

OPERATIONAL LEVEL STRATEGIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF FOUR-STAR HOTELS IN MOMBASA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Performance is the key indicator to access the growth, stability, and capacity of an organization in any industry. Performance in the competitive hospitality industry is attributed to the never-ending strategies put in place by the hotels to either maintain the competition advantage or penetrate the industry. Further, the four-star hotels in Mombasa County are facing an unprecedented crisis due to the international travel restrictions and advisories imposed by foreign countries to contain and curtail the spread of COVID-19. The travel bans and restrictions reduced drastically foreign tourists visiting Kenya and Mombasa to be specific. A number of hotels shut down while others operating at severely reduced capacity with high reliability on the local tourists who are equally affected by the advisories. To survive in the industry, four-star hotels in Mombasa County have employed operational level strategies to mitigate the problem of organizational performance. Performance of the four-star hotels in Mombasa County has declined steadily and the hotels that adopted the operational level strategies have reinvented their businesses. The main objective of this research was to examine the effect of operational level strategies organizational performance of four-star hotels in Mombasa County. The specific objectives of this study were to examine the effect of human resource strategies, customer service strategies, information and communication strategies and marketing strategies on the organizational performance of four-star hotels in the County. The study was soundly informed by Resources Based Theory, Balance Scorecard, SERVQUAL Model and

Competitive Advantage Theory. The study population was 55 operational managers from all the five four star-rated hotels. Census technique was used since the target population was small. The research used questionnaire with closed-ended questions to collect data. Validity and reliability of the study was determined through a pilot study. The researcher used Cronbach's alpha formulae to test reliability through internal measure of consistency. The returned questionnaires were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics by use of the SPSS version 26. The study adopted regression and correlation models of analysis. The study found that there is a moderate positive and significant relationship between human resource strategies and organizational performance ($r=0.305$; $p=0.026 < 0.05$) and its alteration would also affect organizational performance ($\beta=0.128$; $t=2.038$; $p=0.045$). The study also revealed that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between customer service strategies and organizational performance ($r=0.668$; $p=.005 < 0.01$) and its improvement would affect organizational performance ($\beta=0.220$; $t=2.742$; $p=0.005$). The study found that there is a moderate positive relationship between information and communication strategies and organizational performance ($r=0.404$; $p=0.003 < 0.01$) and its improvement would affect organizational performance ($\beta=0.175$; $t=3.046$; $p=0.004$). On the final variable, it was determined further marketing strategies significantly affects organizational performance ($r=0.314$; $p=0.022 < 0.05$) but its improvement insignificantly contributes to

organizational performance ($\beta=0.127$; $t=1.264$; $p=0.226$). It was concluded that operational level strategies (human resource strategies, customer service strategies, information and communication strategies and marketing strategies) affects hotel performance and the improvement of each strategy would lead to improvement in organizational performance. The study recommended that employees of the hotels can be retained, if the management of the hotels can evaluate, design and measure

employee engagement practices. The study further recommended that employees at lower cadre can be improved if working conditions is improved. Finally, it can be suggested that managers of the hotels should adopt customer care services and customer relations to enhance performance.

Keywords: Operational Level Strategies, Human Resource Strategies, Customer Service Strategies, Marketing Strategies, Organization Performance.

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of many businesses is to make profit, hence organizational performance becomes the core concept of these organizations. The success and failure of majority of organizations has been determined by the operational level strategies (Iravo, Ongori & Munene, 2013) Performance drivers have been identified by top management of various organizations for them to record high returns. Performance management constitute the heart of the day-to-day management of the operations, which is geared towards measuring performance. Various parameters have been used by hotel managers, to measure performance of the hotels (Nzuve & Nyaega, 2013; Sainaghi, 2020). Organization parameters such as effectiveness, employee morale and productivity has been used to assess organization functions with the objective of achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Fwaya, 2016). Various measures and approaches have been identified to gauge organizational performance, one of this approach is goal identification, which is anchored on attainment of set goals and setting organizational goals. The second approach on measuring organizational performance is the systems resource approach, which defines organizational performance, in terms of the relationship with the environment and the relationship can be secured from the environment. The final approach is based on the efficiency of organizational processes based on the strategies adopted as one of the efforts of driving performance (Odhiambo, 2019; Njuguna, 2019). For the long-time success of an organization in terms of performance, operational level strategies are very important (Johnstone, 2014).

Operational level strategies can be defined as the ways in which the goods and services offered by the organization can be improved to improve customer value (Johnstone, *et al.*, 2014). Operational strategies must be aligned to the functional areas and the overall business strategy by the managers. For the organization to stay ahead of competition, innovative strategies must be developed to cope

with globalization and advances in technology (Johnstone, 2014). Service delivery organizations such as the hotel sector, have different operational level strategies compared with other organizations especially in the manufacturing sector, since they directly interact with end customers. Operational level strategies have been concerned with each part of the organization, which concerns people, processes and resources. This facilitates the long-term development of the organization and ensures compatibility of the resources with the organization (Jui-Sheng, 2020). For service delivery, organizations such as hotels have adopted customer-centric models. This model is based on the overall customer experience, customer-service focus and establishing service levels and it relies heavily on customers feedback and interactions. Hotel organizations relies heavily on customers' feedbacks to improve and drive product offerings and operations. Project based model has also been used in the service industry, to support specific project, products, and programs. This model is based on tight integration of technology, processes and people and anchors heavily on cross-functional skills and teams (Cao, 2014). Both models are based on operations, material management, service management, technical support and account management (Ivanov, 2020).

Globally, there is no doubt that despite the key role played by the global hotel sector the industry is facing tough times ahead (Sainaghi, Phillips & Corti, 2018). The Travel and Tourism sector in 2011 accounted for nine percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and it contributed over two hundred and twenty-five million jobs (The World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). It is projected that by the year 2022, the tourism sector will increase by four percent of global GDP and over three hundred and twenty-eight million jobs thereby ejecting about US\$ 20 trillion in the world economy. Hotels are expected to contribute the biggest share of employment opportunities because of new ventures. Kandampully and Hu (2017) state that the global hotel industry has become very competitive and is in the mature stage of its lifecycle.

