



Assessing the Effect of Good Customer Service in Increasing Customer Satisfaction in the Fashion Industry

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Abstract

Most customer gratification/displeasure research is focused either on detecting product and private usage appearances associated with displeasure, or is focused on modeling the psychological processes underlying the phenomenon. Fashion entrepreneurs and business owners, on the other hand, focus only on handling customer complaints. This study focuses on accessing the effects of good customer services that leads to increasing customer satisfaction. Findings from a plethora of fashion entrepreneurs, business owners, fashion students, fashion designers, sales personnel, tailors and seamstresses in Accra-Central region, research show that, while there are some differences in the determinants of consumer satisfaction among the customers, it is the friendly customer-related factors that exert the greatest effects. Qualitative research was considered to collect and analyze data using questionnaire to gather information from various customers at various fashion companies and business owners. The method of research determined how the data is collected. Questionnaire used to recover raw data was designed in two parts of which one part was answered by the external customers the other part answered by the business owners, lecturers, entrepreneurs who are in the fashion business. This study reveals that, even though there are few barriers to customer service provision, it has not negatively affected the service provision promised by fashion businesses and so satisfaction of customers is also not affected.

Keywords: Fashion Industry, Customer Service, Customer, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Retention.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Huno, V. A., & Addy, E. N. A. (2020). Assessing the Effect of Good Customer Service in Increasing Customer Satisfaction in the Fashion Industry. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, 13(5), 865-879.

INTRODUCTION

Development of global economic integration and the competition between the enterprises is more and more fierce; many enterprises are faced with changeable market requirements. Webster (1994) points out that due to the competitive environment changes; customer becomes the most important strategic resources for enterprise.

Many researches have been made and found that good customer service satisfaction greatly affects a company's profitability not just short term but long term as well. Satisfied customers will have high loyalty, and these customers will increase repeated purchase intention, so as to affect the company's market share and return on investment (Bolton & Drew, 1991).

If companies want to satisfy the customers' demand, they must clearly understand the consumer's requirement on quality, functionality, denotation and price (Fonvielle, 1997). Customer service is a widely used phenomenon that can be found in various fields like art, business, aviation etc.

It is such a crucial service that adds not only value but builds relationship with customers in the long run. This research is aiming to spew out the effects of good customer service in order to increase client's satisfaction in the fashion industry business.

Any organization that has satisfied customers is bound to increase customer base and hence profitability. Satisfied customers may sell your organization either consciously or unconsciously.

High levels of customer satisfaction bring several positive aspects to a company; it is believed that customer satisfaction has a positive relationship with economic profit (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994). Moreover, it will lower customer's price sensitivity (Fornell, 1992), and contribute to the creation of loyal customers, which in turn implies a stable future cash-flow (Matzler et al., 1996).

It is therefore important that fashion industries provide quality service to customers so as to satisfy them, make them loyal and retain them in the end. "The goal as a company is to have customer service that is not just the best, but legendary," says Sam Walton, Founder, Walmart.

Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed at providing information and insights regarding excellent customer service and its effects on customer satisfaction in the Ghanaian context. This work will be available to the industry being researched for the management to have knowledge of the perception of their customers and on services being provided to them and to help improve on service quality.

Good customer service satisfaction is one of the few/several most important issues affecting organizational survival. It has the important effect on customer retention, loyalty and narrowing it down, focuses on customer service quality as one of the customer satisfaction factors.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- How does customer service influence customer satisfaction in the fashion industry?
- How does customer service have impact on customer loyalty and retention in the fashion industry?

- What are the barriers to quality customer service provision in the fashion industry?
- Which other customer service activities will really satisfy customers in the fashion industry?

Hypotheses

A null hypothesis was tested in the study:

- Good customer service increases customer satisfaction in the fashion industry.

METHODOLOGY

This survey study was carried in the Accra-Central region. The population involved all categories of customers – fashion entrepreneurs, business owners, fashion students, fashion designers, sales personnel, tailors and seamstresses.

