



**AN INVESTIGATION INTO CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY:
A CASE STUDY OF A SELECTED THEME PARK IN
KWAZULU- NATAL**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this study:

An investigation into Customers' perception of service quality: A case study of a selected theme park in KwaZulu- Natal, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own work in both conception and execution. All the sources of information used or quoted have been duly acknowledged by means of complete references.

Thembinkosi Peter Kalanga

22/01/2022

DATE

Supervisor:

Prof B.I Dlamini
30/03/2022

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this Master's dissertation to my mother who has always kept me going against all odds. I have worked hard to accomplish this work and this achievement will enhance my expertise to secure employment and thus contribute to my ability to secure gainful employment so as to care for my mother and three younger brothers.

ABSTRACT

Customer service quality has been a major concern at theme parks for the past years; theme parks have therefore been struggling to attract new customers and to expand their market due to the impact of their customers' perception of the quality of services rendered. The perception of service quality in theme parks determines customer loyalty and it also influences the consumer buying behaviour, as well as repeat visits and brand switching decisions. In theme parks, poor food quality, for example may lead to dissatisfaction and affect the entire customer experience, however, food is a supplementary service while tourism facilities and souvenirs are considered even more important for best quality experience.

The objectives of this study were to measure the perception of customer service quality within the uShaka Marine World theme park and its impact on customer satisfaction, as well as retention. The literature review was conducted to locate and align the study within the existing context of research. This study used a quantitative research method and questionnaires were distributed to collect data from uShaka Marine World customers. Data were analysed using Statistical Package Social Sciences Statistics to obtain results for the outcome of the study.

The study found that most customers expected excellent customer service from theme parks service providers, however, sometimes it is difficult for theme park planners to design and cater for the changing needs of customers. This study also found that some of the attractions at uShaka Marine World had a higher satisfaction rate than others, while the design and layout of the theme park was a contributing factor to customer service quality.

The study also found that suggested improvements included a wider range of shops for visitors, a larger gallery space for more animals and catering for religious food requirements; some suggested the inclusion of an indigenous food outlet and more attractions for various age groups.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

This chapter covers the background, the problem statement, the guiding research questions and objectives; it defines the main concepts and outlines the significance of the study. The chapter also introduces the rationale for studying customer service quality in theme parks globally and locally. It is an important chapter because it orientates the reader to what can be expected and creates an awareness of the main concepts of the phenomenon and subject of interest.

Theme parks attract roughly one million visitors annually to each large or medium-scale theme park; however, they have reached their maturity (Chang, 2009). A theme park is defined as an aggregation of themed attractions, including dining services and retail shops (Editorial, 2016). Important customers' behaviour, including their perceived quality of service, overall satisfaction with their visits, and various activities they participate on (Tsang *et al*, 2015). All theme parks have their own distinctive attributes. According to a study by Eades (2017), theme parks make up a significant segment of the tourism industry and are major contributors to tourism revenue. Mayer (2015:34) further indicates that theme parks increase tourism activity and economic benefits for the local community and provide education and entertainment opportunities for the public.

According to Wu *et al* (2014), brand image plays a crucial role in creating an impression in terms of customer service as it has a negative and positive impact on experiential satisfaction, as well as retention of customers. Prior experience at a theme park is an important determinant of repeat attendance. Yelkur *et al* (2016) argue that creating memorable experiences at theme parks through customer service delivery is crucial in keeping existing visitors as well as reaching out to new markets. According to Cheng and Hsu (2014), the poor quality of customer service and bad experiences at theme parks both affect experiential satisfaction, theme park image, and revisit intention.

This study measures the perception of customers in service quality using a multidimensional approach. The multidimensional approach plays a very important role in highlighting pitfalls in an outdated model, and in determining the service quality.

The study has adopted the SERVPERF model that deals with stimulating performance and measuring service quality through performance during service delivery. However, there is an initial THEMEQUAL model that is modified and is called the SERVQUAL model for theme parks. This SERVQUAL model evaluates the perception of customers on service quality within theme parks (Lari *et al*, 2020).

The SERVQUAL method is mostly used in gauging the perception of service quality. However, Cronin and Taylor (1992) designed a substitute SERVPERF method that influences performance on service quality. This method is used to measure the quality of service in terms of perceptions of customers (Lari *et al*, 2020).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The assessment of service quality within theme parks is complex due to numerous factors that determine the decision-making process (Themed Entertainment Association, 2017). According to the Themed Entertainment Association (2017), assessing service quality of theme parks is very difficult due to the various perceptions of customers, therefore these factors affect the outcome of assessments and can lead to a decrease in demand for services, as well as a decrease in repeat visits due to customer dissatisfaction.

Food consumables and soft-drinks are part of additional services that play a key role in evaluating services at theme parks for customers and bad customer experience of food available affects the whole service. Food quality has therefore been linked to customer satisfaction and loyalty whereas poor quality leads to dissatisfaction (Wu *et al*, 2018). Service quality and price are also known to be very important in customer dining experience within the hospitality service industry (Wu and Ai, 2016).

The quality of the physical environment justifies the necessity for a tangible service environment in theme parks and different theme park attributes show that physically a good environment gives visitors the feeling of service quality, while poor ambience discourages satisfaction and retention (Ali *et al*, 2018). The perception of customers in

theme parks based on quality of experience is good when easy access to desired places and activities is granted, but insufficient amenities have proved to be a barrier to success in theme parks (Wu *et al*, 2016). Customers in theme parks are aware of the quality of the attractions and the level of service they receive but they are also disappointed of it, for example available rides prevent them from sharing the experience with their families (Singh, 2016).

The interaction amongst employees and customers determines the interacting value during the service encounter within the park, therefore, the lack of engagement between employees and customers can create a negative impact in the quality of service. Ali *et al*, (2016) note that the perception of customers regarding service performance focuses largely on the attitude of employees. Negative staff behaviour was responsible for ruining customer experience. The customers' decision to revisit is influenced negatively by the poor quality of service delivery (Aziz *et al*, 2019). According to Wu *et al* (2018), the needs of customers has an influence on consumer expectation and customer's intention to decide on the next purchase of the same services or products.

The poor provision of service quality hinders the competitive advantage in theme parks; therefore, such theme parks are not able to position themselves in order to obtain an advantage over other parks (Tsang *et al*, 2015). Despite theme parks being well known and well established, they always need to be aware of changing attitudes and behaviour towards their product offerings. This research intends to measure visitor perceptions of customer service quality within a theme park in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

Magubane (2021), states that uShaka Marine World was operating at a loss and could be dissolved as an independent entity and its functions taken over by eThekweni municipality as the entity has been deep in debt and battling to remain afloat. To the tune of R40 million owing to the municipality for rates and services, while it is also owing approximately R14.7 billion to the eThekweni municipality (Magubane, 2021). In 2020, the Mercury reported that the theme park had been hit by Covid-19 regulations and had asked for a multimillion-rand bailout from the municipality.

“uShaka was facing critical challenges prior to Covid-19. It has been experiencing serious cash flow challenges. The loss of income since the lockdown has further impacted its revenue.” said Kaunda

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted at uShaka Marine World a theme park located in the province of KwaZulu Natal. uShaka Marine World is a theme park that brings tourism services and leisure experiences to local visitors and tourists from all over the world. The customer perception of service quality within theme parks is really crucial as it reflects production effort levels of the organisation on customer service. According to Saudi *et al*, (2018), it is vital for theme park planners to emphasize customer satisfaction in terms of products and services that they offer. In addition to understanding the type of atmosphere experiences that emotionally touch visitors, upgrading the facilities provided, and also providing different facilities, as well as plenty of games in the theme park to enhance customer loyalty while encouraging new customer to come on board is vital.

The outcome of this study may be beneficial to uShaka Marine World and other theme parks globally. The perception of customers regarding service quality, it is hoped will trigger the attention of management on customer service quality challenges and solutions for the theme park. This study will also assist other theme parks to improve their provision of customer service quality, visitor experience, destination marketing, and service excellence in order to achieve customer satisfaction and higher repeat visits. This study will also enable theme park planners, managers, and employees to set up an environment that is user friendly to visitors, accessible, and able to cater for the different needs of customers and create an adaptive culture, in terms of visitors' preferences ranging from social class and demographics, as well as understanding consumer buying behaviour (Saudi *et al*, 2018).

It is hoped this study will assist uShaka Marine World to understand the perceptions of customers regarding service quality and thereby enhance the quality of service that is rendered to customers. Outlining the desired and preferred service quality through the customers' voices during data collection should help the organisation.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The uShaka Marine World theme park is situated on Durban's Golden Mile in South Africa's coastal region of KwaZulu Natal. uShaka Marine is a 16-hectare piece of land and it was established in April in 2004. Figure 1-1 shows the map of uShaka Marine World theme park where the park is located.



Figure 1.1: uShaka Marine World Map

1.5 RESEARCH AIM

Singh (2018:32) states that the aim of research is also the purpose it envisions result of a study, controls, as well as manages the actions of researchers. The aim of this study is to measure uShaka Marine World customer perceptions regarding customer service quality within the park.

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

According to Singh (2018:44), the objectives of research should be brief, clear and write the statement formulated in the present tense. The role of objectives is also based on assisting in keeping the emphasis on the problem that is currently investigated. According to Pathmanathan and Brownlee (2003) the objectives of research are the instruments that determine the literature to peruse and the type of information to be gathered.

The study will be guided by the following fundamental objectives:

Objective 1

- To measure the gap between customers' desired service and actual service received.

Objective 2

- To determine how staff interaction impacts on the overall customer experience.

Objective 3

- To measure the impact of the physical environment as a contributor to customer satisfaction.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Hayne (2006) states that research questions are questions that a research project sets out to answer. The research questions in this study seek to identify the gap in customer service quality, efficiency of staff interaction and also the impact of the physical environment on customer service quality at uShaka Marine World.

The study will be determined by the research questions below:

- What is the gap between the desired service and actual service received?
- How do staff interactions contribute to the overall customer experience?
- What impact does the overall physical environment have on customer satisfaction?

1.8 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The delimitations are defined as boundaries in the researcher's control that outline the capacity, boundaries, limits and margins of a study (Simon, 2011). This study focuses on the perceptions of customers in terms of service quality in theme parks. The study will be confined to uShaka Marine World theme park in KwaZulu-Natal. It discusses the perceptions of customers regarding service quality theme parks cater. The study will be limited to the selected theme park's customers.



Figure 1.2: uShaka Marine World image

1.9 STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS

The structure of this study is arranged in an academically acknowledged manner, and it begins with drawing attention to the study orientation, and, secondly, outlining the theoretical framework and literature review, methodology of research, data presentation, analysis of data, as well as data interpretation. Lastly, it deals with the conclusion and recommendations. Below is an overview of each chapter:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents the background and problem statement of the study. It also comprises general and specific objectives which are supported by the research questions. In addition, the researcher explores the significance of the study and the contribution that the study makes to knowledge in the field.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

Chapter 2 is based on the literature review. It is about conveying the secondary or relevant existing data/information of other researchers to support the study. The literature review and theoretical framework section of a dissertation is of crucial importance because it allows the researcher to explain how things are linked and it locates contradictions and gaps in the main concepts of the phenomenon under investigation.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter describes the methods that were used in data collection and data analysis in answering the primary and secondary research questions of the study. It also explained the research design, sampling techniques and data collection method used, as well as describing data from the analysed research. This chapter is important because it introduces the research genre, character and tone, and it is also used to justify the choice made of methodology.

The researcher uses this chapter to expound on the research design, explain the tools that used to collect primary and secondary data as well as the reasons why the tools were deemed the most appropriate to best answer the research questions.

Chapter 4: Data presentation and analysis

This chapter presents data that is collected and an analysis of results. Quantitative data is presented, analysed and interpreted in this chapter. This chapter also lays the foundation for all the recommendations and conclusion in the final chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, recommendations and conclusion

This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study. The conclusion is directly related to the research questions and objectives of the study. The conclusion of the study is drawn from the discussion of findings in chapter four and literature review in chapter two. This chapter is also used to identify the areas for future research in the field of customer service quality.