Regionally, in Sub-Sahara Africa, COVID-19 pandemic, has created a major economic recession not only in the global but also in the regional perspective, in 2020 real GDP dropped to 2.1 and the most affected sector is the hotel and tourism sector and 2.9 in Eastern Africa Community (World Bank, 2020). In Kenya, the country has entered into the economic crisis with considerable resilience, due to COVID-19 pandemic, which has contributed to the negative impact on the hotel economy. Kenyan hotel sector has experienced unprecedented and abrupt drop in the hotel service demand, due to travel bans. Consequently, several hotels in the country have sent home some staffs on unpaid and paid leaves (Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, 2020). There is a positive relationship between the number of rooms in a hotel and its performance. Out of the 28

Specifically, the hotel industry in Kenya contracted by 45% in 2013 compared loan expansion of 2.6 per cent in 2012. Kenya undertook the last hotel classification in 2003 but since then so many new hotels have come up with improved products and services. The coast region accounts for 50 per cent of all bed-nights out of which 140 or 8.2% are classified. This falls below the standard requirements of at least 100,000 and could limit the country's ability to hold major conferences and conventions (Kenya Economic Report, 2013). In 2011, Kenya achieved the highest average length of stay 13.4 days in a decade which was 2.3 per cent improvement from the previous year (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The 1.5 million international tourists that visited Kenya in 2010 generated US\$ 7000m. In 2012 tourism generated Kshs. 96.02 billion which represented 1.92 per cent drop from Kshs.97.90 billion realized in 2013 (Kenya Economic Report, 2013). Availability of quality hotels and quality services are the key destination choice drivers of tourists (Thiong'o, 2007). There has been a lot of discussions in literature about the impressive performance of hotels in Kenya over the past 20 years (Agumba, 2016; Fwaya, 2016; Kamau, 2018; Kingi, 2013 & Mibei, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Operational level strategies have been used by various hotels, so that they can qualify for star ratings, company of the year awards and international recognition for standardization certificates as well as recognition in the membership to professional bodies (Ongore & Kobonyo, 2017). Hotel performance is measured against benchmarks and global standards. The key measures and parameters include customers' turnover, service quality and market share (KIM, 2018). Hotels play key roles in the Kenyan economy; hence they must be assessed in terms of operational level strategies. Performance ratings poses a serious challenge and problem to majority of hotels (Ongore & Kobonyo, 2017).

Currently, hospitality industry, including the four-star hotels in Coastal Region are facing an unprecedented crisis due to the international travel restrictions and advisories imposed by foreign countries to contain the spread of COVID-19. With majority of hotels operating at severely reduced capacity and some completely shut since majority of their customers are in lockdown (Grant Thornton, 2020). Due to the closure of many hotels in the region, many staffs have been laid off. Further occupancy rate has reduced to between 10-20% and the situation is heading to the worse (Nzuve & Nyaega, 2019). The poor performance in the hospitality industry is attributed to stiff competition, threats of new entrants, suppliers and customers bargaining power and threats of government subsidies have created low market share for the hotels (Kamau, 2018). Further, the problem of insufficient levels of service quality has been a characteristic of many hotels in the Coastal Region (Ali, 2021)

The main objective of this research was to assess the effect of operational level strategies on the organizational performance of hotels in Mombasa County, Kenya

Specific Objectives

Despite the existing problems, few studies have examined the relationship between operational level strategies and performance of the hotels. For instance, Mwangi (2017) studied performance of five-star hotels in Nairobi County and strategic management drivers. The study adopted cross-sectional research gap where 10 senior managers were purposively sampled. Where it was established that performance of 5-star hotels was significantly influenced by CRM drivers. The study relied on data from a single industry. Ayabei (2020) studied performance of hotels in Kabarnet Town in relation to strategic management practices. The study adopted descriptive survey design where census technique of eleven hotels was used, which provided specialized services, such as drinks, meals and accommodation services. The study revealed that improved performance hotels in the town, can be attributed to strategic evaluation and control, implementation, formulation of strategic management practices. The study only focused Baringo County, which has small number of hotels, compared to other counties nationally, Teck and Karuppiah (2020) studied competitive advantage through operation strategy in hotel industry in Malaysia. The study was based on a desk review of papers on operation strategies adopted by hotels in the county. Where it was revealed that operation management can be used as a strategic tool through sustainability and customer satisfaction. Based on the reviewed studies it is evident that there exists a contextual, methodological and conceptual research gap, which this study intends to bridge.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the effect of human resource strategies on organizational performance of four-star hotels in Mombasa County.
- ii. To establish the effect of customer service strategies on the organizational performance of four-star hotels in Mombasa County.
- iii. To assess the effect of information communication strategies to organizational performance of four-star hotels in Mombasa County.
- iv. To examine the effect of marketing strategies on the organizational performance of four-star hotels in Mombasa County.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Balance Scorecard Model

The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is a performance management model which was founded and developed by Robert Kaplan and David Norton in 1992. It is used for both profit (business and industry) and nonprofit (government and non-government) organizations

worldwide. BSC was formulated strategies of the organization with business activities, mission and vision, with the aim of improving both external and internal communications and monitoring organizational performance against its strategic goals that was defined in the beginning. In the past, performance management system mostly only considered the financial perspective, but BSC not only measures the financial perspective but also assesses the stakeholders, internal processes and learning and growth perspectives of the company. The four perspectives translate the strategy into a linked set of measures across four perspectives (Kaplan & Norton, 2010).

According to Kaplan and Norton (1996) the BSC helps in: identifying and aligning strategic initiatives; clarifying as well as gaining consensus about the firm's strategy; performing systematic and periodic strategic reviews; communicating the organization's strategy; aligning personal and departmental objectives to the strategy; connecting strategic objectives to firm's annual budgets as well as long-term goals; and obtaining feedback to improve and learn about strategy. In addition, these benefits will translate into better organizational performance. The balanced scorecard is a substantial strategic management tool because it aids in translating a firm's mission statement and its business strategy into measurable and specific goals as well as monitoring the performance of organization (Yaghoobi & Haddadi, 2016)

By linking human resource strategies with the balanced scorecard model can help hotels align their HR practices with organizational goals and objectives, monitor progress, and drive performance improvement. It also demonstrates the strategic value of HR by defining and measuring its contribution in concrete, clearly understood terms. In addition to alignment with company goals, the HR scorecard must also contain the following elements to truly be effective: accountability, validity and actionable, measurable results.