Sample

A mixture of convenience and purposive sampling were used to select the sample size for the study. The various categories of customers make up the sampling frame for this study of which two hundred and fifty (250) were used as population and ninety (90) participants were selected as the sample size. However, eighty (80) of the questionnaire were answered, seventy (70) of which were customers and ten (10) were business owners.

Instruments for Data Collection

The study of the research was conducted through the use of questionnaires as the main data collecting tool employing the non-probability sampling technique therefore using a mixture of convenience sampling and purposive sampling to select the sample size. The gathering of data ranged from collection of information through questionnaire from various customers at various fashion companies and business owners.

Questionnaires were developed based on the research objectives and the literature was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was divided into two categories (1&2). Category 1 sought information from external customers and Categories 2 was answered by business owners, lecturers, and entrepreneurs who are in the fashion business respectively.

Data Collection and Analysis Technique

Presentation, analysis and discussion of the results from data collected were looked at. Raw data was analyzed using SPSS, and excel to arrive at frequency tables and percentages. Responses from customers are in two parts, the first part reveals the perception that customers have about the services rendered by fashion business owners et al in Accra-Central and the second part discloses strategies that the various fashion business owners et al have put in place as a result of customer expectation so as to satisfy the customers and as such, retain them.

RESULTS

Table 1: Categories of Customers

Category	Frequency	Percent
Retail	10	15.87
Lecturer	5	7.94
Entrepreneur	5	7.94
Seamstress	12	19.05
customer	31	49.2
total	63	100

Table 1 aims at establishing the composition of the various customer categories in Accra-Central. This is critical because, different categories of customers are exposed to different levels of customer service and therefore have different perceptions about customer service. The distribution shows a high level of response from regular customers. There were 31 out of 63 responses from regular customers representing 49.2% of total respondents. In Accra-Central region, where there are a plethora of categories of customers, the majority that dominates are: the regular customers are those who visit most shops in the vicinity on day to day basis to buy from fashion shops et al. Entrepreneurs/Lecturer customers are those who can call/order from their homes to transact business or will come directly to shops as and when there is something very important to be bought from these shops. Seamstress customers are the ‘special’ customers. They are the ones that occasionally interact with other various customers.

Table 2: Number of Years as a Customer in the Fashion Business/Industry

Year	Frequency	Percent
0-1 year	15	23.81
2-3 years	23	36.51
above 3 years	25	39.68
Total	63	100

From Table 2, 25 respondents representing 39.68% appeared to have done business with fashion business owner’s et al for a long time. This may be described as customer loyalty and the owner’s ability to retain its customers, a view supported by Zeithaml et al. (2003:110), who maintained that, the outcome of customers’ satisfaction is their loyalty and ultimately retention by the fashion organizations. If customers perceive the services being provided are excellent, customers will stay on.

Table 3: Customer Relationship Management

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	55	87.3
No	5	7.94
Not aware	3	4.76
Total	63	100

One of the services promised by majority of fashion owner's et al. is developing excellent relationship management with customers. In Table 3, 87.3% of respondents said they have amazing relationship with fashion business owners. Implying the business, to a large degree is delivering on its customer service promises. Of the rest 8 respondents, 5 responded that the relationship they have is nothing good to write home about while 3 are not aware or do not even care whether they have customer relationship with fashion business owners. Though this number is lower compared to those who said they had great relationship, it is still critical to a fashion business owner's et al that aims at retaining its customers. This is because it is less costly retaining an existing customer than prospecting a new one.

Table 4: Calls from Fashion Business Owners to Customers

Calls	Frequency	Percent
Very Regularly	10	16.13
Regularly	15	24.20
Often	25	40.32
Not At All	12	19.35
Total	62	100

Table 4 had 62 respondents in all. 50 out of the total which represents about 80% of the respondents said they are called. About 40.33% are regularly called. Only 19.35 % of the total sampled said they are not called at all. Since from literature every customer wants to feel special and want to be called, there is a need to look at the 19.35% who said they were not called at all. This is because if the not calling them contributes to their dissatisfaction, they may negatively advertise the services to others.

