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Original Article

Demographic Characteristics and Service Quality Perceptions in Game Lodges

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ABSTRACT

Customer demographic characteristics are key determinants of consumers' behaviour and play an important role in differentiating customer needs and service quality perception. Providing high-quality services in game lodges promotes business performance, including market share and profitability. However, practical and empirical evidence has demonstrated that perception of service quality differs significantly between customers, leading to differences in their expectations and satisfaction, consequently affecting their behavioural intentions. Although several studies have reported the effect of demographic characteristics on service quality perception, few studies exist in the context of game lodges. Hence, this study investigated whether significant differences exist in service quality perception within demographic characteristics among visitors in game lodges. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to obtain a sample size of 337 visitors from the different categories of star-rated game lodges at Maasai Mara National Reserve and its conservancies in Kenya. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine whether there were significant differences in service perception within different demographic characteristics. The study found that nationality and age influenced service quality perception. The findings suggest that the game lodge managers should structure their services based on the visitors' nationality and age. Moreover, the game lodge managers can use these findings to formulate a demographic-driven marketing strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of service within the hospitality industry has increased over the last decade and is an important element of competitive advantage in the game lodge sector (Kandampully & Solnet, 2020). There is no consensus on the definition of service as it varies from one individual to another. However, service quality is understood as an evaluation of service delivery by a customer, and it determines the degree to which customers' expectations are met and, subsequently, satisfaction (Ali et al., 2021).

In Kenya, domestic and international tourists are attracted by numerous tourist attractions, such as wildlife safaris. These tourists need hospitality services such as accommodation, and lodging facilities, such as game lodges, are important. Game lodges are classified within the context of resort hotels since they satisfy the classification criteria for resort hotels, as Fredrick (2019) suggested, for their unique location regarding attractions, scenery, and climate. In this study, star-rated game lodges refer to classified accommodation establishments in Kenya's national parks and reserves, such as the Maasai Mara National Reserve. Tourists' patronage of Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) national parks and reserves is an indicator of tourism performance, as wildlife tourism is a core product in Kenya's tourism industry. Maasai Mara National Reserve is one of the world's wildlife safari destinations, owing to its annual wild beast migration (Chakrabarti & Ekblom, 2024).

Game lodges are becoming one of the fastest-growing segments of tourist attractions globally (Ali et al., 2016), creating intensified competition and making it vital for individual game lodges to comprehend different service quality perceptions so that superior service quality is delivered to retain existing markets and attract the emerging market. Game lodges need to understand the various parameters, such as differences in visitors' demographic characteristics that influence service quality perception, to develop marketing strategies that help build a greater customer base (Al-jazzazi & Sultan, 2017).

Socio-demographic characteristics are key determinants of consumers' behaviour, and play an important role in differentiating customer needs and service quality perception (Makanyeza et al., 2021). This point of view is supported by an earlier study of Fotiadis & Kozak (2017), who opine that differences in customers' socio-demographic characteristics lead to variance in their service quality perception. Although a substantial amount of research on the influence of demographic characteristics exists in the extant literature, especially on travel motivation (Aziz et al., 2018), restaurants (Parsa et al., 2015) Robot service in restaurants (Choi et al., 2020), homestays (Zhao et al., 2020) Food delivery services (Bansal et al., 2023). Little or no attention has been paid to the influence of demographic factors such as age, nationality, and gender on service quality perception in game lodges. Hence, this paper sought to examine the influence of demographic variables on the service quality perception of visitors in game lodges.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Service quality has attracted attention in research due to its significant influence on various industries' performance (Cheng et al., 2019). Several studies support service quality as an important factor in offering a business a competitive weapon, which is essential for customer emotional satisfaction and Customer behavioural intentions (Clemes et al., 2020). Similarly, Zeithaml et al. (1988) revealed that service quality relates to the company's capacity to comply with or exceed the expectations of customers.