SERVQUAL Model

SERVQUAL Model was originated by Parasuram, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) and it was based on disconfirmation paradigm. The model was based on ten factors of service factors, these factors include: tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, competence, credibility, courtesy, security, communication, accessibility and understanding the customer. Pakurar, Haddad, Nagy, Popp and Olah (2019), narrowed down these factors into five, which include: reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness. The SERVQUAL model proposes the use of the gap analysis or difference between expected level of service and delivered level of service for measuring service quality perception with five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurances, empathy, and tangibility. SERVQUAL is an analytical tool, which can help in identifying the gaps between variables affecting the quality of the offering services (Seth, Deshmukh & Vrat,

2015). This model has a wide acceptance among marketing researchers and scientists, although it is an exploratory study and does not offer a clear measurement method for measuring gaps at different levels.

This model can be used to measure service quality in the hospitality industry, using various dimensions. These dimensions include: reliability which is the organisation's ability to perform the promised service accurately and dependably, service responsiveness which is the willingness of the organisation to help customers and in providing prompt service; assurance can be defined as the courtesy and knowledge of the employees and their ability to convey confidence and trust; while empathy which is the caring, individualized attention; and tangibles covers the physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2016).

Resource Based View Theory

Developed by Wernerfelt (1984), resource based view is a management tool that highlights on the important role that the capabilities of a firm and its resources play in attaining competitive merit in the marketplace. The theory answers some fundamental questions on why firms are different and how they can maximize on those differences to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage in the market. The theory postulates that every firm controls different resources and therefore employ different strategies; this way, opportunities and threats in the external environment are addressed. Strategic decisions should be anchored on the firm's resources and capabilities. Barnes (1991) deduces that attaining competitive advantage in the market require firms' ability to identify and exploit these resources efficiently and effectively. These resources must meet certain critical facets; valuable, unique, and expensive to imitate. These characteristics provide firms with the ability to develop unique products and services that cannot be imitated competitors. In the endeavor to achieve competitive advantage, firms have adopted this theory to provide guidance. This theory amplifies the essence of resources that are internal by nature both tangible and intangible in the development of competitive strategy aimed at positioning firms. As stated by (Hoskisson, 2018), positioning is imperative in determining firm's market share, which in turn affects its performance. Hafeez, (2012) notes that, a resource is anything that a firm can perceive to be a strength or weakness. This underpins the value of situational analysis as a process in strategic management. Therefore, firms set their objectives and goals based on their resources, which provide foundation to project strong performance. This assertion is strongly echoed by Porter (1998) that firms must strive to distinguish themselves from their competitors by utilizing their unique resources and capabilities.

Maximum utilization of these resources needs to be done in a systematic manner. Kumari, (2017) points out that, for firms to utilize their resources to gain competitive advantage, there are critical steps they must adhere. The first step is an in-depth analysis of their resources. This ensures they identify the key resources and capabilities that will boost positive performance by evaluating them against their competitors. The second step is identifying the relative strengths of the resources in terms of the long-term value in building competitive advantage. The final process is using the resources efficiently and effectively. This begs the question whether Resource Based View (RBV) is a linear process. As stated by Lockett, (2014), improving these resources and capabilities requires constant review of the process with the aim of developing a concrete competitive advantage

In relation to this study, there are no illusions that internal resources and capabilities such as ICT capabilities alone will guarantee success in firm. However, it's quite reassuring that combining these resources and capabilities through coaching with diligent scanning of the environment, formulation, implementation and continuous evaluation of strategies, will boost firm's chances of attaining competitive merit in the marketplace. Therefore, this theory is of significance when it comes to personal contact strategies through employee engagement strategies, communication strategy and customer engagement strategies

Competitive Advantage Theory

Developed by Michael Porter (1985), the theory holds that a firm can be said to have a sustainable competitive advantage when its average profit is beyond the industry's average, compared to its rivals. The goal of much of business strategy is to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Barney & Hesterly, 2016). Smit (2020) identified two basic types of sustainable competitive advantage which are differentiation and cost advantage. Cost Advantage exists when the firm can deliver the same customer benefits as competitors but at a lower operational cost, but differentiation advantage are the core benefits that a firm obtains which exceed those of competing products. Cost and differentiation advantages are known as positional advantages since they describe the firm's position in the industry as a leader in either cost or differentiation. Thompson, Strickland, Gamble, and Jain (2016) describes generic strategies as being core to improvement of a firm's performance. For a hotel to perform it must use one or more of the generic strategies otherwise its performance is bound to decline (Allen & Helms, 2016).

These generic strategies are cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. Cost leadership strategy calls for companies to be low-cost producers compared to their rivals. As the hotel industry prices decline and matures, hotels that can produce at lower operational cost will be profitable for a long period of time. Differentiation strategies on the other hand can be

defined as product or service development which are unique and are highly valued by the customers and they perceive these products to be better than those of the competitors in the industry. In differentiation, hotels should seek to provide unique products and services in the industry with consideration of service quality dimensions which can highly valued by the customers (Porter, 2011). Focus strategy should be used by the hotels in narrowing customer segment and achieving differentiation and cost advantage (Cheng, 2013). Cheng (2013) highlighted that the core competencies of hospitality organizations include the processes, skills and assets that influence organizations to achieve competitive advantage. Other factors have also been mentioned to contribute to core competencies such as location, brand, facilities, employee customer loyalties, market coverage, market share, service quality, technology, leadership, systems and procedures and organizational culture. Hotels should strive for unique characteristics to distinguish themselves from competitors in the eyes of their consumers (Gehrels, 2017).

In relation to this study, four-star hotels in Mombasa can use marketing strategies create new advantages that will keep them one step ahead of their competitors through marketing strategies such as digital marketing strategy, pricing strategy and product diversification strategy in relation to their competitors if they are to survive especially in the global competitive environment. Porter (2018) developed a framework for analyzing the nature and extent of competition within an industry and unique product features is one of the elements of creating competitive advantage. Porter (2018) further adds there are five competitive forces which determine the degree of competition within an industry such as the Hotel Sector.