Table 5: Customers Ranking Staff

Staff Performance	Frequency	Percent
Excellent	24	38.10
Very Good	15	23.81
Good	15	23.81
Poor	0	0
Satisfactory	9	14.28
Total	63	100

Table 5 presents how customers rank the staff of fashion industry/shops in terms of general performance. The results shows that there was no customer who said they performed poorly and about 86% ranked them as good or very good or excellent which suggests that the customer service staff present perform their duties to the satisfaction of customers. 14.28% are just satisfied with staff performance. Their satisfaction may be attributed to their perceived quality as reflected in Table 6.

Table 6: What Customers like about Fashion Business/Industry

Likes	Frequency	percent
Staff Attitude	40	63.5
Short Turnaround Time	12	19.04
Information On Products	9	14.3
Others	2	3.17
Total	63	100

As much as 63.5% of respondents said what they like about the fashion industry/business is the staff attitude. Customer service can be seen in the attitude of the staff towards the customer. It is said that service and for this matter, customer service is inseparable from the service provider. If customers are satisfied with the way they are handled and perceive that as quality, then they will be satisfied and become loyal to any organization. The percentage that like the short turnaround time and information on products might mean much is not done in those areas. It may also mean that what they perceive as customer service is attitude, rather than time spent in shops or information about products in the shop.

Table 7: Customers Intention to Continue Patronizing from Fashion Businesses

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	54	85.72
No	6	9.52
Cannot Tell	3	4.76
Total	63	100

Perhaps those who cannot tell are the new entrants to the field of fashion and may need time to decide. 54 out of 63 intend to continue patronizing from fashion businesses due to excellent customer service and satisfaction. A past research shows that satisfaction is a reliable predictor of re-purchase intentions (Wang, 2001). Maximization of customer loyalty is a priority for most industries. It can be said from the table that 86% are satisfied.

Table 8: What Customers like the Fashion Businesses to do to Meet their Needs

	Frequency	Percent
Provide More Quality Services	40	63.5
Provide Adequate Apprentices To Eliminate Waiting	12	19.04
Visit Or Call You Regularly	9	14.3
Total	63	100

Customers were asked to mention activities that if the company undergoes will meet their needs. In other words these are other expectations of customers.

According to Looy et al. (2003), Zeithaml et al. (2006) and Grönroos (2001), the subjective assessment of the actual service experiences is the customer perceived service quality. And what satisfies one customer may not satisfy the other.

It is certain from Table 8 that 63% of respondents will like more quality services to be provided and about 19% will like adequate apprentices to be provided to eliminate waiting. If more apprentices are provided and turnaround time is shorter, then there will be no need for

complaints. In any case, if provision of adequate staffs will increase the satisfaction level of customers, then it should be looked at.

Table 9: Other things Customers think the Fashion Businesses can do to make them more Satisfied

	Frequency	Percent
No Response	6	9.52
Customer Communication Has To Be Excellent Always	5	7.94
Information On Regular Basis	2	3.18
Paying More Attention To Customers	15	23.81
Delight Customers	1	1.59
Quick Delivery	7	11.11
Low Prices	18	28.57
Continue With Good Services	4	6.35
Improve On Customer Relations	2	3.17
None	3	4.76
Total	63	100

Every customer interaction is an opportunity for feedback.

Out of 63 respondents, 18 wants prices of products reduced. 15 of the respondents will like more attention be paid to customers. A few of them also talked of the adequate number of apprentices and how fast they things can be done. It is certain that most of what respondents wants are feasible demands, things they want to see and feel. If these are what will satisfy customers, then there is the need to provide them so as to give them quality in their own eyes.

Table 10: Customers Recommendation of Fashion Businesses to Others

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	54	85.72
No	6	9.52
Cannot tell	3	4.76
Total	63	100

Fifty four (54) recommendations out of sixty three (63) respondents were not very bad as indicated in Table 10. It could be a positive sign that customers see something good about fashion businesses. Remember one of the easiest and common ways to advertise a company is through word of mouth. So if the customers are recommending the business to others, then there is a brighter future for the business.