Higher service quality provision in the lodging industry is a crucial in-service marketing strategy to meet the demands of customers (Ali et al., 2021b). Most of the extant evaluation models in

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service quality have applied conventional methods such as SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, LODGQUAL, and LODGSERVE. However, these models have the limitation of not fully reflecting the correlation between evaluation factors or the hierarchical conceptualisation of service quality. Thus, they are considered insufficient to measure service quality in lodges. In recent years, as the service environment has changed, Brady & Cronin (2001) and Dabholkar et al. (1996) have proposed that customers evaluate service quality at several levels of abstraction, that is, sub-dimension, dimension, and the overall service quality level.

Demographic Characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics are key determinants of consumers' behaviour, and play an important role in differentiating customer needs and service quality perception (Makanyeza et. al., 2021). This point of view is supported by an earlier study of Fortis and Kozak (2017), who opine that differences in customers' socio-demographic characteristics lead to variance in their service quality perception. Several studies have reported that social-demographic characteristics such as age, educational level, level of income, marital status and nationality influence service quality perception (Banki et al., 2018; Ojekalu et al., 2019).

Banki et al. (2017) investigated the influence of social-demographic characteristics on leisure travellers, and the travellers' gender, age, marital status, occupation, and income level showed a significant influence on perceived service quality, but educational level was not found to be significant. Similarly, Ojekalu et al. (2019) examined the influence of demographic characteristics on service quality perception among occupiers of a shopping complex and found that gender and level of education significantly influenced service quality perception, whereas age had an insignificant influence. Additionally, Lu and Ahn (2023) noted that gender, age and income influenced quality of service and subsequent behavioural intentions within a restaurant service context.

Therefore, this study proposed the following hypotheses based on the reviewed literature:

H1: There is a significant influence of nationality on the overall service quality perception in game lodges

H2: There is no significant influence of age on the overall service quality perception in the game Lodges

H3: There is no significant influence of marital status on the overall service quality perception in the game lodges

H4: There is no significant influence of marital status on the overall service quality perception in the game lodges

H5: There is no significant influence of the level of education on the overall service quality perception in the game lodges

H6: There is a significant influence of occupation on the overall service quality perception in the game lodges

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Data was collected from tourists visiting the Maasai Mara National Reserve and its conservancies. This study focused on game lodges in the Maasai Mara Ecosystem in Kenya, which has been recognised as a unique ecosystem (Nampushi & Nankaya, 2020). In addition, the choice of the Maasai Mara ecosystem was based on tourist popularity (GOK, 2022), attributed to the fact that Maasai Mara National Reserve (MMNR) is one of Kenya's leading wildlife reserves owing to its spectacular wild beast migration (Chakrabarti & Ekblom, 2024), abundance of variety of large wildlife that includes the big five, and availability of high-standard lodging facilities.

Tourists who patronised the star-rated game lodges in Maasai Mara National Reserve and its conservancies between November 2021 and August 2022. were considered as the total population of this study. The sample frame consisted of tourists who stayed in 24 star-rated game lodges. The Proportionate stratified

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sampling was used to get a sample of respondents in each of the game lodges. Respondents from each lodge were selected through systematic random sampling, and every third customer who checked in was selected for data collection. A total of 421 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 320 were returned, and after screening for completeness, 312 questionnaires were suitable for analysis. This represented a 93% response rate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Diagnostic tests were among the preliminary data analysis done on collected data to determine the validity of the findings (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In this study, three diagnostic tests were conducted to test for the assumptions of absence of multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity and test of normality. In this study, the variance inflation factor (VIF) and the Tolerance were used to test multicollinearity among the independent variables. Tolerance measures the impact of collinearity among the variables in a regression model and is calculated from 1 - R2, with a tolerance value close to 1 showing little multicollinearity, while a value close to 0 indicates the presence of multicollinearity. VIF values ranged between 1,013 to 1.927 while tolerance values ranged from 0.519 to 0.987. The VIF values were within the range of below 5, and the tolerance values were close to 1. The finding, therefore, shows that there was no evidence of multicollinearity in the data.

To test normality, the value of skewness ranged from -0.125 to -1.933 while kurtosis ranged from -0.902 to 3.682, and these values were within the +/-3 range for all factors. This implied that most of the data was normally distributed. Heteroscedasticity was not a problem in the data, as the constant variance (Chi-square 2.001) was insignificant (P = 0.245). Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and we conclude that the error variance is equal.