Review of Empirical Literature

Human Resource Management and Organizational Performance

Manuti *et al.* (2020) conducted a study in Italy to explore the relationship between positive organizational behavior and employees' perception of sustainable HRM practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study used a convenience sampling technique and structured questionnaires to collect data from 549 Italian workers during the first phase of the lockdown. The study found that sustainable HRM practices play a crucial role in organizational performance and the optimization of human resources during times of global uncertainty. The study contributed to the development of sustainable HRM policies that could lead to competitive advantage for organizations. However, the study had some limitations, including the use of a cross-sectional design, a heterogeneous sample, and self-reported measures, which may have affected the validity of the findings. In this regard it created methodological and conceptual research gap.

Chelangat (2019) investigated the correlation between turnover intentions and perceived employee engagement in the banking industry in Nairobi. The study used a cross-

sectional survey that targeted 1760 employees from the top and middle management levels. The results showed that perceived supervisor support, organisational support, organisational justice, and value congruence had a negative effect on turnover intentions. The study recommended that banks should implement proactive employee engagement policies and practices to attract and retain employees. However, the study had a conceptual research gap as it only focused on five antecedents that affect employee turnover.

Customer Service Practices and Organizational Performance

Buhian (2021) studied how customer satisfaction in hotel business development was impacted with service quality in Sweden, where Best Western Princess Hotel in Norrköping was the focus of the study. The study used structured questionnaires to collect information from 80 respondents, where qualitative descriptive research was used. The analysis revealed that reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness significantly affect customer satisfaction which determines the nature of service. The study created a contextual research gap since it was limited to Best Western Princess Hotel in Norrköping. The study also created methodological research since it focused on smaller sample size.

A study by Wambua and Yuhaya (2018), the relationship between customer service practices and hotel performance in Nairobi County was investigated through a case study. The study revealed that customer care services and customer relations had a positive and significant relationship with hotel performance, The study recommended that managers of the hotels should adopt customer care services and customer relations to enhance performance. The study created a conceptual research gap on other management factors that affect hotel performance, since the study showed that customer service practices could only explain 84% of performance.

Information Communication Technology and Organizational Performance

Thuo (2018) conducted research on the relationship between competitive advantage and information and communication technology (ICT) in five-star hotels in Nairobi County. The study used a descriptive research design and targeted 127 managers of these hotels. A structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions was used to collect data. The study discovered that ICT played a critical role in various hotel operations such as housekeeping, inventory management, financial management, restaurant management, customer relationship management, front office operations, and hotel bookings. It was determined that there was a significant relationship between ICT and competitive advantage. However, the study only focused on three dimensions of ICT integration, competencies, and infrastructure, creating a conceptual research gap on other dimensions of ICT in relation to competitive advantage.

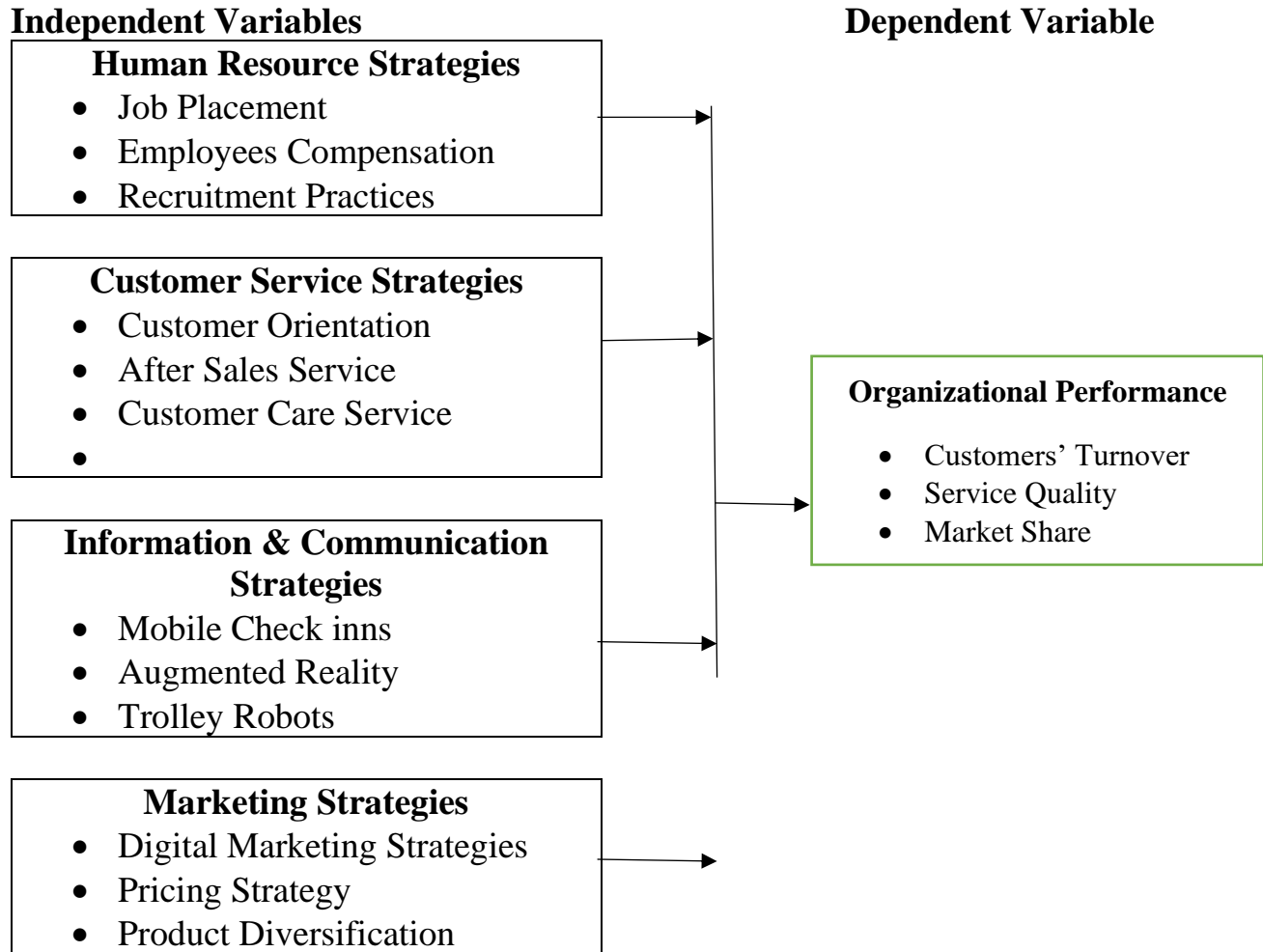
Obonyo, *et al.*, (2016) conducted a multiple case study approach on the determinants of ICT adoption among hotels in Kenya. They study used multiple case approach to analyse data from 10 managers of hotels in Nairobi and Mombasa. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data collected with the use of interviews. The study determined that ICT applications were significantly used in the sector. The study recommended that hotel managers need to assess their investment capabilities on the ICT in the sector. The study created methodological research since thematic analysis and use of interviews could not be used to examine the relationship between the variables.