Retention Strategies

The second part of the questionnaire for customers was on strategies adopted by fashion businesses to give them excellent customer service that will retain them. There are general expectations of customers and this in the service industry is the service variables as discussed below. The retention strategies have been grouped according to the variables that customers would normally expect. The researcher wanted to know whether customers were satisfied or delighted in Accra-Central region, by analyzing of the following variables.

Tangibles

Tangibles are the appearance of physical facilities. The tools or equipment used to provide the service and communication material. Looy et al. (2003) described tangibles as the tools or equipment used to provide the service and communication material. In other words, every material is used to give tangibility to service.

Tables 11 and 12 show tangibles in fashion businesses, considering location and various quality products. From the tables, it is obvious that 27 out of 63 respondents agree to the convenience of the business location. However, 36 think it is normal. Agreeing may mean that customers are satisfied about the location of the business. The majority who see it as normal could mean that that is just what they expected. Accra-Central is more like the central hub of most fashion related businesses. Also the quality of the products is normal or alright for the most number of respondents. That could mean that it is just the expectation of the customers due to location. From the table on professional services provided by staff, it again shows that 35 out of 63 respondents strongly agree that a customer service is professional.

Table 11: Location of Company/Shop Is Convenient

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	14	22.22
Agree	13	20.64
Normal	36	57.14
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	63	100

Table 12: Has Quality Products to Choose from

	Frequency	valid Percent
Strongly Agree	11	17.46
Agree	31	49.21
Normal	21	33.33
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	63	100

Table 13: Service Provided by Staff is Professional

	Frequency	valid Percent
Strongly Agree	15	23.80
Agree	35	55.56
Normal	12	19.05
Disagree	1	1.59
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	63	100

Reliability

This is the consistency of the service performance, which breeds dependability, from the first time the service is correctly performed to the ability of the firm to keep its promises. Table 14 looks at reliable services to satisfy customers and hence retain them in the fashion business, and from the responses, 33 out of the 63 respondents feel the promotions to reward customers is normal or just alright, 25 of the respondents however agree that promotions are regular while 5 of the respondents are not very satisfied with how regular promotions and rewards to customers are. It may mean that if promotions and reward to customers are made more regular, satisfaction and retention for that matter may be increased.

Table 14: Promotions to Reward Customers are Regular

	Frequency	valid Percent
Strongly Agree	12	19.04
Agree	13	20.63
Normal	33	52.38
Disagree	5	7.94
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	63	100

Table 15: Turnaround Time is Swift

	Frequency	valid Percent
Strongly Agree	9	14.28
Agree	27	42.86
Normal	20	31.75
Disagree	7	11.11
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	63	100

Responsiveness

This is the willingness on the part of the service supplier (staff) to assist customers and provide prompt service. Turnaround time measures the responsiveness of staff in fashion shops. How fast business is transacted so that less time is spent in the shop. The view from respondents on this question is diverse as seen in Table 15. 36% of respondents are in agreement that turnaround time is swift. 11.11 % however disagree about the swiftness of the staff. 31.75% also think turnaround time is normal.

Customers generally want to be swift in orderly manner, no matter the transaction. They will not just tolerate any form of delay. So if customers think the shops have a short turnaround time, then it is a plus for them.

From the table on what customers will like the fashion businesses to do to make them more satisfied, some of them stated that the number of staff be increased while some also said that the staff should be faster in dealing with them. It is possible that it is those who made these statements who disagree with the swiftness of the staff.

Table 16: Staff Will Tell Customers about New Products

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	19	30.16
Agree	25	39.68
Normal	19	30.16
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	63	100

It is obvious from Table 4.16 that, majority of customers said staff will tell them about the new products. 63 out of 63 respondents said they will be told about new available products in the shop. But looking at the frequency for normal, it is also quite high, which could mean that customers expect more information about the products than they may be receiving now.

