

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Restaurant service and customer satisfaction: the case of Crucita beach, Ecuador

Servicio de restaurante y satisfacción del cliente: el caso de la playa de Crucita, Ecuador

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Abstract Restaurant service has become a key part of tourism industry, especially in sun -and- beach destinations like Crucita, Ecuador. Despite many restaurants and cafes, service shortcomings cause dissatisfaction among customers and employees. This study aimed to assess the current state of customer service at the ALOHA restaurant in Crucita. The item used a mixed-method approach— quantitative and qualitative — with exploratory and descriptive research, including fieldwork and document review. The study was non-experimental and cross-sectional. Data was collected through customer surveys and tools such as the service triangle, flowcharts, and a mystery shopper. Analysis was carried out using Excel. The results showed that the restaurant lacks a supply-bar workstation, does not have properly trained service staff, and has no social media marketing strategy. These issues negatively affect service quality and customer satisfaction. To improve the situation, the study proposes creating a supply-bar station on the upper floor to enhance work conditions and service speed, developing a training plan for staff and management, and launching a consistent presence on social media. These actions aim to improve customer experience and boost the restaurant's competitiveness within the tourism sector.

Keywords process management, customer satisfaction, ALOHA restaurant.

Resumen El servicio de restaurante se ha vuelto esencial en el turismo, especialmente en destinos de sol y playa como Crucita, Ecuador. Existen deficiencias en el servicio que generan insatisfacción tanto en los clientes como en los empleados. Este estudio evaluó el estado actual del servicio al cliente en el restaurante ALOHA en Crucita. Se utilizó un enfoque cuantitativo-cualitativo con métodos exploratorios y descriptivos, mediante investigación de campo y documental. El diseño fue no experimental y transversal. La recolección de datos se realizó a través de un cuestionario aplicado a los clientes del restaurante y herramientas como el triángulo del servicio, diagramas de flujo y un cliente incógnito. Los datos fueron analizados en Excel. Los resultados revelaron que el restaurante ALOHA carece de una estación de trabajo de barra de suministros, su personal no cumple con las competencias requeridas para el servicio y no tiene presencia ni estrategia en redes sociales. El estudio concluye que estos problemas afectan negativamente la calidad del servicio y el desempeño del personal. Para abordarlos, se propone la creación de una estación de barra de suministros en la planta alta para mejorar el flujo de trabajo, la implementación de un programa de capacitación para el personal y la gerencia, y una entrada estratégica en redes sociales para aumentar la visibilidad y el compromiso de los clientes.

Palabras clave gestión por procesos, satisfacción del cliente, restaurante ALOHA.

How to cite

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Introduction

Tourism has experienced rapid growth worldwide in recent years. Latin America is no exception to this dynamic, and Ecuador aims to become a leading destination in the coming years. The country has an adequate infrastructure for this purpose, but customer service in the hotel, restaurant, and leisure sectors needs to be strengthened. Quality in restaurant service is a fundamental component of achieving successful operations. This corresponds to the level of customer satisfaction with the service received and the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. For a restaurant to achieve quality service, it must meet the needs and expectations of its customers; they are the ones who determine this performance measure.

Thus, perceived quality is divided into two forms. The first is by asking consumers to express their opinion on the quality they have experienced with the product or service, the second, according to Bloemer et al. (1999); and which tends to be the most dominant in the literature, is through a series of reagents called SERVQUAL, or some other derivative of it, which consists of an instrument designed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), in which five dimensions of service quality are identified: tangible aspects (physical), reliability (compliance and consistency), speed of response to customer demands, assurance of what is offered and empathy with the customer.

These dimensions articulate with the components of the service triangle, since it is in this model where the service strategy, the systems, and the employee are active and decisive components in customer satisfaction. Although there is a tendency to understand that the systems in the restoration are made up of utensils, tables, chairs, cooking equipment, refrigeration and computer systems, in the present study the emphasis is on how to organize some of these physical elements for a better service, emphasizing the sound design of the jobs for a better service and satisfaction of clients and employees, as demonstrated by Gonzales and Díaz (2024), who point out that reorganizing staff functions in key areas of attention improves both the customer experience and operational efficiency.

Based on the research project on sustainable tourism in Crucita Beach, developed by the University of Mexico (UTM) and completed in 2020, deficiencies in this destination were identified regarding customer service and satisfaction in restaurants, primarily due to errors in service.

According to Vavra (2003), in his research, he gives some definitions, among which he states:

- Satisfaction is the pleasure the customer experiences after consuming a particular product or service.

- Satisfaction is the process the customer experiences by perceiving and evaluating a supposed expertise.