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter dealt with the major concern of this research study in terms of service quality objectives and the perception of customer service and service consciousness of customers. The research problem was conceptualised, and insight given into the rationale, aim and research objectives of the study. It also presented a detailed outline of the contents of chapters to come. In chapter 2 the researcher will introduce the theories that underpin the study.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION.

The preceding chapter outlined the orientation of this study. The aims of the study were also identified, as well as the research problem together with the research objectives. This chapter provides the literature based on the perception of customers on service quality in theme parks; the intention being to provide knowledge about customer experience in theme parks. This chapter also pinpoints the connection amongst all relevant frameworks and the importance of the customer service quality phenomenon. The theoretical framework and literature of this study aimed at establishing an impression of the context where the research study was done (Anfara and Mertz, 2015). In this chapter, it is crucial to address the link existing amongst studies of the past and recent ones, all of which shape the choices of methodology.

The importance of this chapter was to assert the studies within a relevant field of knowledge, and then add to the discount by engaging participants and involving their inputs. This chapter also speaks indirectly to the methodology of the study, the research design, tools, and also the techniques that are used to facilitate the accomplishment of the research objectives.

The study adopted the SERVQUAL model and also designed representations that were made to suit relevant attributes of theme parks such as the THEMEQUAL model (Ali and Raza, 2017). The SERVQUAL and THERMQUAL models helped in determining the subjects in the study, openly focusing on the noted customer service quality problems, crises, inabilities; and organisational practices in the findings, all of which will clarify the staff development practices of uShaka Marine World theme park as a tourism organisation (Ali *et al*, 2017).

Ang *et al* (2015) highlight a conceptualised 3-factor model that outlines the quality of service relating to the quality of interaction in terms of the environment physically and also the outcome quality. According to Hollebeek and Brodie (2016), customers demonstrate their commitment to theme parks as they tend to inform other potential

customers and their acquaintances about the good quality of service they actually received. The consumers are thereby deliberately assisting their acquaintances through platforms as they provide a great deal of assistance about sharing their tourism experience regarding tourism facilities (Hollebeek *et al*, 2016), hence they can also offer assistance to tourism organisations through suggestions; for example, they can make suggestions to staff with the intention of enhancing the service that is delivered to customers (Kaura *et al*, 2015).

Service quality in theme parks is also aligned with brand awareness and value that is believed to involve trust in services; this also includes the experience of customers in an evaluation of products offered and the process of service delivery (Chekalina *et al*, 2018). At the same time, this rereads how the customers perceive on theme parks' service and the actual evidence of the brand value.

According to Carlson *et al*, (2017), service quality in theme parks also encompasses equality depending on the service that is perceived by the customers, and it is also seen as the customers' perceived level of fairness on behaviour of tourism organisations. The perceived service fairness indicates that customers anticipate tourism organisations to provide services that exceed their expectations and also provide fair treatment (Carlson *et al*, 2017). Carlson *et al*, (2017), furthermore state that the feelings of customers on the fairness of service may be a matter of the amount of their invested time in the organisation. Numerous customer service quality researchers reveal proof by acknowledging the substantial effect in terms of the fairness of service rendered to customers and considering important relationships like the behaviour of customers complaining, propensity of customers to remain with the service organisation and their habit of changing or switching service providers (Ostrom *et al*, 2015).

Ostrom *et al*, (2015) identifies a customer's perception of a tourism organisation is service equity as a creator of a customer's responsibility behaviour such as customers' suggestions and response mechanisms and customers helping other customers.

Classification of Service quality

Alshaibani and Bakir (2017) state that the desired quality of service can be categorized into two sections which are: technical and functional quality. Technical satisfaction comprises of the delivered service such as food quality; functional high-quality pertains psychological and behavioural factors and the manner where delivered into consumers through contact and surroundings. Alshaibani *et al*, (2017) say that functional quality is more essential, than technical quality.

Negative hygiene experiences affect the visitor's perceived best encounter with regards to the desired experience of services (Fotiadis, 2016). Hall (2016) highlights pleasure, in a tourism organisation having an impact on satisfaction as well as good behaviour.

2.2 MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY IN THEME PARK.

The SERVQUAL model and established models have been improved to suit the specific features of theme parks; the THEMQUAL is one (Ali and Raza, 2017). The SERVQUAL and THERMQUAL models assist in determining the service expectations and performance using six dimensions (Ali *et al*, 2017).

2.2.1 Service quality model

According to Ang and Dyne (2015), there is a service quality model that consists of 3 elements such as engagement between customers and employees in the environment and the result of the service rendered. Ang *et al* (2015) state that quality of engagement is determined by a psychological response such as attitude as well as surroundings, quality of a high level while using conditions of the environment, layout, and, lastly aspects of environment. Alshaibani *et al*, (2017) found that some of these aspects included the meaningful, desired impact on the quality of services rendered by theme parks.

2.2.2 The SERVQUAL Model

Victorino and Bolinger (2016) state that the SERVQUAL tool determines the customer's expected outcomes in terms of performance by the theme park organisation, in other words, how they perceive performance after utilizing the service. Victorino *et al*, (2016)

believe that expectancy and the perceived balances are matched through gaps between service quality and service delivery.

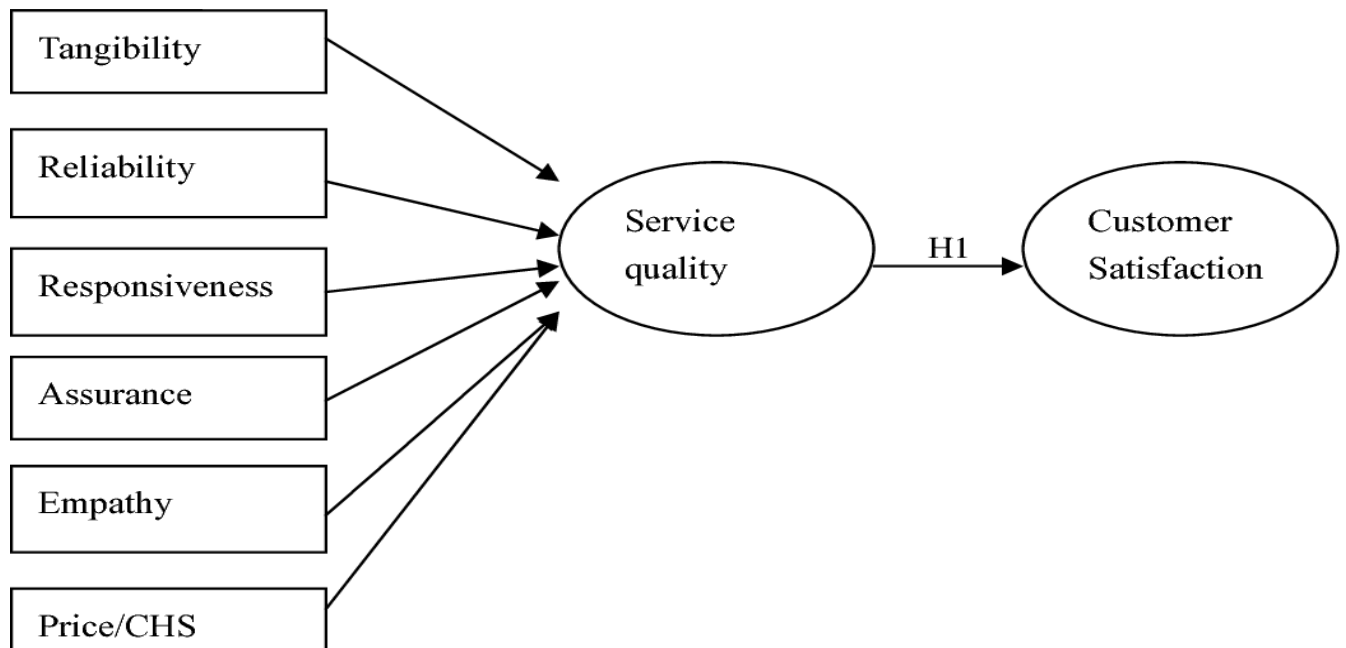


Figure 2.1: Service Quality Model

2.2.3 The THERMQUAL Model

According to Anestis *et al* (2016), the SERVQUAL model for theme parks was improved and adapted and named THEMQUAL with the intention of changing the dimension of the normal model and introducing a single measurement to the SERVQUAL model, six THEMQUAL measurements are: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness and access, assurance, empathy and courtesy.

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Pautasso (2013) the literature review is a summary of recent literary work that leads to new insights in a field of study. This chapter is important because it locates the study within the field and highlights pertinent debates that have been obtaining in the field. The groundwork of this research study is based on the perception of customer service quality. The literature reviewed exposes a plethora of rich, descriptive sources including books, journal articles, websites and a variety of other conceptual writings that

discuss the significance of customer service quality in theme parks. Ali *et al*, (2016) state that the quality of service has mostly been addressed for ages and also its concept is still pertinent to help in organisations with an intention of enhancing differentiation and gaining a competitive advantage enough of competition in a period of globalisation.

2.3.1 Perceived service quality

Service quality is defined as a perceived judgment attributable to an assessment method in which customers evaluate anticipations together with the rendered service that they perceive to have obtained (Li and Shang, 2020). According to Zhou *et al* (2018), service quality best performs an essential position in attaining vital desires, consisting of growing trust, enhancing satisfaction, and cultivating loyalty. According to Spyridou (2017), the quality of services is measured by the size of the gap between the expected and the perceived service delivered.

According to Hussain (2015), if ever offerings are acquired as anticipated, the quality of service is considered good, and when received service surpasses the expected performance on service then visitors can overjoy, and eventually see the quality of service to be extremely good. Spyridou (2017) believes that the level of affirmation or disproof of the expectations remains the most important aspect within the size of the quality of the service.

According to Hussain *et al* (2015), the best quality of service is mostly enhanced by expectations of services and perception of the customers. The perceived service quality improves the firm-customer relationship leading to the customer's purpose of sharing of knowledge about the company that provides the service, and shares the knowledge amongst acquaintances as well as family members and close relatives (Roy *et al*, 2018).

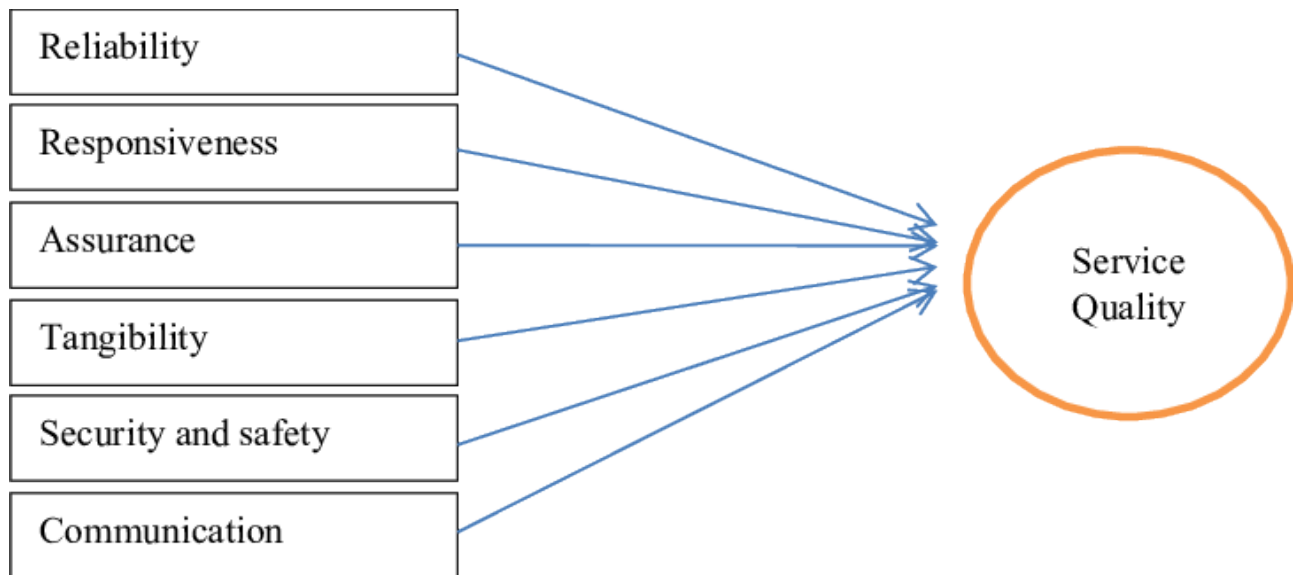


Figure 2.2: Service quality dimensions

According to Alzaydi *et al*, (2017), the servicing of customers and the perception of service quality is mostly assessed and measured by using the expectations customers had earlier than when they utilized offerings with their perception of actual service. When the perception of service is similar to expectations, customer's expectancies certainly have to be fulfilled (Nguyen *et al*, 2016). Nguyen *et al*, (2016) also state that better service between the perceived service and the expected service helps to deliver service quality that exceeds what customers expected; consumers will be sooner or later satisfied. Han and Hyun (2015) contend that when the expected quality of service is not offered, services supplied are deemed unpleasant.