Marketing Strategies and Organizational Performance

Etim, *et al.*, (2021) studied performance of hospitality firms and integrated marketing strategies amidst COVID-19 pandemic. The study adopted descriptive research design, where 226 customers from 15 hotels responded on the questionnaire. The study found that public relations, social media, sales promotion and advertisement significantly affects hotel performance. The study recommended that hotels should adopt public relations programmes. The study created a contextual research gap on other sectors of the tourism industry.

Wawira (2016) studied performance and marketing strategies of hotels in Nairobi County. The study used regression, correlation and descriptive methods to analyse data collected from 30 four- and five-star hotels in Nairobi County. The research determined that penetration, market development and product development strategies significantly affect performance of hotels. The study concluded that marketing strategies positively and significantly affects performance. The study recommended that the top priority for the hotels should be the implementation of marketing strategies. The study created a conceptual gap on the implementation marketing strategies.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Research Design

The research design used in this study was a combination of cross-sectional and descriptive approaches. Cross-sectional research design, as defined by Sarma and Misar (2016), involves observing units of analysis and research variables at a particular point in time across different locations. In this study, data was collected from multiple sources and organizations, specifically hotels. The cross-sectional approach also considered differences among respondents who completed the structured questionnaire. Descriptive research design was also employed to describe the relationship between operational level strategies and organizational performance. To analyze the data collected, descriptive statistical methods such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages were utilized.

Target Population

The target population refers to the specific group of individuals or items relevant to the study being carried out (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2013). In this study, the target population was the four-star hotels in Mombasa County in Kenya. The selection of the four-star hotels was justified, since they are assumed to have attained meaningful service levels to be accorded the four-star rating, where operational level strategies are applied for the benefit of organizational performance (GoK, 2020). The target population for this study was Sarova Whitesanads, Serena Beach Hotel, Hotel English Point Marina, Voyager Beach Hotel and Neptune Beach hotel. The unit of observation was managers from the following departments: Food and beverage, housekeeping, front office, food production, accounts and credit, sales and marketing, human resource, event planning, purchase and IT departments. The study targeted these departments, since they are actively involved in the operational level strategies.

Sample and Sampling Design

According to Naoum (2013), a sample is a representative subset of the target population that is chosen to conduct research. The selection of a sample size is usually done because it is easier to manage than the entire population. The research used a census technique where all 55 operational managers were chosen as prospective respondents since the study population is small, and the aim was to generalize the study findings to all construction projects in the county. Cooper and Schindler (2011) suggest that when the population is small, the census technique is appropriate and the target population can be the sample.

Data Collection Instruments

The study collected information on independent and dependent variables by administering structured questionnaires to line managers of the four-star hotels. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions presented on a Likert scale of 1-5 to facilitate quantification of data. The researchers opted for a questionnaire because it was cost-effective, provided confidentiality to the respondents, enabled the use of standardized questions, allowed respondents enough time to reflect on their answers, and was easy to use.

Data Collection Procedure

The operational level managers of each hotel were informed about the study's purpose. In order to begin data collection, the researcher obtained an authorization letter from the Dean of the School of Business, Kenyatta University, and NACOSTI. Copies of the permit were then given to the administration of the private security firms. The data collection process involved the drop and pick method, where printed questionnaires were left in the four departments, and the

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ and β_4 = Coefficients of X_1, X_2, X_3 and X_4 respectively

employees filled them at their own convenient time. Follow-ups were made through phone calls, and the completed questionnaires were collected after one week.

Data Analysis and Presentation

After data collection, the questionnaires were prepared for analysis by cleaning and coding them before entering them into SPSS version 24. Only completely filled questionnaires were used in the analysis. The collected data was presented using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation, ANOVA, coefficient of determination and regression coefficient were used to establish the relationship between operational level strategies and the performance of four star-rated hotels in the county. The multiple linear regression model was used in this study, which has been used previously in other studies to establish cause and effect relationships between variables. This model was used to determine the relationships between independent variables (operational level strategies) and dependent variables (organizational performance), as explained by Orodho and Kombo (2014)

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + e$$

Y = Organizational Performance

B_0 = Y Intercept

X_1 = Human Resource Strategies

X_2 = Customer Service Strategies

X_3 = Information and Communication Strategies

X_4 = Marketing Strategies

e = Error Term

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Human Resource Strategies

SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
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Job requirements was stressful to the employees thus contributing to turnover due to burnout	0 (0.0%)	2 (4.1%)	10 (20.4%)	29 (59.2%)	8 (16.3%)	3.66	.827
Employees strain reactions are actually contributed by job requirements	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (10.2%)	28 (57.1%)	16 (32.7%)	3.31	1.061
The organisation uses advertisement as sourcing strategy to attract employees who will not leave the institution	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (14.3%)	25 (51.0%)	16 (30.6%)	4.19	.821
The organisation uses various techniques to screen potential employees to identify potential employees for the job	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)	9 (18.4%)	27 (55.1%)	11 (22.4%)	3.97	1.031
The firm's compensation mode often incorporates health benefits of the employees'	1 (2.0%)	7 (14.3%)	11 (22.4%)	14 (28.6%)	16 (32.7%)	4.19	.859
Hotels often incorporate both financial and non-financial incentives in their compensation plans	6 (12.2%)	13 (26.5%)	4 (8.2%)	8 (16.3%)	18 (36.7%)	4.09	.963
Composite Score						3.90	.927

Based on the data presented in Table 1, it was clear that most of the respondents agreed that job requirements could be stressful for employees, leading to burnout and turnover (M=3.66; SD=0.827). Additionally, many respondents agreed that job requirements contributed to employees' strain reactions (M=3.31; SD=1.061). It was also found that a majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the organization used advertising as a sourcing strategy to attract employees who were less likely to leave (M=4.19; SD=0.821), and that the organization used various techniques to screen potential employees (M=3.97; SD=0.859). Furthermore, most of the respondents strongly agreed that the firm's compensation plan incorporated health benefits for employees (M=4.19; SD=0.859), and that hotels often used both financial and non-financial incentives in their compensation plans (M=4.09; SD=0.963). Finally, the overall mean of 3.90 and standard deviation of 0.927 suggested that most respondents agreed to a great extent that human resource strategies affect hotel performance, and there was little variation from the mean, as the standard deviation was less than 1. These findings were consistent with Manuti et al.'s

(2020) research, which found that sustainable HRM practices are crucial for organizational performance and the effective utilization of human resources during periods of global crisis and uncertainty.