Profile of the Study Respondents

The study findings revealed that respondents were drawn from international and domestic tourism markets (Table 1). Domestic tourism comprised the Kenyan residents and constituted 18.9% of the respondents visiting Maasai Mara game lodges. The International tourism market comprises tourists from different world regions, namely Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia. More than 50% of tourists came from the American and European regions and constituted 29.8% and 28.5% of the total number of tourists, respectively. This was followed by tourists from the Asia region, comprising 17% (50) and a small proportion of tourists from African and Australian regions, consisting of less than 10% of the total tourists. The results show that whereas Kenya has relied on the international market and more specifically the USA market, UK, German, Italian and French markets, there is a positive indication of patronage of Maasai Mara game lodges by Kenyan residents as well as emerging markets such as Indians, Chinese, Polish and Spanish nationals. This is a clear indication that Kenya has made efforts in tourism market diversification as envisaged in Vision 2030.

The gender of the respondents revealed that the majority were males (65.4%) and 34.6% were female. Analysis of respondents' age group suggests that the age bracket of 45-54 years constituted a slightly higher proportion of tourists than other age groups, constituting 27.6 % of the total respondents. The majority of the respondents (67.3%) had post postgraduate level of education, and 61.9% were employed.

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Table 1: Respondents per Tourism Market

Nationality/ Region	Counts	% of Total
Domestic Tourism		
Kenya residents	59	18.9%
International Tourism		
America	93	29.8%
Europe	88	28.5%
Asia	50	17.0%
Africa	18	5.8%
Australia	4	1.3 %
Total	**312**	**100%**

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender of the respondents	Male	204	65.4%
	Female	108	34.6%
Age of the respondent	<24 years	13	4.2%
	25-34 years	75	24.0%
	35-44 years	74	23.7%
	45-54 years	86	27.6%
	55-64 years	55	17.6%
	>64 years	9	2.9%
Marital Status	Single	100	32.1%
	Married	171	54.8%
	Other	41	13.1%
Highest level of education	Pre-High School	2	0.6%
	High School	11	3.5%
	Diploma	12	3.8%
	Undergraduate	59	18.9%
	Postgraduate	210	67.3%
	Other	18	5.8%
Profession/Occupation	Employed	193	61.9%
	Self-Employed	95	30.4%
	Student	14	4.5%

Comparison of Service Quality Perceptions Across Demographic Groups

Service quality perceptions were compared across sub-groups for all six demographic variables using a series of t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's honest significant difference (HSD) post–hoc tests.

Nationality and Service Quality Perceptions

The ANOVA was examined based on an alpha value of .05. The results of the ANOVA were significant, F (4, 306) = 9.07, p < .001, indicating there were significant differences in service quality among tourists' nationalities. (Table 3).

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Table 3: Analysis of Variance Table for Service Quality by Nationality

Term	*SS*	*df*	*F*	*p*	$\eta_p 2$
Region	7.73	4	9.07	< .001	0.11
Residuals	65.17	306			

The eta squared was 0.11, indicating that nationality explains approximately 11% of the variance in service quality. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 4

Table 4: **Mean, Standard Deviation, and Sample Size for Service Quality by Nationality**

Combination	*M*	*SD*	*n*
America	3.95	0.51	93
Europe	3.98	0.44	87
Asia	3.94	0.40	50
Africa	4.33	0.46	77
Australia	4.16	0.24	4

A *t*-test was calculated between each group combination to further examine the differences among the variables based on an alpha of .05. The Tukey HSD p-value adjustment was used to correct for the effect of multiple comparisons on the family-wise error rate. For the main effect of region, the mean of service Quality for America (M = 3.95, SD = 0.51) was significantly smaller than for Africa (M = 4.33, SD = 0.46), $p < .001$. For the main effect of region, the mean of service Quality for Europe (M = 3.98, SD = 0.44) was significantly smaller than for Africa (M = 4.33, SD = 0.46), $p < .001$. For the main effect of region, the mean of service Quality for Asia (M = 3.94, SD = 0.40) was significantly smaller than for Africa (M = 4.33, SD = 0.46), $p < .001$. No other significant effects were found.