Othman *et al.*, (2020) list six dimensions of service quality specifically: worker competence, reliability, and product innovativeness, value for money, physical evidence, and convenience. Service quality is typically known as an evaluation of how properly a delivered service conforms to the consumer's expectations (Moura *et al.*, 2019). According to Moura *et al.*, (2019), service providers should often assess the service excellence provided to their customers in an effort to improve their best service quality and maintain customer's satisfaction.

Service quality is considered to be a major factor in the theme park customer relationship and customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). According to Alzaydi *et al.*, (2017), based on the perspective of customers, there is a distinction between expectations and

perception of services. Alzaydi *et al.* (2017) further explains that it is challenging to manage the quality of service due to intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability and simultaneity of services, and also the best perception of service quality. Ban *et al.*, (2017) concur by arguing that it is more difficult to evaluate the quality of service than products because of its intrinsic nature such heterogeneity, inseparability, intangibility, and perishability.

Customers often assess the quality of services by comparing what they want or assume to what they actually receive at theme parks (Fotiadis and Vassiliadis 2016). The efficiency and quality of the service varies not only on the performance of the theme park service provider, but also on the requirements of the consumers they therefore makes the management of quality somewhat challenging (Fotiadis *et al.*, 2016). Au *et al* (2016) indicate that reducing gaps tied to the increment of competition has become essential for theme parks to maximize the standard of service so on to encourage visitor satisfaction. However, it is very challenging when it comes to conceptualizing or examining due to the fact that service consists of 3 predominant traits which are intangibles, heterogeneity, and inseparability (Roppola., 2017). Kondasani and Panda (2015) maintain that it is impossible to assess service quality analytically due to its intangible concept when comparing to the technical quality of manufactured products.

To decide on the service quality of a theme park, customers service fulfilment is typically a technique that is often over-used, while the undesired experience of customers due to theme park service failure appears to be disregarded (Roppola, 2017). When consumers are clearly not satisfied, it can result in customer defection and negative word of mouth (O'Neill, 2017). Su and Teng (2018) state that a bad perception and reputation lead to dissatisfaction. Su *et al* (2018), confirms that a ruined reputation of the brand to is more significant than optimistic opinion as they are usually deemed to be more convincing and also catch a customer's attention. Su *et al* (2018), believes that the queries of customers are crucial for tourism service officials in order to gain insight into how to improve the quality of service. Mohaidin (2017) states that refining the quality of the service delivered to customers depends on theme park ability to constantly fulfil the desires and anticipations of the visitors. Mohaidin *et al* (2017) found that theme parks gained and

accomplished a great market share only if they created and maintained the best quality of service that could ultimately result in the satisfaction of the customer.

In a fast-growing environment, the quality of service might also result in expected outcomes (Chen *et al*, 2019). Ringham and Miles (2018) found that the outcome of customer's perception in terms of service quality, enhanced the customer's behaviour due to effective awareness, as well as the reputation of the brand. The customer's requirements are the most challenging characteristic to predict because of changing technology and service (Ringham and Miles, 2018), and behavioural intention is likely to be one of the least inevitable outcomes for service organizations (Chow, 2015). The best quality of service according to the consumers' appraisal on the part of theme park employees, whether services suit the desires of customers and their anticipations as a positive outcome will ultimately enhance their repurchase decision (Chen *et al.*, 2019).

The provision of best quality service is a bit tricky to estimate, unlike good quality, and the expected service performance can actually be compared with the process evaluation of the service delivered (Rezaei *et al*, 2018). Providing sufficient desired service improves the fulfilment to end-users through the offerings and it leads to adding value on repeat purchases and retention (Ban and Ramsaran, 2017). Ban *et al* (2017) argue that having insight into desired quality of service helps with useful knowledge about the qualities of a theme park, so that visitors are the priority when advancing customers' fulfilment within the theme park.

Kondasani *et al* (2015) argue that the visitor's opinions on the total value of the quality service is measured on the technical quality such as the delivered service and also functional quality, which is how the services were rendered. It is clear that the visitors' perception of quality is mostly determined by the service process, while the service result also contributes effectively (Kondasani *et al*, 2015).

2.3.2 Perceived value and expectations.

According to Li and Shang (2020), perceived value is the customer's complete judgment of the usage of services or products based on perceptions of benefits obtained in the exchange between costs and benefits. The customers' evaluation of the theme park

provider is primarily based on the judgment of service and overall performance and whether or not the provider meets their expectations (Li *et al*, 2020). According to Keshavarz and Jamshidi (2018), good value received by customers leads to greater degrees of retention of customers. The satisfaction of customers and loyalty is analytically and empirically seen as the effects of the perceived value (Keshavarz *et al*, 2018). Chong (2017) found the perception of value to have a tremendous and direct impact on intended behaviour that had changed and considered as an attitudinal idea of loyalty.

Customers that rated a service to be quite nice-looking confirmed their intention on product preferences and high-quality emotions toward theme park service to develop a stage of perception to value, in which perception of the value is frequently focused on needs of customers and anticipations, (Lam *et al*, 2016).

Dong *et al* (2018), argue that perceived costs on service value involve customers' money that is paid and also non-financial charges like wasting time, power exploitation, as well as anxiety that is experienced by visitors. However, the perception of customers in terms of fee consequences after an assessment of rewards or sacrifices involve communication of changing prices prior. Clients are willing to feel rightfully handled as they understand that the proportion in with results to inputs is corresponding to the proportion of results to contribution encountered by way of the theme park (Chan, 2017). Rising on expectations from customers in all theme parks is a major challenge on the tourism industry (Daedal Research, 2017).

2.3.3 Service experience

Milman *et al*, (2017) state that there are expenses in consumption of products and services, and they are measured by means of physical or tangible components, however, additionally, there are emotional dimensions, and it is also vital to recognize the numerous influences on loyalty to and satisfaction with a theme park for aggressive survival within the market environment. Milman *et al* (2018) also believes that serving customers with an excellent experience is critical to accomplish achievement, particularly in the competitive market. There are various traits and situations that have an effect reviews, including social variations, motivations, sports, pursuits, and attitudes, in addition to the psychological nature of studies and experience of environments (Daedal Research., 2017). Good

experiences in the tourism sector are measured according to different elements such as pleasure seeking, uniqueness, expertise, participation, and neighbourhood tradition (Hall *et al*, 2016). Hall *et al* (2016) suggest that experience within tourism is always memorable and also comprises of local culture, different activities, management of the environment, access to amenities, infrastructure development, and desired service delivery. Jarvis and Liu (2016) state that visitors' reviews are important regarding leisure vacations.

Lee and Smith (2015) initially created a measurement to evaluate tourists' quality of experience including visits to historical sites. The five measurements included leisure, adventure, and escapism. Satisfaction is measured by customers based on differences in their expectations of service enjoyment as well as implementation of the acquired services and products (Zboja *et al*, 2016).

Jarvis *et al.*, (2015) state that four experiential characteristics have been positively associated with experiential pleasure, however, they are associated with "reliability intentions". This consists of the involvement of customers at some point of purchase; however, it results on a situation whereby the value is neglected and focusing on giving minimal service instead of considering the outcome. Secondly, the uniqueness perceived by customers during the utilisation of services and products, thirdly, the interaction of customers within the service environment utilising the tangible products or services, and, lastly, enjoyment and leisure visitors experience at the destination (Jarvis *et al.*, 2015).

Currently, the demands of consumers have increased, specifically regarding the quality of customer service experience (Dredge and Gyimothy, 2015). Consumers' negative attitudes have an impact on the perceived provider's quality in experience and service, however that leads to the failure of service on the presence of customers (Grove *et al.*, 2015). Theme park planners can also be affected by default of service that is delivered whenever misbehaving visitors are not properly (Grove *et al.*, 2015). Loyal or essential visitors consider that theme park managers should be skilled in handling disruptive customers, these customers end up sharing bad word of mouth about the organisation when addressing their spoiled experience (Zourrig and Chebat, 2015).

Some customers complain to their friends and peers; however, they are also likely to publish derogatory remarks based on the evaluated service in the event that

misbehaviour ruined their experience because of the theme park's weakness in managing customers behaving in an undesirable manner (Berezina *et al*, 2016). Visitors tend to blame providers for negative incidents that occurred within the provider's area of authority (Dinçer and Alrawadieh, 2017). Even though there are probably exceptions to this high-quality service at some stage, theme park experience providers that are directly involved in corporate social responsibility events are required to cautiously control experience of service in order to also secure commercial enterprise fulfilment (Cai *et al*, 2018).

Nikbin *et al* (2016) state that tourism corporations are required to cautiously maintain good experiences regarding service in order to secure enterprise fulfilment. According to Chekalina *et al.*, (2018), the service experience of customers additionally relates to brand awareness. This is all about trustworthiness in the assessment of products, as well as service provision techniques, and it also reflects the customers' feelings towards the services as it shows to be the key value of the brand.

Johnson *et al* (2018), mention that employee attitude, behaviour, and performance form a crucial aspect of the customer service experience. Johnson *et al* (2018) also maintain that service providers and customers cannot be separated at any stage during the delivery procedure and the consumption of the service, with frontline personnel playing an essential role in the customer experience.

2.3.4 Brand switching

According to Cheng *et al* (2016), the recognizable proof of customer service and behaviour that influences switching is needed, and it is declared that a receptive approach to investigate the reasons of switching behaviour to make sure that customer satisfaction and loyalty is maintained to avoid switching decisions. Cheng *et al* (2016), add that satisfied customers should be expected to revisit the theme park and be distinctly loyal to it, while dissatisfaction leads to some purchasers switching theme park destinations.

In terms of switching cost, some consumers may give up switching from a brand due to the high switching fee (Chan, 2017). According to Chan (2017), the degree of involvement can affect the influence of switching, and the customer may also surrender switching brands due to lengthy switching value, but the price of switching can also harm a

customer's habit of switching. Elements hindering customer switching behaviour regarding theme parks can be due the fee of switching, involvement of customers, appeal of competitor, reputation of parks, perception of value, and satisfaction of customers (Dong and Siu, 2018). Dong *et al* (2018) propose rebranding as a method that ensures fulfilment, gain, and also improvement of parks, facilitates and find out the services that are at peak to develop them into a new desired product to enhance customer satisfaction and grow the brand value to achieve customer loyalty.

Cheng *et al* (2016) state that satisfied customers may nonetheless engage in brand switching behaviours. Switching occurs due to the fact that customers experience unique levels of pleasure they acquire from expertise and encounters. Chan (2017) states that to create a simple competitive situation, some parks should adopt brand orientation, without full knowledge of the elements behind the behaviour regarding switching brands. Theme park managers may make huge investments in resources relating to unsuccessful aspects, which are particularly valuable.