Empathy

This is a quality of the employee to care for the customer and give them individualized attention. It is a way that ensures employees feel valued and their needs are cared by the organization, so they would like to stay along with this firm (Wilson et al., 2008).

From Table 17, 24 out of the 63 respondents think the individual attention given to the customers is normal while, 34 agree they are given individual attention and a cumulative frequency of 5 disagree on individual attention.

Table 17: Customers are Given Individual Attention

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	34	53.97
Normal	24	38.10
Disagree	3	4.76
Strongly Disagree	2	3.17
Total	63	100

The table 18 below, shows that 29 customers see the courtesy of fashion businesses staff as normal, 21 agree they are courteous while a cumulative frequency of 8 do not agree they are courteous. Again this needs to be looked at since customer retention strategies need to be exciter's and not just satisfiers if customers are to be retained.

Table 18: Staffs are Friendly and Courteous

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	5	7.94
Agree	21	33.33
Normal	29	46.03
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	8	12.7
Total	63	100

Response from Staff

In as much as companies make it their sole aim of wanting to satisfy their customers through quality customer service, there are barriers to customer service delivery and for that matter, customer satisfaction. The questionnaire for staff seeks to find out if there were some barriers to service delivery which will eventually affect satisfaction of customers. Barriers usually are from management, systems/processes or the individual providing the service?

From literature, some factors that can serve as barriers to customer satisfaction include: Overworked Staff which can result in staff losing energy quickly and since they will have many clients to serve, steps will be skipped, staff and customers will become frustrated and clients will receive insufficient attention to their issues. From Table 20, out of 10 service personnel that were contacted, 7 said they serve between 10-20 customers every day. And this could be burdensome. Looking at the large number of customers in Accra-Central not considering those that are coming from far and wide, and the need not to keep them waiting so long in the queue, the attention and patience that should be given to make the customers feel like a king or queen might not be present. This can be inferred, from the questionnaire, which suggests that the average turnaround time for each customer is between 11-20mins.

From the results, fashion businesses/shops has a customer service goal which is to meet customer expectations and hence, delighting the customers. This is the very reason why they put strategies in place to satisfy and retain the customer. From the questionnaire, a cumulative frequency of 5 out of 10 staff said that some executive decisions affect customer service delivery in the organization while the rest five also disagree with the fact that executive decisions affect delivery of customer service. This is quite interesting because there is always a direct effect of decisions from management on service delivery in every organization.

On systems, 8 out of the 10 staff agreed from the questionnaire, that they are well equipped with resources to deliver customer service. In the modern world where systems are a necessary part of customer service delivery, in other words they cannot be done away with. Systems can positively or negatively affect service delivery. If the systems are poor, customers will get frustrated very quickly if the turnaround time is long. Therefore they may start looking elsewhere (www.entre-propel.com/customer-service). The staff also indicated that, they are always trained on new techniques of serving customers, which can also be attributed to system sufficiency.

Finally on the barriers to customer service delivery, 9 out of the 10 staff think that employee mood can affect customer service delivery. If staffs are not happy, if they are not given the necessary support and incentives, they may not give off their best. But the result on motivation of staff to deliver on the company's service promises shows that, they are always motivated, either internally or externally to deliver on the service promise of the company. The staffs were also asked what other factor can aid the company to improve customer service and the result is as below:

Table 19: Other factors within the set up that can aid the organization to improve upon its current service level

	Frequency	Percent
Fashion Businesses Must Employ The Use Of Quality Sales Personnel's Who Have Adequate Product Knowledge And Information	1	10
Fashion Businesses Must Check Their High Prices To Attract More Committed Customers And Clients	1	10
More Training	4	40
Motivation	4	40
More Skilled Workers	0	0
Total	10	100

The employees contacted had different views about what else can be done to improve the quality of services. 4 out of the 10 respondents said they needed more training; reason being is, diverse people from all walks of life walk into their shops and special way of handling them is needed to deliver good service. This will make their work faster and efficient. 1 of them said that, employees with good customer relations must be employed. This might mean there are some customer service personnel who do not have good customer relations or sales quality. One of the staffs also said they needed to maintain good customer service, which can be inferred that there is good customer service which needed to be maintained.