Based on these results, hypothesis one: There is no significant influence of nationality on the overall service quality perception in game lodges, was rejected. This finding suggests that service quality perception in game lodges is influenced by visitors 'nationality.

Service Quality Perception by Tourists' Age

The results of the ANOVA were significant, F (5, 305) = 2.54, p = .029, indicating there were significant differences in service Quality perceptions among the levels of age (Table 5). The eta squared was 0.04, indicating age explains approximately 4% of the variance in service Quality.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance Table for service Quality by age

Term	*SS*	*df*	*F*	*p*	$\eta_p 2$
Age	2.91	5	2.54	.029	0.04
Residuals	69.99	305			

The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 6.

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Table 6: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Sample Size for service Quality by age

Combination	*M*	*SD*	*n*
	3.94	0.63	13
25-34 years	4.03	0.55	75
35-44 years	4.13	0.42	74
45-54 years	4.02	0.45	86
55-64 years	4.15	0.45	55
>64 years	3.60	0.48	8

A *t*-test was calculated between each group combination to further examine the differences among the variables based on an alpha of .05. The Tukey HSD p-value adjustment was used to correct for the effect of multiple comparisons on the family-wise error rate. For the main effect of age, the mean of service Quality for 35-44 years (M = 4.13, SD = 0.42) was significantly larger than for >64 years (M = 3.60, SD = 0.48), p = .036. For the main effect of age, the mean of service Quality for 55-64 years (M = 4.15, SD = 0.45) was significantly larger than for >64 years (M = 3.60, SD = 0.48), p = .031. No other significant effects were found.

The findings support hypothesis two, that there is a significant influence of age on the overall service quality perception in game lodges. This finding indicates that the age of visitors in game lodges influences service quality perception and supports previous studies (Banki et al.,2017). However, this finding contradicts Hagan's study (2015), which found age to have no influence on service quality perception in hotels.

Service Quality Perception by Tourists' gender

A two-tailed independent samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether the mean of Service quality was significantly different between the Male and Female categories of Gender. The result of the two-tailed independent samples *t*-test was not significant based on an alpha value of .05, $t(309) = 0.19$, p = .849, indicating the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. This finding suggests the mean of Service quality was not significantly different between the male and female categories of Gender. The results are presented in Table 6, and a bar plot of the means is presented in Figure 1.

Table 6: Two-Tailed Independent Samples t-Test for Service Quality by Gender

	Male			Female					
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*t*	*p*	*d*
Service Quality	4.06	0.48	204	4.05	0.49	107	0.19	.849	0.02

Note. N = 311. Degrees of Freedom for the *t*-statistic = 309. *d* represents Cohen's *d*.

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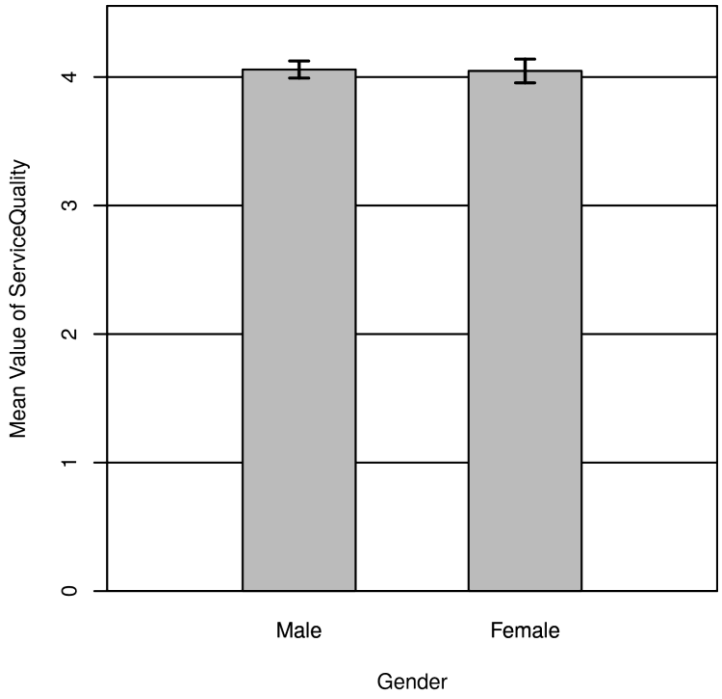
Figure 1: The Mean of Service Quality by Levels of Gender with 95.00% CI Error Bars