Customer Service Strategies

Table 2: Customer Service Strategies

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
Customer service department of the hotel is mainly focused on solving customers problem	0 (0.0%)	2 (4.1%)	4 (8.2%)	25 (51.0%)	18 (36.7%)	3.38	1.129
Customer orientation approach of the firm is aimed at retaining current customers	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (18.4%)	29 (59.2%)	11 (22.4%)	3.59	1.173
After-sale support of the hotel is considered as part of the marketing strategy	1 (2.0%)	2 (4.1%)	8 (16.3%)	20 (40.8%)	18 (36.7%)	3.41	1.103
After-sale service of the hotel ensures that customers get value for their money	0 (0.0%)	4 (8.2%)	24 (49.0%)	12 (24.5%)	9 (18.4%)	3.81	.998
Customer service department of the hotel ensures that guests are comfortable	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)	13 (26.5%)	16 (32.7%)	18 (36.7%)	3.44	1.268
Customer care department ensures that all guests of the hotel have great experience	0 (0.0%)	2 (4.1%)	12 (24.5%)	21 (42.9%)	14 (28.6%)	3.44	1.045
Composite Score						3.18	1.119

Table 2 indicated that majority of the respondents agreed that customer service department of the hotel is mainly focused on solving customers problem with (M=3.38; SD=1.129) and they also agreed that customer orientation approach of the firm is aimed at retaining current customers with (M=3.59; SD=1.073). It was further determined that majority of the respondents agreed that the after-sale support of the hotel is considered as part of the marketing strategy with (M=3.41; SD=1.103) and they also agreed that after-sale service of the hotel ensures that customers get value for their money with (M=3.81; SD=0.998). It was also revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that customer service department of the

hotel ensures that guests are comfortable with (M=3.44; SD=1.268) and they also agreed that customer care department ensures that all guests of the hotel have great experience with (M=3.44; SD=1.045). On the overall mean of 3.18 and standard deviation of 1.119, implied that majority of the respondents agreed that customer service strategie affects hotel performance and there was a strong variation from the mean since standard deviation is greater than 1. The above findings corroborate that of Wambua and Yuhaya (2018) who determined that customer care services and customer relations had a significant and positive relationship with performance of the hotels.

Information and Communication Strategies

Table 3: Information and Communication Strategies

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
Mobile check ins have eliminated double booking common with manual booking process.	2 (4.1%)	1 (2.0%)	6 (12.2%)	27 (55.1%)	13 (26.5%)	4.03	.861
Mobile check ins have improved hotel bed occupancy.	0 (0.0%)	6 (12.2%)	6 (12.2%)	28 (57.1%)	9 (18.4%)	4.03	.897
Augmented reality is used by the hotel to enhance the hotel physical environment.	2 (4.1%)	1 (2.0%)	9 (18.4%)	25 (51.0%)	12 (24.5%)	3.81	.896
Augmented reality has led to increased satisfaction, increased high booking as the guest has better understanding of how their stay will be in the hotel.	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)	4 (8.2%)	22 (44.9%)	21 (42.9%)	3.87	.833
Trolley robots enhances logistics supports in the hotel thus enabling social distancing for COVID 19 prevention.	1 (2.0%)	4 (8.2%)	9 (18.4%)	24 (49.0%)	11 (22.4%)	3.59	.946
Trolley robots has reduced congestion and improved the scheduling of movement in the hotel.	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)	4 (8.2%)	19 (38.8%)	25 (51.0%)	4.03	.967
Composite Score						3.89	.901

It was determined that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that mobile check ins have eliminated double booking common with manual booking process with (M=4.03; SD=0.861) and they also agreed that mobile check ins have improved hotel bed occupancy with (M=4.03; SD=0.897). It was also determined that majority of the respondents agreed that augmented reality is used by the hotel to enhance the hotel physical environment with (M=3.81; SD=3.59) and they also agreed that augmented reality has led to increased satisfaction, increased high booking as the guest has better understanding of how their stay will be in the hotel (M=3.87; SD=0.833). Majority of the respondents agreed that trolley robots enhances logistics supports in the hotel thus enabling social distancing for COVID 19 prevention with (M=3.59; SD=0.946) and they also strongly agreed that trolley robots has reduced congestion and improved the scheduling of movement in the hotel with (M=4.03; SD= 0.967). The overall mean of 3.89 and standard deviation of 0.901, implied that majority of the respondents agreed that information and communication strategies affects organisational performance and there was a low variation from the mean since standard deviation was less than 1. The above findings were in line with that of Kungu (2014) who revealed that ICT has significantly contributed to operational performance, through faster processing of customer requests, increased productivity and efficiency.

Marketing Strategies

Table 4: Marketing Strategies

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
Digital marketing strategy has improved customers reviews and tracking online reviews of the hotel	2 (4.1%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (8.2%)	18 (36.7%)	25 (51.0%)	3.56	1.014
Digital marketing strategy affect the valence of online reviews, hence impacting performance	0 (0.0%)	3 (6.1%)	7 (14.3%)	26 (53.1%)	13 (26.5%)	3.50	.950
Pricing strategy of the hotel is based on the seasonal demands	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)	11 (22.4%)	23 (46.9%)	14 (28.6%)	4.16	1.110
Hotel has effective pricing strategies that is aimed at improving revenue	2 (4.1%)	8 (16.3%)	10 (20.4%)	15 (30.6%)	14 (28.6%)	3.47	.718
Product diversification is a strategy used by the hotel management when introducing new products	0 (0.0%)	2 (4.1%)	7 (14.3%)	23 (46.9%)	17 (34.7%)	2.63	1.040

Product diversification aims to reduce the risk faced by the hotel in the hospitality industry	3 (6.1%)	7 (14.3%)	9 (18.4%)	20 (40.8%)	10 (20.4%)	3.00	1.295
Composite Score						3.39	1.021