Anestis *et al* (2016) state that operators need to take into consideration ways to make sure consumers do not pick offerings from competitors and that they repurchase theme park offerings. In the way, switching brands is reduced, and brand loyalty is maintained. Anestis *et al* (2016) also state the essentiality of examining all the important factors that encourage visitors to switch brands in terms of theme parks.

The switching of brand occurs relies upon three features which might be customer perceived value, the value of money consumers choose to spend when switching brand, and the loss that takes place when the customers stop supporting a brand (Dong *et al*, 2018). Gursoy *et al* (2017), state that a customer's level of satisfaction leads to the decision to switch. At the same time as competitor attraction affects satisfaction, it can also cause suffering to parks in maintaining competitive advantage.

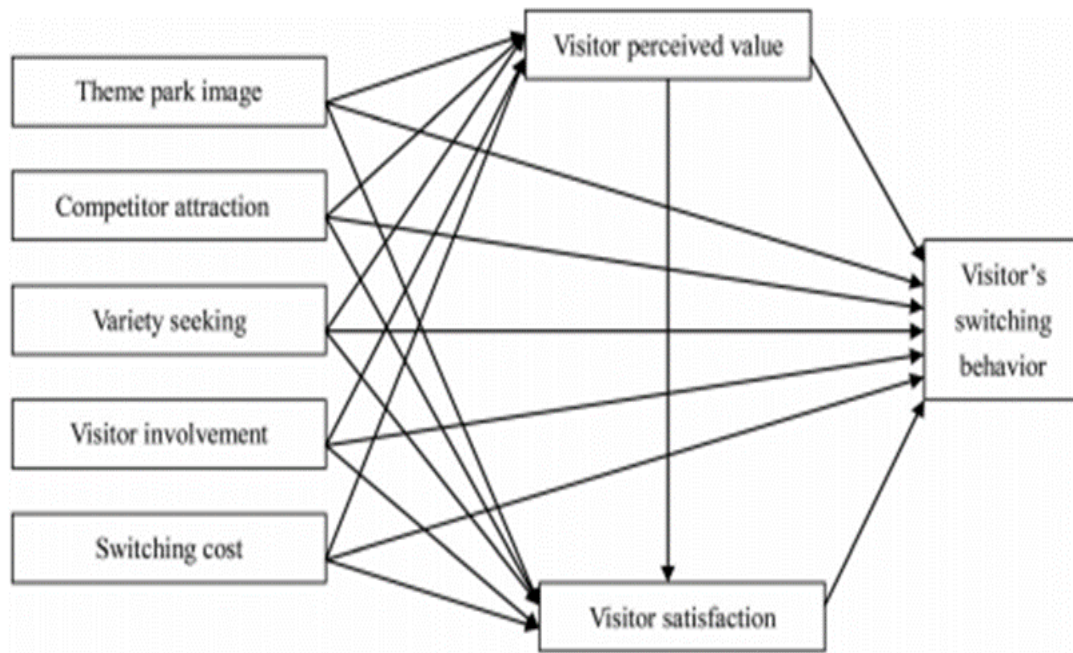


Figure 2.3: Conceptual model for customer switching behaviour

2.3.5 Service convenience.

According to Roy *et al* (2016), service convenience refers to the perceived saving of time and effort in the assistance of customers related to purchasing and utilization of a service. Ostrom *et al* (2015) define service convenience as a judgment made by customers in keeping with their feelings of management over the utilization and conversion in their effort and time in attaining their desires associated with get entry to and use of service. Convenience or lack of it (inconvenience), is an important issue of customer's ordinary revel in, which impacts a customer's perception of fairness in conditions when they come upon aggressive and useless methods, excessive options, and goal incongruence (Ostrom *et al*, 2015). Vaerenbergh *et al* (2014) state that the perceived shortage of disposable time and effort has raised the opportunity costs for consumers, which affects their perception of fairness, consumers' satisfaction, and pleasure even as managing service providers. Ostrom *et al* (2015) observe that decreasing customer's effort and time expenditure during carrier buy and consumption improves nice perceptions and consumer pleasure.

Vaerenbergh *et al* (2014) state that customers' price conveniences which include saving effort, time and fee costs, not most effective while making purchase decisions, but additionally at the same time as accessing, receiving, and completing a provider.

Hollebeek and Srivastava (2016) state that decision convenience refers to time and effort stored with the help of customers even as making purchase selections or deciding on a service firm. Hollebeek *et al* (2016), also said that gain of convenience pertains to effort as well as time saved by visitors even as receiving the centre advantages of service, and lastly, submit-benefit comfort consists of period and commitment stored using visitors regarding preserving interaction with tourism businesses as well as sorting issues that include purchase related concerns. Kaura *et al* (2015) describe the significance of comfort in service is having an excellent effect on the loyalty of customers together with customer recommendation and referral behaviour.

Groeger *et al* (2016) state that experience contains a perception of a lack in effort, time and also searching out approaches to stability and different, flexibility inclusive of leisure sports. Customers are much more likely to reply favourably closer to service providers that offers them service comfort throughout their buying journey (Groeger *et al.*, 2016). According to Forrester (2016), communicating information that do not involve fee costs such as effort and time helps customers encourage peers to show support behaviour closer to tourism organisation. Forrester (2016) state that good outcomes of service convenience are intentions to repurchase, a good reputation, and also needs of customers that are satisfied. Forrester (2016) describes that high-quality impact justice that is perceived on customer's tendency to give opinions to tourism organisations to liaise with staff and talk good about the organisation.

Verleye *et al* (2016) state that reflection of service convenience in dedication to visitors, and a strange choice or favours can also be perceived through customers to be greater as honest. Verleye *et al.*, (2016) also state that the provided quality is desired to propose to other prospects, and it also affords a circumstance on customers to do Consumer Engagement Behaviour.

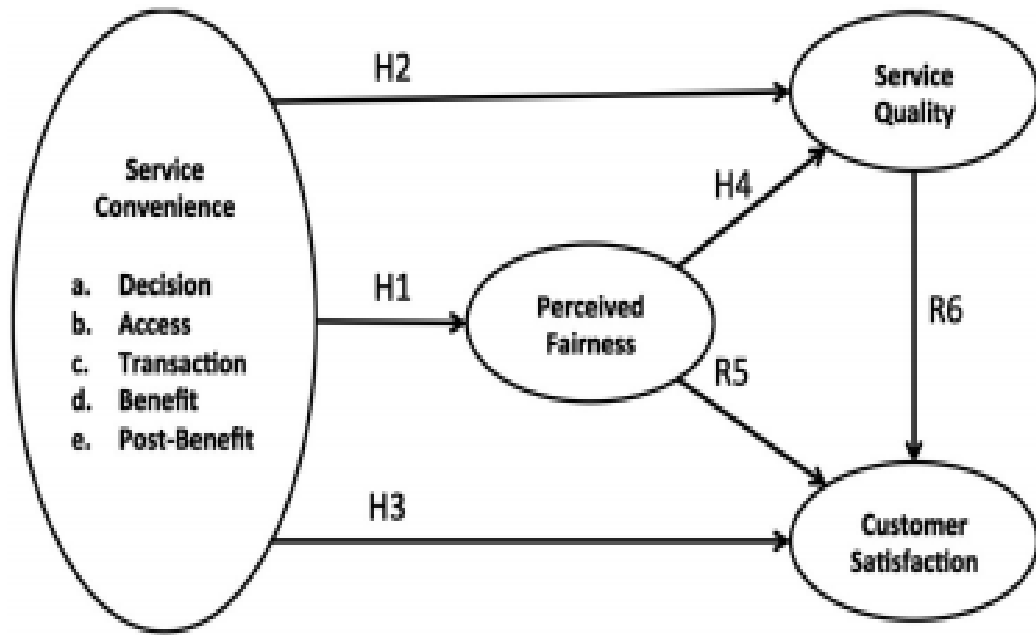


Figure 2.4: Conceptual framework of Service Convenience

2.3.6 Customer satisfaction.

Roy *et al* (2016) state that customer satisfaction has an instantaneous and effective effect on Cooperation and Loyalty. Happy customers are much more likely to have interaction in Consumer-Citizenship-Behaviours including customer helping behaviours at the theme park to make sure provider transport and customers energetic participation inside the provider improvement and development (Roy *et al*, 2016).

Customer satisfaction is a vital part of enterprise, overall performance and monitoring of the service high quality that can allow for leveraging in the market (Kim *et al*, 2017). High quality offerings have been verified to enhance consumer pride, which creates customer loyalty for the service provider (Kim *et al*, 2017). The happier customers are more likely to return to consume the service positively (Kitapci *et al*, 2015). Eventually, growing dedication by the customers will bring about a resistance to trading with a different service provider (Kitapci *et al*, 2015). Kim *et al* (2017) also says that dissatisfied customers normally have lower intentions of repurchasing the service than happy customers. Kitapci *et al* (2015) argue that complaint behavior is more essential amongst disillusioned

customers than pleased customers, and it is also defined as dissatisfaction or objection to the seller.

According to Dolnicar *et al* (2015), it is very important to consider the satisfaction of customers in theme parks, however there is inadequate willingness in terms of loyalty in customers. Akamavi *et al* (2015) state that loyalty consumers are always eager in terms of advising theme park providers and circulate the high-quality word of mouth. Satisfaction of consumers is typically a distinguished purpose to theme parks and operators of tours, simply unhappy consumers cannot be reliable to theme park services and services (Dolnicar *et al*, 2015).

Ahrholdt *et al* (2017) state that some consumers do feel delighted when it comes to perceiving a surprising and high-quality of service that is provided, but it often it far breaks away to satisfaction. Bajs and Irena (2015) reveal an effect of pleasure on loyalty intents that depends on how pleasure affects the purpose of loyalty. Bajs *et al* (2015) identified major differences on effects of satisfaction on the intentions of loyalty.

According to Bufquin *et al* (2017), satisfaction also ends in huge hints to prospective clients. However, pleasure does not lead to high levels of repeat purchase underneath all situations in theme parks (Tripathi, 2018). According to Tripathi (2018), satisfaction is accountable for developing a consumer mindset in large part and it brings diverse service satisfaction that will impact the client's intention to buy the service again or show loyalty.

Cheng (2016) states that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are generated from service encounters and assessment of enjoying with expectation. According to Kuo *et al* (2018), satisfaction refers to the extent of an individual's pride or dissatisfaction that can be unmet expectations made by the perceived service or product to be good (Sivakumar *et al*, 2014). Satisfaction level or failure can affect a customer's chance to return to a vacation spot (Fotiadis, 2016).