- Satisfaction is the customer's emotional response to their assessment of the perceived discrepancy between their prior experience/expectations of our product and organization and the actual performance experienced once contact has been established with our organization, once they have tried our product.

According to Mora (2012), consumers can feel satisfied with a particular aspect of the choice or consumption experience. Users always expect products to be better than expected, exceeding their expectations when purchasing a product or service.

The research emphasizes the impact of employee or collaborator satisfaction on customer satisfaction.

Based on these conceptual elements, the worker must have adequate working conditions to motivate themselves and ensure that their clients are satisfied and ready to return to their destination.

In the Crucita beach destination, there are dozens of restaurants of similar size and service, hence the high level of competition for this type of service. Therefore, it is essential to identify any problems that could impact customer satisfaction and take action to resolve them and become more competitive.

This research aims to establish the current restaurant service process and customer service status at the Crucita beach-tourist destination. Due to its size and services, the ALOHA restaurant is a reference, representing most of these establishments in the resort under study.

Methodology

The quality of tourism services is essential in shaping their image. The parish of Crucita is one such site in Manabí, Ecuador. It is a destination rich in natural and cultural resources, and despite being located within one of the country's largest and most important provinces, it has not been exploited wisely and consciously. Strategic planning and management of the sustainability of tourism development must be considered necessary elements to guarantee the destination's medium- and long-term perspective. For sustainability, indicators must be defined that allow for effective management of its sustainability and consider caution in decision-making as a highly relevant aspect for the development of the destination.

In order to develop this scientific work with the required

rigor, a mixed research design (qualitative-quantitative) is used with an exploratory and descriptive type of study and of a non-experimental nature with a field and documentary approach. To address the collection of information most effectively, a survey is applied to a sample of customers taken from a finite population made up of visitors or tourists who arrive at the restaurant during the study period of this research. To reinforce the process of capturing, processing, and analyzing information, business tools applicable to the case in question are used.

The eight-question survey was administered to the 321 customers, as determined by the sample calculation. It used a Likert scale with five response options to capture the respondents' perceptions: totally agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and totally disagree.

The service triangle connects three nodes of a triangle (the service strategy, the service support systems, and the employees or collaborators). These are centered on the central node represented by the customer, the *raison d'être* of a pull-based organization.

The interaction between the employee and the customer is known as the moment of truth. These are the most important points in a service process because they define the level of customer satisfaction, as argued by Freire (2024) and Ruelas-Pérez et al. (2024), who highlight that each interaction must be carefully designed to ensure consistency and quality in the perceived service.

This service triangle allows us to present the interaction between the customer, the service strategy, the systems, and the staff to characterize the behavior of the service process in the ALOHA Playa Crucita restaurant. The analysis of the moments of truth evaluates the points of contact between the employee and the customer that influence the visitor's perception.

Robbins and Judge (2023) define job satisfaction as a positive feeling about one's job that arises from evaluating its characteristics. A person with high job satisfaction has positive feelings about their job, while a dissatisfied employee has negative feelings. The effects of job satisfaction include productivity, staff turnover, health, and social learning.

The instrument of the British international consultant, Don Harper, will be applied to determine the level of employee satisfaction quantitatively. It presents 25 items, where the level of priority that workers give to each of them is compared and related to the real situation of their behavior and said reason, once applied to a mathematical expression, gives a value between 0 and 1 and that can be expressed as a percentage, so that it can be measured to what percentage the

employees are satisfied.

A flowchart is important to an organization, as it presents the different steps in the process under study. This flowchart graphically represents each link in the service process at the ALOHA restaurant in Playa Crucita. It will serve as a documentary guide for proper process management and organization, establishing all the requirements for each position or workstation.

Regarding working conditions, Chiavenato (2007) points out that "it is the physical circumstances in which the employee finds himself when he holds a position in the organization. It is the physical environment that surrounds the employee while he performs a position" (p. 334).

On the other hand, Castillo and Prieto (1990) state, "Working conditions are everything that revolves around work from the perspective of how work affects people. Therefore, working conditions are not only about hygiene, safety, physical, and psychological aspects that determine these conditions" (p. 121).

Results and discussion

As can be seen in the questions related to customer service, just over 50% of respondents have a favorable opinion of the service, and in some cases, less than 50%, indicating that the service is lacking and customer dissatisfaction is felt.

Silva-Treviño et al. (2021), in the structured model presented in their research, raise three dominant variables of the study: quality of service, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. One dimension evaluates customers' appreciation of the equipment used to provide the service and the construction design, an issue emphasized in the research carried out at the Crucita beach destination.