Service Quality Perception by Tourists' Marital Status

The results of the ANOVA were not significant, F (2, 308) = 1.75, p = .176, indicating there were no significant differences in service Quality by marital levels. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 8

Table 7: Analysis of Variance Table for Service Quality by Marital Status

Term	*SS*	*df*	*F*	*p*	$\eta_p 2$
Marital	0.82	2	1.75	.176	0.01
Residuals	72.09	308			

Table 8: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Sample Size for Service Quality by Marital Status

Combination	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Single	3.98	0.44	100
Married	4.09	0.50	170
Other	4.11	0.53	41

Service Quality Perception by Tourists' Level of Education

The results of the ANOVA were not significant, F (5, 305) = 0.09, p = .994, indicating there were no significant differences in service quality by education levels (Table 9). The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 10.

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Table 9: Analysis of Variance Table for Service Quality by Education

Term	*SS*	*df*	*F*	*p*	η_p^2
Education	0.10	5	0.09	.994	0.00
Residuals	72.80	305			

Table 10: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Sample Size for Service Quality by Education

Combination	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Pre-High School	3.85	0.33	2
High School	4.09	0.56	11
Diploma	4.06	0.48	12
Undergraduate	4.05	0.48	58
Postgraduate	4.05	0.48	210
Other	4.06	0.59	18

Service Quality by Tourists' Occupation

The results of the ANOVA were not significant, $F(3, 307) = 2.04$, $p = .109$, indicating there were no significant differences in service quality by respondents' occupation levels. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 12.

Table 11: Analysis of Variance Table for Service Quality by Occupation

Term	*SS*	*df*	*F*	*p*	η_p^2
Occupation	1.42	3	2.04	.109	0.02
Residuals	71.48	307			

Table 12: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Sample Size for Service Quality by Occupation

Combination	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Employed	4.03	0.48	193
Self-Employed	4.13	0.48	94
Student	3.83	0.58	14
Other	3.99	0.42	10

Note. A '-' indicates the sample size was too small for the statistic to be calculated.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's findings determine visitors' demographic differences in service quality perceptions in game lodges and contribute to the knowledge gap in demographic influence on service quality perceptions of visitors in game lodges. Game lodge visitors have different demographic characteristics and thus possess diverse service quality perceptions. The findings support the specific nature of service quality and demonstrate the importance of age and nationality on visitors' needs and service quality perception in game lodges. Since service quality influences customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions such as positive word-of-mouth recommendations and repeat visits, the findings indicate that game lodges could benefit by comprehending the unique demographic-driven visitors' needs. Game lodges could structure their marketing and service based on age and nationality sub-groups to provide adequate services. Specifically, game lodges can use age and nationality-specific needs to target specific customer segments effectively by marketing services that meet the needs and requirements of these segments**.** Moreover, this

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would ensure game lodges meet the needs and demands of their existing markets as well as the emerging markets.

Implications for Future Research

The finding of the present research has several implications for future research. First, this study is location-specific to Maasai Mara National Reserve and its conservancies that have different cultures and geographical locations and hence may not be generalised to other tourist regions. Future research could be conducted in other tourist destinations that have different service settings. Second, to expand the findings of this study, further research should investigate more demographic, travel characteristics, as well as create new factors such as social class, income, length of stay, travel arrangement and category of hotel preferred. Future research may also explore the relationship between service quality and behavioural intentions in unclassified lodges at the Maasai Mara National Reserve. Finally, specific aspects of service quality dimensions should be compared across different demographic characteristics to gain a clear understanding of potential disparities in specific service quality perceptions.

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