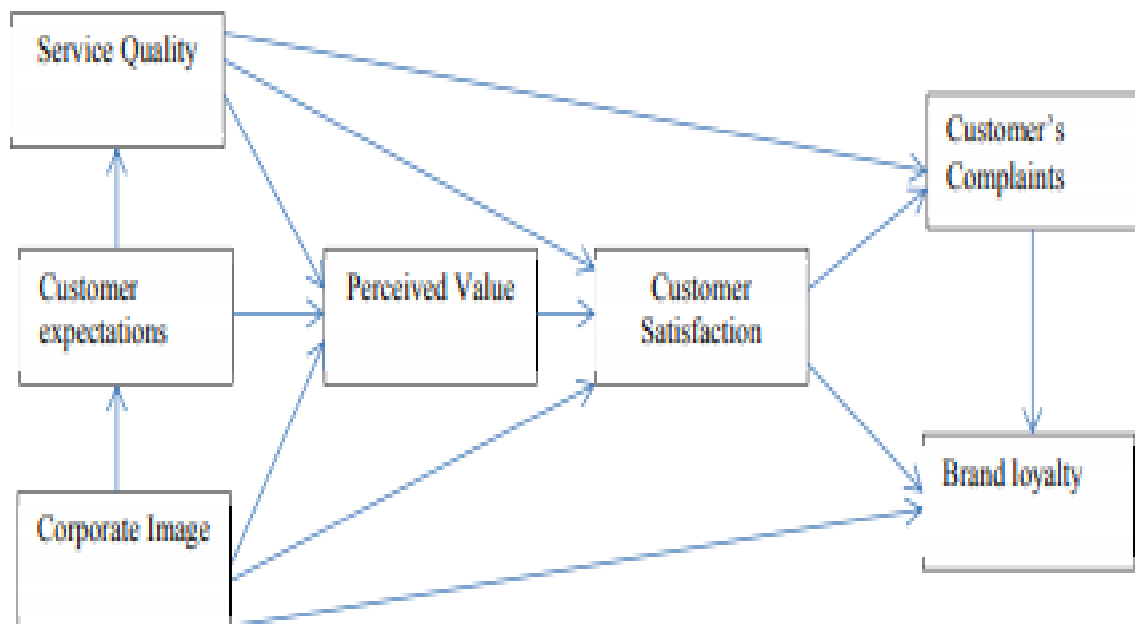


Figure 2.5: Customer satisfaction model

2.3.6.1 Customer loyalty.

According to Moura and Cunha (2019), customer loyalty is defined as the relationship between purchaser mind-set, repeat purchasing, and monetary performance. The main reasons behind customer loyalty are worker loyalty, and purchaser satisfaction (Othman *et al*, 2020).

2.3.7 Service failure.

Service failure is defined as provider performances that fall under purchaser expectancies and what might happen in the procedure and as a result of shipping (Pantalony, 2015).

Pantalony (2015) states that the failures in terms of service delivery between the provider and customers eventually reveals the customers' attitude towards the bad experience and that will lead to service recovery. The advancement of the tangible offerings in the park also determines the service failure or success; as a results, service failure can be found after the consumption of service.

2.3.7.1 Service recovery

According to Fernandes *et al* (2018), service recovery includes actions taken by host companies in reply to service failure of which it is inclusive of reimbursement and the way it is carried out to consumer-employee interaction, it affects customer perceptions. Migacz *et al* (2018) state that failures are inevitable in services and signify a challenge for firms while Proença *et al* (2017) contend that most of the activities concerned in service recovery are executed through the front-line employees and that they require flexibility to count on and adapt to customer desires and to respond efficiently. Fernandes *et al* (2018) maintains that customers tend to assess the recuperation system primarily based on performance. It is not the preliminary failure by companies that causes dissatisfaction, but the inadequate employee's reaction to the situation (Migacz *et al*, 2018).

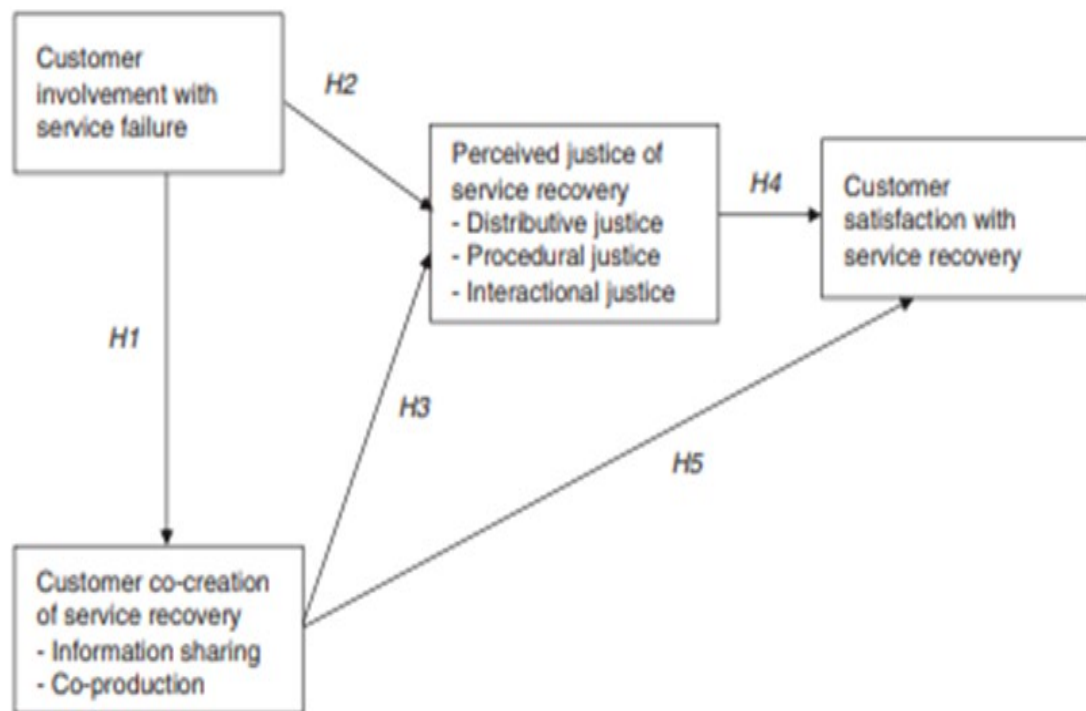


Figure 2.6: Service recovery model

2.4 SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN THEME PARKS.

According to Ali *et al* (2016), it is possible for customers to express their feelings towards a service received and impact the service value. In theme parks, visitors usually engage

with three kinds of people along with the service provider. They are their personal friends and circle of relatives, and different clients with whom they share the servicescape (Torres *et al*, 2019). The interactions between consumer and service industry employees can have an effect on the appraisal by visitors from both an attitudinal and affective viewpoint (Ma *et al*, 2017). Ahn *et al* (2019) argue that service related factors together with interaction with personnel, result in a client's pleasure through the introduction of experiential value. Ahn *et al* (2019) also state that a customer's perceived experiential cost is related to interactions from distanced appreciation or direct utilization of products and services while Mencarelli and Lombart (2017) say that the experiential value of a parks' brand is also associated with customer's impression earlier than arrival, at some stage in, and after intake.

Zgolli and Zaiem (2017) believe that interactions relate to touristic enjoyment as it is not often spent in isolation but in groups of diverse backgrounds. Zgolli *et al* (2017) argue that tourists eventually need wonderful engagements of a social manner with the creation of memories with family members. Schuckert *et al* (2016) state that societal engagement is referred as a great experience in parks for visitor related matters signifies the main purpose for a visitor holiday. According to Schuckert *et al* (2016), customers are always willing to explore new places that encourage social engagements, however, there is a possibility to expand bonds, alliances with unknown people and share good remarks of the park to some consumers. Sebastian *et al.*, (2016), find that whilst customers opinions on the relationship, and bond, makes the eager to spend extra period on theme park. Excellent interactions reflected in friendly attitudes generate positive customer feelings and add to the overall satisfaction with service (Sebastian *et al*, 2016).

Yin *et al* (2016) revealed that social interaction among backpackers seemed to be an important factor in deciding on backpacking as a way of travel; the interactions pursued can be useful. Nelson *et al* (2017) adds that theme parks attach great importance to interactions among visitors and primary-line service employees. In most instances theme parks require a considerable amount of manpower and service to satisfy the needs of huge crowds, and interactive advertising and marketing among employees and customers, so it is essential for theme parks to ensure the loyalty of their inner clients which can be employees, so as to grow their profitability and competitiveness (Wei *et al*,

2017). According to Alnawas and Hemsley-Brown (2019), theme park companies might also utilize exterior elements like communicating with personnel and the environment to steer the senses of the consumer, with the intention to enhance the utilisation experience of customers.

2.4.1 Staff-customer interaction.

Employee and customer engagement pertains to the dominance of direct and oblique interaction amongst a team of workers and customers (Ali *et al.*, 2016), while Ren *et al* (2016) state it is considered as a belonging of most service evaluations because of the inseparability of the service from employees. Workers and consumer interactions occur through numerous channels inclusive of physical, social media, and online boards (Stein *et al*, 2016). Personnel-customer interaction requires employees to display good interaction competencies, inclusive of friendliness, satisfaction, reliability and also useful throughout the service delivery process and levels is a purpose to supply an excellent first-class experience to customers (Stein *et al*, 2016).

2.4.2 Customer-customer interaction.

Customer and customer engagement involves the importance of perception on customer interaction the service environment (Srivastava and Kaul, 2016). Srivastava *et al*, (2016) state that while customer respecting the privacy of another customer, demonstrating good behaviour towards others positively have an effect on the satisfaction of different customers.

Customers who experience and respect interactions with others may enjoy sharing the environment with others during peak seasons while they are likely to be minded with different customers (Martin, 2016). According to Yin *et al* (2016), customers who perceive other customers as difficult can avoid the premises when the park is attracting too many or the wrong type of customers to theme parks. Martin (2016) states that some customers avoid rude or insupportable behaviour, undesirable noise, crowds, long queues, occupying a confined range of handy parking spaces, people who take up the time and attention of employees.

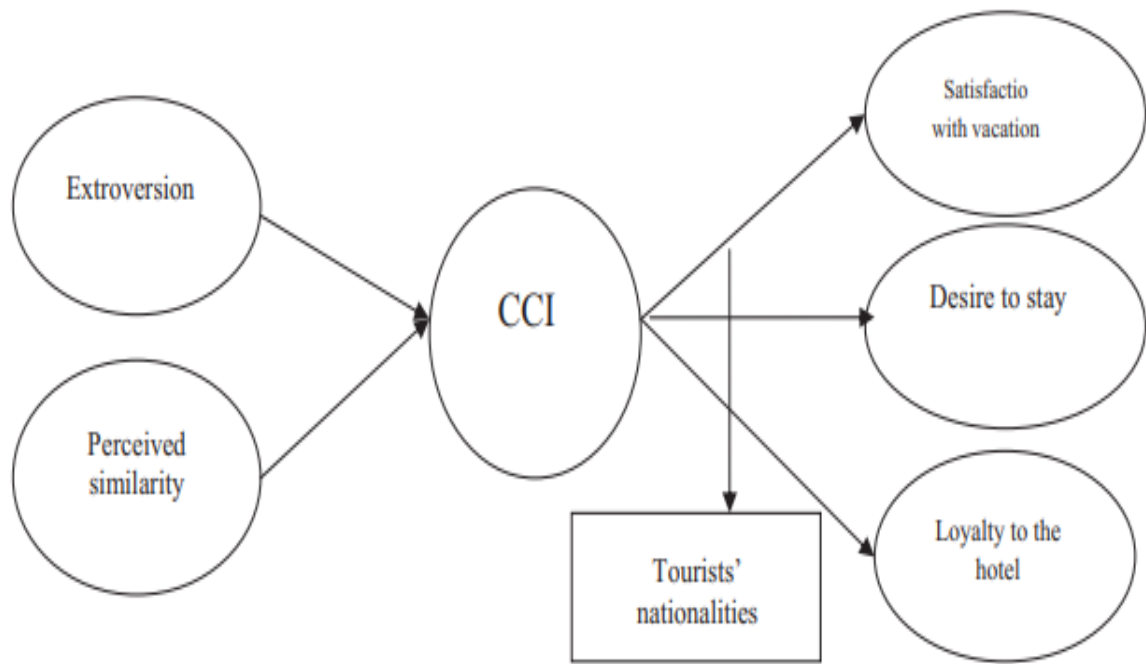


Figure 2.7: Conceptual model for Customer-Customer Interaction

2.4.2.1 The perceived similarity among customers

According to TripAdvisor (2017), similarity is a point where customers appear to share common traits to understand one another and co-exist within the environment. Consumers often develop an impression of different customers, and they take advantage of their presence as a gain (Yin and Poon, 2016). Similarity confirms that customers create relationships in order to make random bonds to discover others that possesses the same preferences (TripAdvisor, 2017).