It was determined that majority of the respondents agreed that digital marketing strategy has improved customers reviews and tracking online reviews of the hotel with (M=3.56; SD=1.014) and they also agreed that digital marketing strategy affect the valence of online reviews, hence impacting performance with (M=3.50; SD=0.950). Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that pricing strategy of the hotel is based on the seasonal demands with (M=4.16; SD= 1.110) and they also agreed that hotel has effective pricing strategies that is aimed at improving revenue with (M=3.47; SD=0.718). Majority of the respondents were neutral that product diversification is a strategy used by the hotel management when introducing new products with (M=2.63; SD=1.040) and they also agreed that product diversification aims to reduce the risk faced by the hotel in the hospitality industry with (M=3.00; SD=1.295). The overall mean of 3.39 and standard deviation of 1.021, which implied that majority of the respondents agreed that marketing strategies affects hotel performance and there was a strong variation from the mean since standard deviation is greater than 1. The above study was in conjunction with that of Wawira (2016) who postulated that marketing strategies positively and significantly affects performance.

Organisational Performance

Table 1: Organisational Performance

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
Operational level strategies have improved the growth of market share of the hotel	6 (12.2%)	2 (4.1%)	4 (4.1%)	13 (26.5%)	14 (28.6%)	3.85	.88688
Continuous improvement of organizational processes has improved the quality of services	4 (8.2%)	9 (18.4%)	12 (24.5%)	15 (30.6%)	9 (18.4%)	3.87	.83230
Improvement in quality of clientele served has been experienced due to the implementation operational strategies	1 (2.0%)	2 (4.1%)	18 (36.7%)	16 (32.7%)	12 (24.5%)	3.88	.87498
Growth and profitability of the hotel dynamics and has widened the scope results in performance	1 (2.0%)	6 (12.2%)	10 (20.4%)	15 (30.6%)	17 (34.7%)	3.89	.85809

Differentiation of products has improved the demand of the hotel products	3 (6.1%)	6 (12.2%)	7 (14.3%)	20 (40.8%)	13 (26.5%)	3.90	.88601
Hotel industry performance may also be put into consideration through its service to visitors	1 (2.0%)	2 (4.1%)	12 (24.5%)	19 (38.8%)	15 (30.6%)	3.95	.85882
Composite Score						3.89	.8662

According to the analysis, most of the respondents agreed that the hotel industry's performance could be evaluated based on its service to visitors (M=3.95; SD=0.85882), and that differentiation of products had led to increased demand for hotel products (M=3.90; SD=0.88601). They also believed that the growth and profitability of the hotel were important factors that widened the scope of results and improved performance (M=3.89; SD=0.87498), and that implementing operational strategies had led to improvements in the quality of clients served (M=3.88; SD=0.87498). Additionally, they agreed that continuous improvement of organizational processes had improved the quality of services (M=3.87; SD=0.83230), and that operational level strategies had led to an increased growth of the hotel's market share (M=3.85; SD=0.88688). Overall, the mean score of 3.89 and standard deviation of 0.8662 indicated that most employees agreed that operational level strategies had an impact on hotel performance, with a low variation from the mean as the standard deviation was less than 1. These findings were consistent with Teck and Karuppiah's (2020) study, which suggested that operational management could be used strategically to promote sustainability and customer satisfaction.

Correlation Analysis

Theoretical preposition regarding the relationship between operational level strategies (human resource strategies, customer service strategies, information and communication strategies, marketing strategies) and organizational performance was tested using Pearson correlation. The relationship is considered weak when $r = \pm 0.1$ to ± 0.29 , while the relationship is considered moderate when $r = \pm 0.30$ to ± 0.49 , and when r is ± 0.50 and above, the relationship can be considered strong as asserted by Kothari (2013).

Table 6: Correlation Analysis

			Y	X1	X2	X3	X4
Organisational Performance (Y)	Pearson Correlation		1				
	Sig (2-tailed)						
	N		49				
Human Resource Strategies (X1)	Pearson Correlation		.305*	1			
	Sig (2-tailed)		.025				
	N		49	49			
Customer Service Strategies (X2)	Pearson Correlation		.668**	-.026	1		
	Sig (2-tailed)		.005	.551			
	N		49	49	49		
Information & Communication Strategies (X3)	Pearson Correlation		.404**	.166	-.164	1	
	Sig (2-tailed)		.003	.235	.243		
	N		49	49	49	49	
Marketing Strategies (X4)	Pearson Correlation		.314*	.029	.092	.222	1
	Sig (2-tailed)		.022	.635	.513	.111	
	N		49	49	49	49	49

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2- tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 presented the results of the correlation analysis conducted among the variables under study. The analysis revealed that there was a significant and moderate positive correlation between human resource strategies and organizational performance ($r=0.305$; $p=0.026<0.05$). This finding was consistent with the study by Manuti et al. (2020) which established that sustainable HRM practices are crucial in enhancing organizational performance and leveraging human resources during times of crisis and uncertainty. Additionally, there was a significant and strong positive

correlation between customer service strategies and organizational performance ($r=0.668$; $p=0.005<0.01$). This finding was consistent with the study by Wambua and Yuhaya (2018) which found that customer care services and customer relations are key drivers of hotel performance. The analysis further showed that there was a significant and moderate positive correlation between information and communication strategies and organizational performance ($r=0.404$; $p=0.003<0.01$). This was in line with the study by Kungu (2014) which found that ICT significantly enhances operational performance by improving customer service, productivity and efficiency. Finally, there was a significant and positive correlation between marketing strategies and organizational performance ($r=0.314$; $p=0.022<0.05$). This finding was consistent with the study by Wawira (2016) which suggested that marketing strategies significantly and positively affect organizational performance.

Regression iAnalysis

Regression analysis was used to establish the causal relationship between human resource strategies, customer service strategies, information and communication strategies, marketing strategies in relation to organisational performance. Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) states that regression analysis is useful in understanding how typically dependent variable changes, when independent variables are altered. Wan (2022) adds that it helps in generating an equation which describes the statistical relationships.

Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination, denoted as R-squared (R^2), is a statistical measure that represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable (organizational performance) that is explained by the independent variables (operational level strategies) in a regression model.