In the case of the ALOHA restaurant, the requirements for integrating systems with employees, articulated with the service strategy, are not fully met. The main shortcomings are poor employee training, low refrigeration equipment utilization, and inadequate station design for liquids, dishes, and utensils on the second floor to provide better service.

According to Kankam-Kwarteng et al. (2020), important factors must be considered when designing a bar or restaurant, such as understanding the business, differentiating from the competition, being relevant to the customer, and the intensity of the emotional bond.

Coronel and Vivar (2020) propose that coherence and adaptability are key elements in restaurant design, starting from the premise that each project is unique, we can say that it is essential to understand that retail interior design must start from a deep analysis, which includes the characteristics of the space and the basic needs of the business.

Table 1. Customer survey characteristics at the ALOHA restaurant, Crucita beach

Feature	Option for more repetitive responses that predominate
Do you know ALOHA restaurant from advertisements you have seen on social media or flyers?	37% Totally agree and agree
Do you think the waiting time to be served is adequate?	49% Strongly agree and agree
Do you think ALOHA restaurant meets your needs and expectations?	53% Totally agree and agree
ALOHA, Restaurant to family and friends?	51% Totally agree and agree
Does product quality influence your satisfaction?	93% Totally agree and agree
Do you prefer ALOHA restaurant over other restaurants in the Crucita area that offer similar cuisine?	48% Strongly agree and agree
Do you think the infrastructure of the ALOHA restaurant is important for a visit or recommendation?	79% Strongly agree and agree
Are you satisfied with the service provided at the ALOHA restaurant?	51% Totally agree and agree

Below are the key moments of truth that occur in the service at ALOHA Restaurant.

With this method, the customer interacts with ALOHA Restaurant, thereby providing a perception and opinion about the restaurant's quality of service. The sequence of customer experiences can be observed, beginning with check-in, reservation, arrival at the restaurant, table assignment, initial service, order taking, service during the order, payment of the bill, and farewell. The aforementioned are the real experiences or moments of truth that the customer experiences.

Real behavior of moments of truth

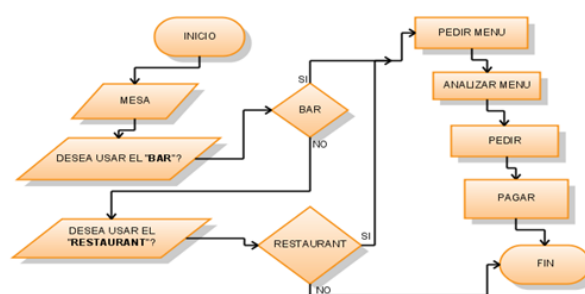
- Informal welcome, no well-educated or eloquent employee is observed.
- The table is chosen as a client
- When taking orders, it was discovered that products such as potatoes were in short supply, although the clerk explained the difficulties presented by the pandemic.
- During service, there was a noticeable delay in bringing liquids and dishes.

A flowchart characterizing the restaurant service offered was drawn up to achieve greater precision in managing the ALOHA restaurant.

The flowchart provides a sequence of activities at ALOHA Restaurant. This diagram allows you to observe and understand the steps in the customer service process.

The flowchart designed for the ALOHA restaurant in Crucita beach (Figure 1), begins with the entrance to the tables where customers sit to be served. Employees must assist them and inquire about the service they require, i.e., whether they will use the bar or the restaurant. The process for each service option offered by the restaurant is the same. The employee hands them a menu of food and beverages. Custom-

ers analyze the menu, make their decision, and place their order. Once they have finished eating, they serve themselves and pay, thus concluding the customer activities within the establishment.

**Figure 1.** ALOHA restaurant flowchart.

For the research on the ALOHA restaurant, the flowchart is expected to be implemented to make process management more effective and efficient for employees and customers, as well as to optimize delivery time. This flowchart allows the company, in this case the restaurant, to reduce service time because the staff in charge will perform well-defined and standardized tasks.

Redesigning logistics processes through flowcharts, focusing on reducing cycle time and improving delivery, is a key tool for continuous improvement (Moreno, 2023).

A group method was developed to determine employee satisfaction levels, created by English doctor Don Harper, who applied it to the merger of British airlines in the 1990s.

Table 1. Results of the satisfaction level of the workers at the ALOHA restaurant

Employee	Percentage of satisfaction
1	84
2	60
3	63
4	72
5	90
6	83
7	74
8	92
9	57
10	75

To determine the average percentage obtained from the level of satisfaction of the employees of the ALOHA restaurant, the Olympic criterion of decision by appreciation is applied, so the extreme values are eliminated, that is, the lowest and the highest, to eliminate biases of sympathy or antipathy with the restaurant under study.