2.4.3 Lifestyle

According to Yoon and Lee (2017), lifestyle include setting where a theme park can be part of the visitor's life-style and be able to help customers with guidance and existence in the parks' social environments. Yoon *et al* (2017) state that life-style experience additionally comprises layout-led, a stimulating environment, and customized services and products. Lifestyles of customers in parks pertains sharing experiences of the service in order to respond to their changing expectations and provide best services that are

substitutes to the service. The lifestyle of customers in parks creates awareness in innovation of the services to match their preferences (Yoon *et al*, 2017).

Stein *et al* (2016) state that poor pleasant from staff to visitor interaction will show a negative impact in the brand image and that may result in customer dissatisfaction and spread a negative word-of-mouth. According to Wei *et al* (2017), it is practical to expect to expect visitors to spread good remarks amongst other customers and staff about the service they received during service encounter with.

2.4.4 The extrovert.

Lee *et al* (2017) argue that extroversion represents characteristics of interpersonal assertiveness, sociability and confidence. People or customers with a high level of sociability are more likely to establish interpersonal relations, and also spend more time with people who prefer to associate with others (Lee *et al*, 2017). According to Shamim *et al* (2017), the degree of social engagement depends in whether others have similar personalities. Individuals with high levels of sociability are very self-assured, exceptionally lively and enjoy social engagement (Shamim *et al.*, 2017).

2.4.5 The desire to stay.

Stephen and Lehmann (2016) state that the satisfaction of service, and diversity of social and physical interaction is comparative to the period the visitors remain the theme park and to the preference to remain inside the location of service. Stephen *et al* (2016) found that consumers who liked the employees, liked to spend more time at the venue. Sebastian *et al* (2016) concur in that customers who develop rapport with individual employee are likely to spend more time the provider vicinity.

2.4.6 The loyalty to the theme park.

Xie *et al* (2016) state that advantageous social engagement among customers can provide an explanation for the dedication to the area and what leads to this loyalty together with enjoyment and trust. Xie *et al* (2016) say that visitors' dedication develops when there are offerings with great and strong opportunities for social engagement at place which include theme parks, and tourism services. Xie *et al* (2016) also believe that

the lifestyles of a high quality hyperlink between emotions of friendship and loyalty to the service provided in a theme park.

2.5 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Torres *et al* (2019) suggest that all elements of good hygiene should be present inside the setting of the theme park, while Ali *et al* (2016) also state that enjoyment may be as a result of the theme park's points of interest, service space, food service, interaction amongst consumers, as well as interaction amongst customers and employees. Fotiadis and Stylos (2017) contend that good physical amenities, such as rides, parking lot, clean space and also interactions between visitors and personnel as well as different customers are important, while Fotiadis *et al* (2017) say that intangible drivers along with a reasonable fee, security, together with different perceptions, inclusive of environment, preferred type of leisure, and engagement. Further to physical stimuli, social stimuli, like interactions with employees, have an impact on customer support experiences (Fong *et al*, 2017).

Babolian (2016) says that the primary impressions of the surrounding area, the satisfactory ambience and customer's emotions can be interconnected. Some customers feel satisfied by simply making a reservation or locating a parking space, enhanced by a first-class eating place. This influences a purchaser's loyalty, and it may increase profits and after recommendations by means of word-of-mouth (Chatzigeorgiou *et al*, 2017). According to Victorino *et al* (2016), there are critical features (tangible and intangible) in the service process which can determine how consumers view the quality of service, the major providers being personnel.

Ba-sarangil (2018) found that the contribution of theme parks to destinations in terms of sustainability with an intention to improve and invest on infrastructure helps to create a favorable environment for customers. Ba-sarangil (2018) describes some crucial features of theme park for customers as being the hygiene in the environment, control of queues, and fun ecosystem. According to Ngoc and Uyen (2015), the most vital factor in theme parks have high-quality of safety, and security as part of the service environment. Sung and Lee (2015) describe the physical space as a specific association of centres within the service surroundings for a particular function, whilst symbols or artefacts are those

facilities within the service surroundings that direct and form the behaviour of the visitors within the environment. Victorino *et al* (2016) emphasize the significance of the physical environment and state that giving customers exceptional service adds to the good service experience (Li *et al*, 2016).

Cheng *et al* (2016) state that servicescape, recreation experience, availability of information and support offerings, amongst others are important satisfaction components. Cheng *et al*. (2016) also mention that very important attributes affecting a theme park traveller's satisfaction are blanket safety and protection, price of tickets and knowledge of the park by its team of workers. Torres *et al.*, (2017) concludes that a theme park visitors' pleasure is enhanced by the park's reasonable food, costs, admission pricing. The hygienic state on the surroundings. Torres *et al* (2017) point out categories to quantify theme park pride which include the environment within the park, thrill rides, relaxation areas and good entrance prices.

2.5.1 Physical Appearance.

Hanks *et al* (2017) believes the physical appearance should have tangible traits, standard along with features of different visitors within the service surroundings. Visitors are also making suggestions primarily with regards to the presence of other customers, however, the happy customers are more likely to obtain enough pleasure, great experience reputation and trust (Line *et al*, 2018). Line *et al* (2018) focus on the immediate effect of other customers in terms of their presence, as this has an impact on psychological reaction such as enjoyment. Visitors often choose to associate with other visitors that decide on interesting physical attractions (Zhang and Shan, 2016). Different consumers reflect tangible evidence of the environment where service is rendered, and these reflect the physical ambience amongst customers (Zhang *et al*, 2016).

The physical environment is operationalised as an assembly of components which includes arrangement and ecosystem that could add value to a purchaser's insight into good quality (Taheri *et al*, 2020). Ali *et al* (2016) maintain that several conveniences can have an impact along with hygiene, access to facilities, food availability, sufficient car parking, and adequate space for resting. Tangible service environment value has been found to be important as customers show satisfaction of the environment through

customer's feedback system whereby clean and convenient places to comply with a design that can preserve main price (Yalinay *et al*, 2018). The fixtures, internal designation, and overall beauty of the environment is observed to add value on according to consumer judgments (Alfakhri *et al*, 2018). Atmosphere has additionally been found to be vital, ambience, lighting, and sound can make contributions to how visitors recollect the servicescape. Effective service environments can assist with showing similarities that are desired by customers (Alfakhri *et al*, 2018).

Meng *et al* (2017), state that regard of the tangible environment, the density includes the built environment, and it remains as amount of seating to the total space in the surroundings. Chang (2016) state that density of the social environment leads to the diversity of customers, at the same time they utilise the service within the environment. Dedeoglu *et al* (2018) points out that decreasing prices of the servicescape's physical surroundings creates a tremendous impression and long term pleasure to customers. Dedeoglu *et al* (2018) also suggest that a theme park is a tourism establishment that bring leisure experience that is perceived desirable. Baker and Magnini (2016) state that receptive approach can be created in the servicescape as it involves issues of the servicescape that need to be solved, while Kandampully *et al* (2017) describe a theme park as a shopping space that is made to arouse adaptive approach with the intention of adding buying possibilities for consumers. Baker and Magnini (2016) also say that an environment that contains favourable conditions and that is known as background of the environment.

2.5.1.1 Atmospheric

Stein and Ramaseshan (2016) state that a consumer's perception of the atmosphere includes emotional and tangible attributes as well as the environment while being in the theme park environment. Those characteristics include sensory elements inclusive of loud sounds, controlled temperature and visible designs which include indoor and outdoor designs, layout and design (Stein *et al* 2016). Ren *et al* (2016) believe that customers who participate in these varieties of activities are known to be inactive customers as they consume services without expressing their dissatisfying experiences.

2.5.2

Servicescape

Fong *et al* (2017) describes servicescape as the constructed surroundings inclusive of manmade features, the physical environment, or social environment affecting purchasers and employees in service organisations. According to Min *et al* (2017), a servicescape in a theme park setting is multi-faceted and complicated that includes various components of service consisting of amenities and the structure of the environment. Min *et al* (2017) states that in theme parks experientially design a servicescape for a period of planning, also changing, as well as monitoring with guidelines. According to Schuckert *et al* (2016), most theme park managers appoint experts that have knowledge of service environment and also help to maintain the theme park at the same time regulating and modifying.

Fong *et al* (2017) also argue that in amusement offerings wherein visitors spend much time, and the service environment have an influence on the behaviours of customers. Chang (2016) states that a suitably designed servicescape pertains desirable services, attractive interior designs, comfortable lighting, and sound, and unique odour and lastly, hosting customers in the built atmospheres pleasing desires and expectancies. In the hospitality field, servicescapes affect purchaser feelings and produce predictable customer behavioural intentions, and commonly centred on servicescape's physical traits (Chang, 2016). Similarly, to physical stimuli, social stimuli, like interactions with employees, affect customer service experiences (Fong *et al*, 2017).

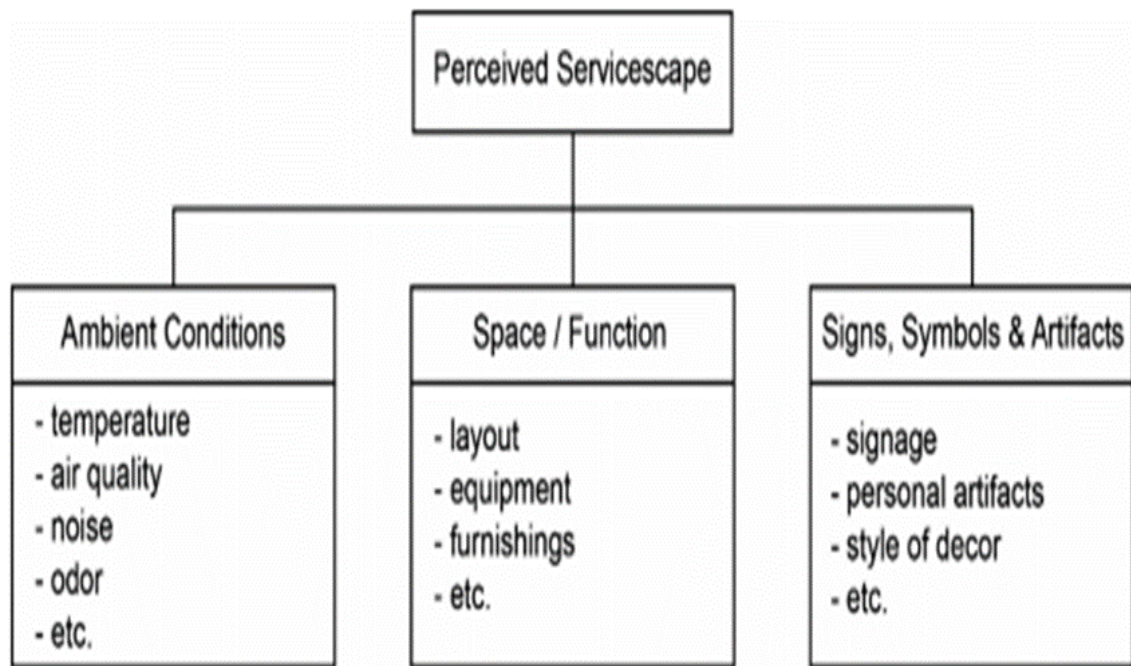


Figure 2.8: Environmental dimension for perceived servicescape

2.5.2.1 Social servicescape

According to Yalinay *et al*, (2018), the service environment no longer operates in silos, and societal issues make contributions to the perceived quality. Gannon *et al* (2017) state that the social environment generally incorporates fellow guests and personnel and is important as guests are seeking destinations that enhance socialising and also offer chances of engagement (Gannon *et al*, 2017) some visitors may give effective feedback if their engagements with other customers are pleasant. This can encourage repurchase and enjoyment (Sheng *et al*, 2017). Nevertheless, the attitude of some customers and their good engagement might go from relaxation and pleasure, and to dissatisfaction because of annoying activities which include waiting or queuing (Sheng *et al*, 2017). The design of servicescapes should intend to magnify pleasure by giving opportunities for effective social interactions (Colm *et al*, 2017).