Table 7: Model iSummary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of Estimate	Durbin Watson
1	.853 ^a	.728	.6967	.89710	1.845

Predictors: Human Resource Strategies, Customer Service Strategies, Information and Communication Strategies, Marketing Strategies

The analysis indicated there is strong positive relationship between the combination of predictor variables (operational level strategies) and dependent variable (organizational performance) ($r=0.853$) The analysis further showed an adjusted r^2 of 0.6967, which implied that operational level strategies (human resource strategies, customer service strategies, information and communication strategies, marketing strategies) can explain 69.67% of hotel performance and hence the model in chapter three was fit.

Analysis of Variance

To determine the significance of the operational level strategies on the hotel performance and significance of equation in chapter three, the study used ANOVA analysis.

Table 8: iAnalysis iof iVariance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	104.104	4	34.701	39.254	.000 ^b
	Residual	38.896	44	.884		
	Total	143.000	48			

a. Dependent Variable: Organisational Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Human Resource Strategies, Customer Service Strategies, Information and Communication Strategies, Marketing Strategies

The ANOVA model showed ($F_{4,44} = 39.254$; $p=0.000$), the analysis indicated that the model was statistically significant since $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ and hence the regression equation was significant. Hence the operational level strategies (human resource strategies, customer service strategies, information and communication strategies, marketing strategies) significantly determines organizational performance.

Regression iCoefficient

A regression coefficient was carried out in order to explain the nature and relationship between each independent variables and dependent variable.

Table 9: Regression Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	1.085	0.266			0.000
Human Resource Strategies (X1)	0.129	0.062	0.114	2.038	0.045
Customer Service Strategies (X2)	0.220	0.077	0.336	2.742	0.006
Information & Communication Strategies (X3)	0.175	0.057	0.122	3.046	0.004
Marketing Strategies (X4)	.127	.099	.123	1.264	.226

Based on the regression coefficient table, the specific regression equation becomes:

$$Y = 1.084 + 0.128X_1 + 0.219X_2 + 0.174X_3 + 0.126X_4$$

Where;

Y = Organizational Performance

X₁ = Human Resource Strategies

X₂ = Customer Service Strategies

X₃ = Information and Communication Strategies

X₄ = Marketing Strategies

The study revealed that changes in human resource strategies (($\beta=0.129$; $t=2.038$; $p=0.045$), customer service strategies ($\beta=0.220$; $t=2.742$; $p=0.006$), and information and communication strategies ($\beta=0.176$; $t=3.047$; $p=0.005$) significantly contribute to organizational performance. The findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Manuti et al. (2020), Wambua and Yuhaya (2018), and Kungu (2014). Specifically, a unit change in organizational performance can be attributed to 0.129 changes in human resource strategies, 0.219 changes in customer service strategies, and 0.176 changes in information and communication strategies. However, the analysis showed that marketing strategies contribute to a unit change in organizational performance by 0.128 changes, but the contribution is not significant. This contradicts the study by Wawira (2016), who suggested that marketing strategies have a positive and significant impact on organizational performance.

Conclusion

Human Resource Strategies and Organisational Performance

The study concluded that human resource strategies have a significant impact on hotel performance. It also found that job requirements can sometimes cause stress for employees, leading to burnout and strain reactions. Additionally, the study showed that the organization utilizes advertising as a sourcing strategy for attracting and retaining employees, and employs various screening techniques to identify suitable candidates. The compensation mode adopted by the firm includes health benefits for employees, and hotels often incorporate both financial and non-financial incentives into their compensation plans.

Customer Service Strategies and Organisational Performance

On the second objective it was concluded that customer service strategies affect organizational performance. It was revealed that improvement in quality of clientele served has been experienced due to the implementation operational strategies and growth. It was further determined that customer service department of the hotel is mainly focused on solving customers problem and customer orientation approach of the firm is aimed at retaining current customers. It was also

determined that after-sale support of the hotel is considered as part of the marketing strategy and after-sale service of the hotel ensures that customers get value for their money. It was further concluded that customer service department of the hotel ensures that guests are comfortable and customer care department ensures that all guests of the hotel have great experience.

Information and Communication Strategies and Organisational Performance

The study concluded that information and communication strategies significantly affect and contributes to organizational performance. It was also revealed that mobile check ins have eliminated double booking common with manual booking process and mobile check ins have improved hotel bed occupancy. It was also shown that augmented reality is used by the hotel to enhance the hotel physical environment and augmented reality has led to increased satisfaction, increased high booking as the guest has better understanding of how their stay will be in the hotel. It was determined trolley robots enhances logistics supports in the hotel thus enabling social distancing for COVID 19 prevention and it has reduced congestion and improved the scheduling of movement in the hotel.

Marketing Strategies and Organisational Performance

On the final objective, the study concluded that marketing strategies significantly contributes to the hotel performance. It was also shown that digital marketing strategy has improved customers reviews and tracking online reviews of the hotel and digital marketing strategy affect the valence of online reviews, hence impacting performance. It was further shown that pricing strategy of the hotel is based on the seasonal demands and hotel has effective pricing strategies that is aimed at improving revenue. It was also shown that product diversification is a strategy used by the hotel management when introducing new products and it aims to reduce the risk faced by the hotel in the hospitality industry.

Recommendations

Based on the study analysis, findings and conclusion, this study recommends that:

The study provided insights into sustainable HRM policies that can help enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of four-star hotels' organizational performance. To ensure effective organizational performance, the hotels' management should adopt proactive employee engagement practices and policies that can attract and retain employees. The study also recommended that a policy framework should be developed to improve the working conditions of lower cadre employees.

The study recommended that managers of the hotels should adopt customer care services and customer relations to enhance performance. Managers of the hotels should also ensure that service

quality dimensions such as reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness are adhered to ensure that customer satisfactions are met.

The study recommended the implementation of ICT tools, since they significantly contributes to operational performance, through faster processing of customer requests, increased productivity and efficiency and they also form the backbone of housekeeping, inventory management, business intelligence, financial management, restaurant management, customer relationship management, front office operations and hotel bookings. The study recommended that hotel managers need to assess their investment capabilities on the ICT in the sector.

The study recommended that the top priority for the hotels should be the implementation of marketing strategies. Since marketing strategies in the hotel sector play an important role on the hotel's growth and to determine achievement made on customer satisfaction. The study recommended that hotels should adopt public relations programmes.

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