On average, the level of satisfaction of the employees of the ALOHA restaurant in Playa Crucita is acceptable. However, it is not what would be expected for an organization immersed in a highly competitive environment. Manjares et al. (2020) state that managing motivation in most environments is complicated. Employees who cannot perform their tasks can be sent for training to learn and learn new job skills. If this person cannot learn these skills, they would move on to simpler tasks, being replaced by a more effective employee, obviously granting them the necessary tools to do their job; this would allow the employee to feel motivated and work more efficiently.

This is the designation of a diagnostic technique widely used in catering services. It consists of appointing an expert disguised as a customer to evaluate compliance with the rules or the 10 Commandments of customer service, thus helping to propose service improvement actions to achieve the desired customer satisfaction.

A tourism expert (Master's degree in Hotel Management) was assigned to take on the role of a secret shopper and verify compliance with the 10 Commandments of Customer Service. The expert provided the required description to record relevant information about the ALOHA restaurant's service process, providing a clear understanding of its effectiveness. The results of the secret shopper insertion are presented below:

Among the problems identified is the lack of a customer provisioning workstation on the upper floor. This would allow service without going down to the ground floor and minimize unnecessary effort for the employee working at this workstation. The workstation has cutlery, dishes, glassware,

and a refrigerator for customers' most commonly consumed liquids.

Coronel and Vivar (2020) propose that coherence and adaptability are key elements in restaurant design. It is important to understand that retail interior design must start from an in-depth analysis, including the space's characteristics and the business's basic needs. With this premise, the waiting time of customers was investigated in depth, due to the absence of this workstation, the great effort of the employee constantly going up and down from the ground floor to the upper floor, and the underutilization of the ground floor refrigerator that could be used in the proposed workstation.

Figure 2 illustrates the current layout of the restaurant's upstairs space, and Figure 3 shows the proposed provisioning job position for the upstairs Bar.



Figure 2. Illustration of the current state of the area to be transformed on the upper floor of the restaurant.



Figure 3. Proposal for a supply and bar position on the upper floor

The secret evaluator allows for obtaining important information about the service offered by the ALOHA restaurant. It was found that the collaborators do not meet the requirements of a tourism professional; they are inexperienced, insecure, and have a low language level. They are not directed towards the needs of the client. It was also observed that the restaurant having two floors makes the waiting time longer than usual due to the lack of a workstation that facilitates the service upstairs and improves working conditions. It is concluded that the conditioning of the employees results in

low performance in both the service processes and customer satisfaction. This coincides with Donayre and Chambilla (2024), who explain that physical and organizational conditions significantly influence the performance of restaurant and hotel staff.

Conclusions

In the research it was possible to characterize the behavior of the service process in ALOHA restaurant in Crucita beach, and customer service, where it is observed that the collaborators show few skills in serving visitors and the administration lacks professional training they manage empirically, without applying service management methods and tools and without drawing up clear strategies to position themselves in the market. The problems detected in the restaurant with the most significant incidence were the waiting time in the restaurant, which is usually very long, the unprofessional attention that the collaborators provide is limited, which can lead to low customer satisfaction, tourists mostly do not recognize or differentiate the ALOHA service from the rest of their similar ones in the destination, another negative element detected was the low level of advertising in the networks that the hotel has, but the central problem that is determined is the absence of a workstation for provisioning customers on the upper floor that allows part of the service to be given without having to go down to the ground floor and minimizes unnecessary efforts by the employee who provides that service and that is equipped with cutlery, crockery, glassware and a refrigerator for the liquids most consumed by customers.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: Suárez, R., Castro, S. Y., & Veliz, S. A. **Data curation:** Suárez, R., Castro, S. Y., & Veliz, S. A. **Formal analysis:** Suárez, R., Castro, S. Y., & Veliz, S. A. **Research:** Suárez, R., Castro, S. Y., & Veliz, S. A. **Methodology:** Suárez, R., Castro, S. Y., & Veliz, S. A. **Supervision:** Suárez, R., Castro, S. Y., & Veliz, S. A. **Validation:** Suárez, R., Castro, S. Y., & Veliz, S. A. **Visualization:** Suárez, R., Castro, S. Y., & Veliz, S. A. **Writing the original draft:** Suárez, R., Castro, S. Y., & Veliz, S. A. **Writing, review and editing:** Suárez, R., Castro, S. Y., & Veliz, S. A.

Data availability statement

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Statement on the use of AI

The authors acknowledge the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies to improve the readability and clarity of the article.

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