Pleasant interactions between staff and customers enhances the service environment evaluation (Jensen *et al*, 2017). Employees' behaviour, and way of communicating has been found to be critical in enhancing the perceived service (Jensen *et al.*, 2017). The

helpfulness of personnel can as a result contribute to pleasure visitors' desires and challenges need to be sorted out in a professional manner (Woo and Jun, 2017). Employee attitudes have an effect on a customer's cognitive experience and pleasure when a group of workers overall make effort, displaying a helpful attitude and show competence. This can also produce visitor loyalty (Woo *et al*, 2017).

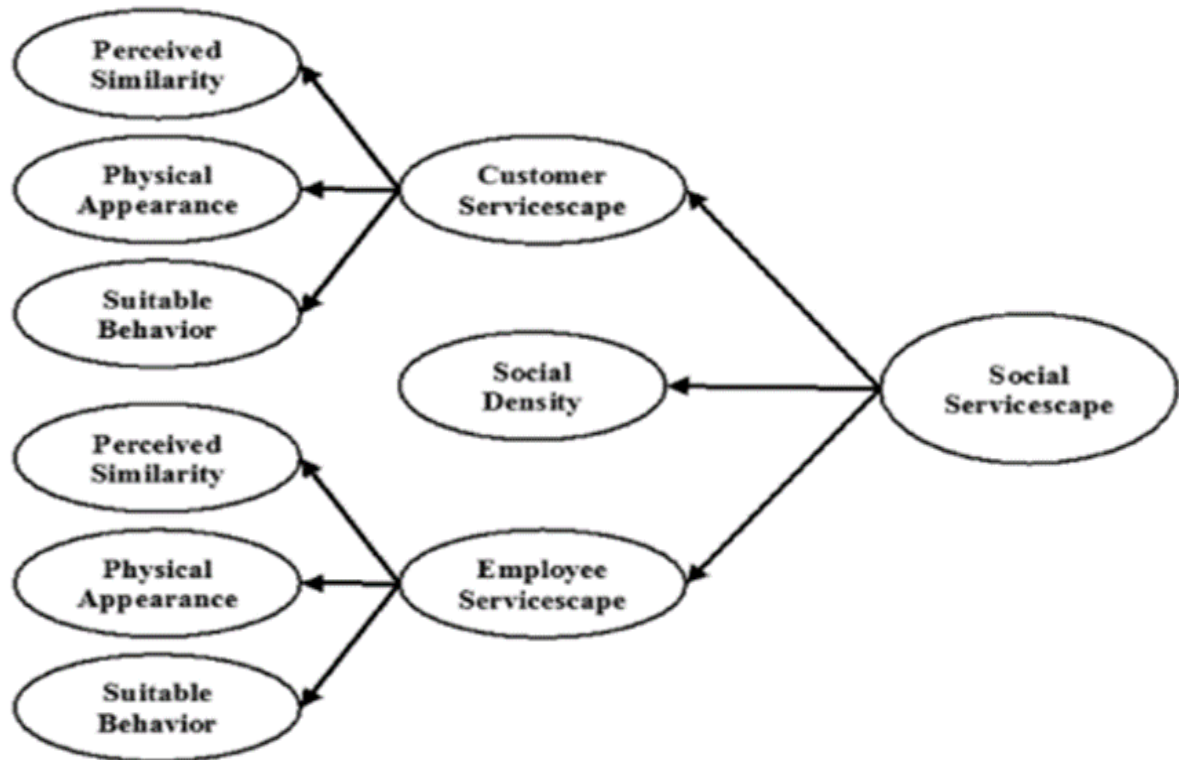


Figure 2.9: Social Servicescape model

2.5.2.2 Social Servicescape, Implications in relation to Customer Satisfaction

According to Morkunas and Rudien (2020), social factors in terms of servicescape are reflected as a positive factor to customers. Morkunas *et al* (2020) see servicescape as an environment that determines the satisfaction level of customer. Chung *et al* (2018) state that failing in terms of providing social aspects of the service environment creates bad image of the organisation and leads to dissatisfaction. According to Ladhari *et al* (2017), customers are understood to anticipate the implementation of service environment in terms of social features to show the provision of services exceedingly,

hence considering making the societal service environment measurement a crucial part of the service. Ladhari *et al* (2017) also state that aspects of social servicescape are an element of growing purchaser insight concerning satisfaction as well as superiority of theme parks offerings, while Li *et al* (2019) show that customer evaluation of experiential consuming of services are done through the social servicescape, and additionally results in good reputation in terms of brand image. Li *et al.*, (2019) also stress the significance of social servicescape elements in informal theme parks services by showing the key factor of crowding.

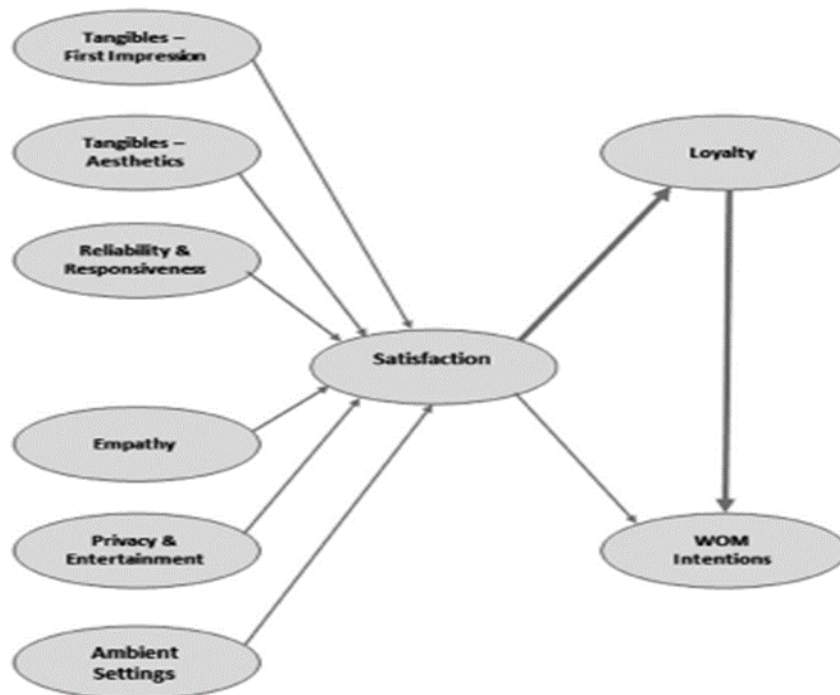


Figure 2.10: Structural model of Customer satisfaction and Word of Mouth

2.5.2.3 Employee Servicescape

According to Chan *et al* (2019), with regards to the personnel element in the service environment, its importance is lacking as well as evaluations. Olson *et al* (2019) state that the service quality is mainly determined by the relationship between a customer and an employee during a service encounter, however, the service environment contributes to service quality level.

2.5.3 Social density

Yalinay *et al* (2018) state that the capacity of people in the service surroundings plays a crucial role in the perception of the social servicescape, whilst the societal density of a servicescape may have a massive effect on client insight into service quality. Crowded places affect the perception of customer on service quality (Yalinay *et al.*, 2018). According to Yalinay *et al* (2018), the service environment and density is placed within the social service environment, and there is a gap between expectations of customers and their perception of service quality (Chan *et al.*, 2019).

2.5.4 Human density

According to Hanks *et al* (2017), the number of people or visitors in a theme park environment is referred to as human density. Hanks *et al* (2017) contend that a saturated environment in terms of population is regarded as a hotspot for events tourism as well as travel industry locations, for example, amusement parks. O'Guinn *et al.*, (2015), express the concern about excessive human density in theme parks which can have an effect on customers' perceptions depending on the environment and also the expectations of customers, based of course on what they value. Jang *et al* (2015), found that these perceptions had customers and their evaluations regarding crowding, especially in an environment where huge groups are anticipated, noisy or congested environments can evoke negative emotions (O'Guinn *et al.*, 2015).

Human congestion can contribute to unfavourable evaluation when the desired service in the surrounding environment is not met. Huge volumes of people can lead to negative customer reports under various circumstances which include eating places and theme parks (Jang *et al*, 2015). Crowded environments also can affect the time spent by visitors, avoidance behaviours, intentions of repurchase, enjoyment, and also level of spending (O'Guinn *et al*, 2015). An environment that is regarded as densely populated influences consumer suggestions in terms of other customers within the service surroundings (Razak *et al*, 2016).

2.5.5

Built density

Razak *et al* (2016) define built density as the fittings of the service environment and their effects on the theme park environment in the views of customers. They pinpoint three fundamentals of the service environment such as spatial layout, artefacts, and conditions (Morris, 2016). The density of the built environment in the service space can likewise influence purchaser insight regarding the quality of service due to its design, setting and not anything that is user-friendly (Roy *et al*, 2016). Morris (2016) states that customers contribute physical development of service space, at the same time they indirectly contribute to co-creating the service so that it impacts on the value of their perception.

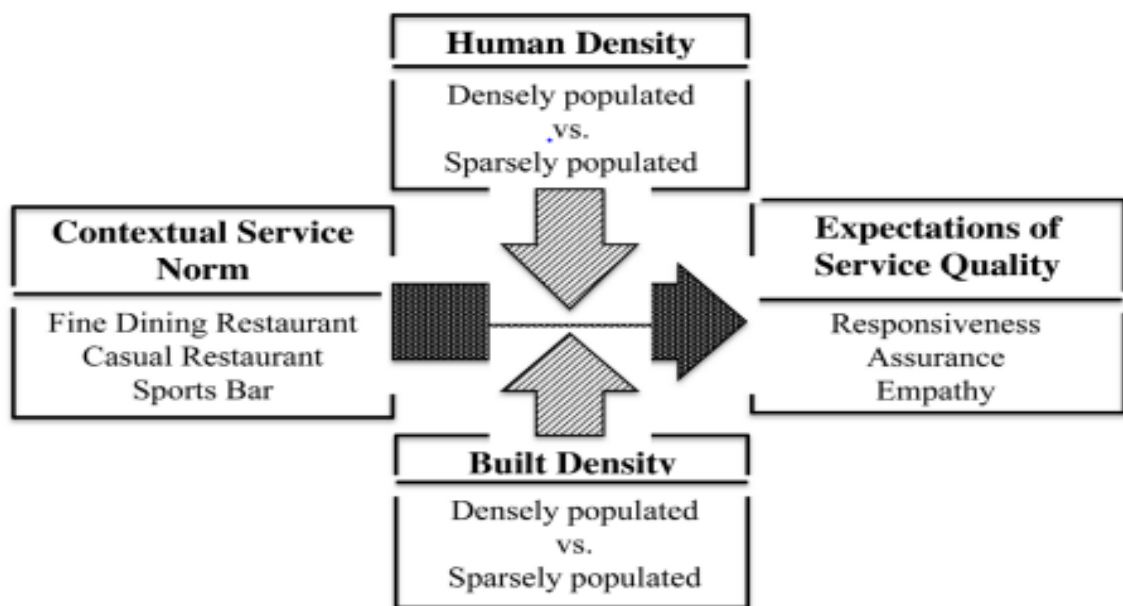


Figure 2.11: Conceptual framework of environmental density

2.5.6

Service quality in service environment.

There is uncertainty about the service environment in terms of estimating the quality of service whether it is tangible products or intangible service, however, theme parks play a positive role in tourism services (Morris, 2016).

According to Abdulrasheed (2017), excellent ambience, well-organized and maintained equipment and facilities, and good customer service are all important for atmosphere creation that leads to satisfied customers. Those are fundamental if management is serious about customer support their business in the future. Al-Ahmad and Ismaiel (2016)

acknowledged that customer satisfaction is a component of the connection between customer assumptions and experience; that satisfaction is dependent upon value and that it is formed continuously.

Razak *et al* (2019) argue that the effect of atmospheric experience on visitor satisfaction will help upgrade the capacity of the parks to emphatically impact visitor satisfaction and hence will allow the parks to remain competitive by creating visitor loyalty. Jamal (2017) concur by stating that the happier visitors' memories are about the ambience of their travel industry experience, the higher their intention will be to return and the more they will spread the word about their positive experience to other people.

