the region. On the other hand, information sharing about products and targeting strategies were found not to be significant in assessing the effectiveness of SCM practices in the hotels. The study results are in contrast with past studies which found these factors to be significant in assessing the effectiveness of SCM practices in hotels (Khalil, Khalil & Khan, 2019; Janaki et al., 2018).

The outcome of this research further showed that factors influencing customer satisfaction notably; Tangibility, responsiveness and safety including security were significant and had an effect on the overall satisfaction of customers in the study hotels in the region. On the other hand, reliability and empathy were found not to be significant in determining customer satisfaction in these hotels as opined by Gupta (2017). Wahid et al. (2017) found positive relationship between tangibility and customer satisfaction as with our study outcome. The study finding however is in contrast with El Saghier (2015) who found reliability to be a significant determinant of customer satisfaction in hotels. According to Thaker, Khaliq and Thaker, (2016) empathy is more desirable and significant in magnifying the quality of service in industries where establishing relationships with customers and clients guarantees survival, quite similar with the results of this study. The study findings further showed that issues of safety and security were parameters the guest placed lots of premiums on and this seems to exemplify the

assertions of Lohninger, Legrand and Delgado-Krebs (2021) who in their study findings revealed that safety and security influences customers willingness to pay premium prices to ensure security and travel comfort.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between SCM practices and customer satisfaction and to examine the effectiveness of various factors of SCM and customer satisfaction in 3-Star hotels in the bono region of Ghana. Four factors namely: strategic supplier partnership, inventory management and lean practices emerged as significant determinants of customer satisfaction in the Bono Region of Ghana. However, Information Sharing about Products and targeting strategies had no significant impact in SCM practices and customer satisfaction. The study further indicated that good SCM practices had significant influence on customer satisfaction. The study generally concluded that there was a positive and significant relationship between SCM practices and customer satisfaction in the 3-Star hotels under study in the region. This however has to be supported with an all-embracing SCM implementation strategy that is well aligned with the hotel industry practices.

Recommendations

The study's outcome reveals a number of practical recommendations based on the conclusions on the factors of SCM practices and customer satisfaction which is worth exploring by industry practitioners and the regulatory agencies.

1. SCM Practices (R_1): The practice of information sharing about products and targeting strategies was identified by the study to be weak in the hotels. This can be resolved by the hotels keeping accurate database of suppliers, which would enable them to disseminate information regarding new products and seek the input of the suppliers before final implementation. Making strategic suppliers to feel part of the hotel's decision would make them feel part of the company and hence enable them provide quality and affordable supplies to the hotels.

2. Customer satisfaction factors (R_2): The study identified customer service - empathy for customers of the hotel to be weak. This needs urgent attention and can be improved by the hotel providing training to its employees on interpersonal skills and work ethics. This will equip employees with the requisite skills that will make them friendlier, approachable and improve their general attitude to work and by so doing make customers feel important, which could create a friendly atmosphere for the customer. Employees should endeavour to always be cheerful towards customers and provide them with the needed attention thereby rendering the needed comfort, and thus enabling guests to open up to service staff on their needs.

3. SCM practices and customer satisfaction (R_3): The study found that the hotel had complete trust in its suppliers hence its ability to provide customers with whatever they needed at all times and this showed no correlation on customer satisfaction. It is therefore important that the hotels undertake an exercise to ensure they have fewer suppliers who are reliable and can be trusted at all times to supply them their needs. This will make it easier for the hotels to plan their activities by sharing information with their suppliers at all times to enable the facilities provide their customers with what they need.

4. The study further recommends that there should be training at least twice a year with one involving all employees of the hotels. The training should be open to strategic suppliers to participate to broaden their understanding of the roles they play in ensuring service quality at the hotels.

Recommendation for Further Research

There is substantial future research potential worthy of examination in the area of SCM practices and its effects on customer satisfaction and value creation. Some notable future research areas worthy of recommendation include: future research should consider

widening the scope to include all 3-Star hotels in Ghana in order to provide a better overview of the extent of implementation, challenges as well as benefits of deploying SCM practices in hotels in Ghana. Secondly, in subsequent studies, the population of participants could be broadened to include participants from the regulatory agencies of hotels in the country. Key suppliers may also be respondents in future studies. Finally, future studies may look at SCM practices in the hotel industry in Ghana or probably the hospitality industry as a whole.

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