Another staff from Table 19 reveals response from a staff who thinks that, products in high prices are to be checked; hence it is one of the determining factors of permitting the customers to make another purchase on another day. No customer wants to be purchasing expensive products all the time.

Four employees also felt motivation of the employees and the customer service personnel in this case will aid the business to improve upon its customer service level.

DISCUSSIONS

From the data obtained, it is curtailed that, the fashion business owners provides appreciable level of customer service as expected by customers. This is deduced from customer responses obtained.

Among the promises to its customers are practice of relationship management, phone calls on pertinent product issues, and less turnaround time from staff as a way of strengthening fashion customer relations and reducing delay. Responses obtained from customers affirmed that, the companies have to a very large degree, delivered on these promises. However, keeping to these service promises are seen as just satisfying. That is to say they just meet the expectation of their customers.

For a fashion business that aims at being highly competitive, it would be expected that, they delight their customers. Delighting the customer implies exceeding the service promised and providing services customers do not even expect to see.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Customer service is very important issue as far as service delivery in today's industry is concerned. More so when competition is so great in the fashion sector of Ghana. To stay in competition, service providers must set goals alright which is in the form of promise to

customers. But to be ahead of competitors or to remain in competition service providers must give more than the expectation of customers so as to delight them. Customer service providers of Accra-Central should put other customer service strategies that will delight customers in place.

From data obtained, because majority of at Accra-Central are satisfied with most customer services provided them as seen in research question one(1), they are loyal to the fashion businesses. Majority of the customers have been patronizing with them since they came to Accra and are still with them. Most of the customers also have recommended fashion businesses and shops to others and they intend to continue dealing with them.

Also from the retention strategies put in place by fashion companies, most of the customers are satisfied with tangibles such as various quality products to choose from and professional services provided by the staff.

Other retention strategies such as reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance are generally satisfying to customers and therefore their loyalty to the fashion companies. Management should supervise the customer service personnel closely so that anyone who does not have good customer relations is taken from that department. More skilled sales personnel's must also be employed to make delay and turnaround times in the shops shorter and less burdensome on the staff. Further research can look at the management's point of view as far as customer service provision in Accra-Central region is concerned, for comparison.

It's been discovered that, each of the staffs serve averagely above 11 -20 customers a day and due the large numbers, the staffs are pressured to be able to give attention to, and be patient with each and every individual customer. Also some of the staffs attested to the fact that there are some managerial decisions which affect their service delivery. It was also inferred from the responses given that management needed to employ staff with good customer relations for the customer service department.

More so, responses show that, there is a barrier to quality customer service as far as systems in the fashion industry are concerned. Fashion businesses must employ the use of quality sales personnel's who have adequate product knowledge and information to make more sales for the company. Also that will help the customers do pertinent transactions such as reducing the amount of questions asked by customers and be able to recommend their services to others as per the product knowledge and information they've had.

On the service providers themselves, the data collected indicated that they needed to attend to customers on time, with a turnaround time of 5 minutes on the average. They also needed to maintain high level of good customer service no matter the circumstances and they needed to be motivated, either from management or from within.

The research has revealed that customers will like fashion businesses that have employed the use of quality sales personnel's who have adequate product knowledge and information to be more effective than it is now. Fashion businesses must check their high prices to attract more committed customers and clients, more training, motivation and skilled workers is a must for fashion businesses if they are to thrive in their business.

Hence, from the findings above, the customer service provision promised by fashion businesses is being delivered to the satisfaction of the customers in Accra-Central. Customers are also loyal to the Adum branch of Fidelity bank and will continue banking with them due to the excellent customer service provision. Even though there are few barriers to customer service provision, it has not negatively affected the service provision promised by fashion businesses and so satisfaction of customers is also not affected.

Finally, the researcher can confidently say that good customer service provision will positively affect and increase satisfaction of customers and that is the case of fashion businesses in Accra-Central region.

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