It is significant for the theme park management to ensure their customers are satisfied with the products and services that they offer (Saudi *et al*, 2018). Razak *et al* (2019) state that understanding the sort of atmospheric experiences that sincerely touch visitors, redesigning the facilities provided and giving a choice, or assortment of games in the theme park, will lead to the retention of visitors and potentially encourage new visitors to attend. According to Raza *et al* (2017), atmospheric refers to the determination to plan the purchase environment by creating a precise, demonstrative impact on the customer to enhance buying possibility. Raza *et al* (2017) further states that atmospherics can be a marketing tool to incite positive behaviours regarding utilization circumstances where products or services are consumed.

2.5.7 Perceived similarity of the environment.

Nathaniel and Hanks (2018) maintain that perceived similarity includes of degree to which essential customers believe they have in common with consumers in the surroundings. Nathaniel *et al* (2018) state that consumers like to encircle themselves with visitors who have similar attributes; whenever visitors believe they relate to each other, they are likely to assess other visitors in a positive manner (Line *et al*, 2018). That impact can result in the idea that visitors are more likely to settle for a service environment where which is highly consistent (Hanks *et al*, 2017). Visitors often have enough comfortability on a servicescape when there is the presence of other people that share similar interests or share some common traits (Line *et al*, 2018).

2.5.8

Suitable behaviour

Bufquin *et al* (2017) argue that essential consumers may lack an immediate association with other consumers, however, the responsive behaviour of fellow customers is a significant feature of the societal surrounding. Proper behaviour can be characterized as how important a consumer believes other consumers in the environment should act considering the consumption setting (Bufquin *et al*, 2017).

Theron and Pelsier (2017) believe that interactions of a social nature amongst customers and employees depend on appropriate designated responsibilities. According to Olson and Park (2019), individual customers are capable of influencing and enhancing the experience of a service in terms of adhering to their role; improper behaviour in a public space, in any event, even where there is a lack of immediate engagement with crucial consumers can diminish perceptions of the business.

2.5.9

Dissatisfaction on service environment.

Disappointments are dissatisfaction with the service environment. The customer's assessment can depend on a single component in terms of the service environment (Sarstedt *et al*, 2017). Sarstedt *et al* (2017) state that this tends to be conceived based on neglected assumptions when customers feel disappointed in terms of tangible or societal components of the service environment. Ali *et al* (2016) state that essential arrangements, for example, food and comfort can likewise enhance fulfilment while quality that is inadequate can altogether affect loyalty and experiences of customers. Olya *et al* (2019) state that components that are referred to as functional in the service environment can be unsatisfactory; for example, unhygienic conditions and absence of knowledge usually disappoint visitors. Customer dissatisfaction be based on societal engagements with individual visitors, or on a customer's perceived dealings with staff (Sheng *et al*, 2017).

Visitors do always have insight into staff capabilities, or the skills required (Cordina *et al*, 2019). According to Cordina *et al*, (2019), customers that are not satisfied with environment can be guilty of consumer behaviour.

2.6 CONCLUSION.

Based on the data presented in the literature above, there is proof that there is sufficient literature that addresses customer service quality and consumer satisfaction in theme parks. The perception of customers of service quality and service expectations creates a responsibility for theme park planners and frontline staff to improve their service quality to meet the various and changing demands of customers during service purchase. Within the servicescape of the service industry, it is crucial to use customer's complaints and suggestions on actual serve as a learning curve to improve or match the perceived service. According to the literature above, service failure may lead to service recovery; theme park planners should conduct short surveys so as to avoid a crisis at a later stage. The pattern of customer service quality is generally tends to be in the assistance business and the travel industry; these businesses need to guarantee the enthusiasm for the piece of the pie. Service quality is an issue that most theme parks are cautious of and conducting environmental scanning is essential often to understand the influence of market behaviour.

Introducing and implementing a reactive approach method to market research will address problems during the service encounter. This is crucial in theme parks. A proactive approach means parks will have existing information of customer service encounters and experiences and concerns.

In the tourism industry or service industry, the amusement park's responsibility is not simply to contribute to the travel industry. Theme parks have obligation to offer satisfaction to visitors. It is also important to consider that theme parks are part of tourism destinations that hold a large portion of the tourism market in the service industry.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The reviewed literature in the preceding chapter outlined the significance of providing good customer service. This study was aimed at analysing uShaka Marine World's perceived service quality, with the aim of espousing strategies that will lead to customer satisfaction while also investigating challenges that the staff face with regards to customer satisfaction at this theme park.

In this chapter the emphasis is on the method of conducting the investigation and the attainment of research aims, as well as research objectives, through research questions. This chapter also addresses the method of investigating based on expectations, relevant research design, research paradigm, approach to research and tools for collecting data (Denzin *et al* 2003). Permission to conduct this study was granted by uShaka Marine World, with research appropriate research design and research methodologies, as well as research ethics being considered. The target population is well identified in this chapter as well as sampling techniques and sample size. The tools for collecting data, the process of collecting data and the method of analysing data is discussed.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Kuhn (2016) defines research paradigm as involving traditional beliefs that well-known as well as common ground that is mutually shared amongst scientists based on a problem-solving technique and understanding the problem. This study adopted a positivist approach, meaning that this study will rely on scientific evidence based on statistics. According to Park *et al* (2020), positivism depends on the hypothetico-deductive method in order to substantiate a prior hypothesis that is usually stated quantitatively. The positivist view was chosen because it is in a better position to satisfy the requirements of the research objectives.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Welmen (2009: 52) a research design refers to the entire plan linking conceptual research problems with the relevant practical research.

3.3.1 Quantitative research method

As already stated, this study will adopt a quantitative research method for data collection analysis. This approach is recommended by Bhandari (2020) who states that the quantitative research approach is used to deal with analysing and quantifying variables with the intention of attaining results. The quantitative method comprises the usage of numerical data analysis using statistical methods to calculate results. This method will allow the researcher to use only the quantitative method to satisfy research aims and objectives.

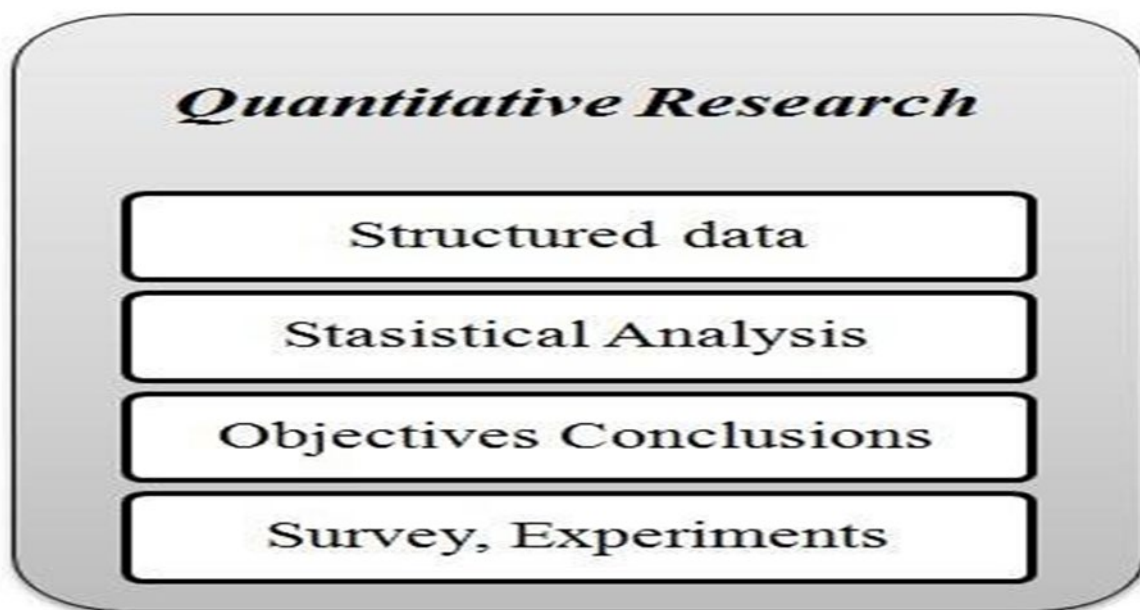


Figure 3.1: Quantitative research method

Bhandari (2020) outline the quantitative research method using the above figure. A questionnaire was distributed to participants and calculations were based on the responses.

3.3.2 Cross-sectional case study design

Bland (2001) states that the cross-sectional study design is easy to read. This study aimed to look at the quality of service for customer satisfaction at the selected theme park at a particular time. Kumar (2019:179), states that a case study design as a hypothesis is used when the case being studied is typical of cases of a particular type, however, one case can also give insight into proceedings and situations that predominate in groups from where the case has been drawn. This study focuses on measuring the perception of customers regarding service quality at a single theme park and the findings of the study cannot be generalised.

3.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The uShaka Marine World theme park is situated on Durban's Golden Mile in South Africa, and specifically on the coastal region of KwaZulu Natal. uShaka Marine is situated on a 16-hectare site and it was opened in April 2004.

3.5 SAMPLING AND SAMPLE SIZE

According to Dessel (2013), the sample population is a collection of individuals or items that are extracted from a population for measurement. Sample size refers to an appropriate group from which to gather information which can be generalised to embody the whole target population. The sample of the study comprises of park customers. This sample was used because this sample population held the most relevant information required by the study to address its objectives.

Purposive non-probability sampling is when potential subjects of the study recommended other participants to participate in the study. A purposive non-probability sampling was suitable sampling for this study as the researcher deliberately selected customers because customers are familiar with customer service satisfaction and the service experience. The purposive sampling procedure is also based on a researcher's knowledge about who can provide the best information required to attain the objectives of the study (Brink *et al.* 2018). This recommended sample selection method was selected due to its low cost, because it was simple to implement (Acharya *et al.* 2013).

This study has an aggregated total sample size of 384 customers from a total population size of roughly 2 086 332 (based on the 2018/2019 annual visitors' numbers) (uShaka annual report, 2019/2020).

Table 3.1: Population and sampling

	Total population	Sample
Park Visitors	2 086 322	384

The Krejcie and Morgan table (1970) was used to determine the sample size of the study's participants.

3.6 TARGET POPULATION

The aim of this study was to measure the perception of customers of service quality at the uShaka Marine World theme park in Durban. The target population comprises of individual people and groups, as well as situations to which they are exposed (Welman. 2009). The targeted population of this study were Ushaka Marine World theme park stakeholders, specifically customers. Customers are the key providers of information regarding the quality of service rendered.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION AND COLLECTION TOOLS

Data collection is defined as information that researchers attain through participants of the study. According to Kabir (2016), the collection of data refers to the procedure that involves collecting and measuring information based on variables of interest in an established methodical way that allows an individual to respond to stated research questions, as well as testing of hypotheses and evaluating outcomes. Adeniyi *et al* (2011) state that the tool for data collection includes a procedure whereby a researcher asks for information from participants.

The questionnaires were used to collect data which was formulated in a way that addressed research objectives of this study and elicited relevant responses to the

questions of the study. A letter providing information and a consent form was issued to participants prior to their participation in the study. The administration of questionnaires was conducted in a quiet area to ensure that the process is not interrupted. The completed questionnaires were coded to protect privacy and to ensure anonymity of the participants. Data obtained from the answered questionnaires were deposited in a sealed envelope that was kept in supervisor's office.

3.7.1 Measuring instruments

"Measuring instruments" refers to various methods through which a researcher obtains data from participants for research work (Chenail. 2011). In this research, questionnaires were used to measure the feasibility of the study. A pilot study was done to identify unclear or ambiguous items in the questionnaire and monitor the response rate. The pilot came positive, and all questions were answered without any challenges.

3.7.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from customers at uShaka Marine World theme park. The questionnaires were designed around the research questions stated in Chapter one. For this study, the questionnaires were distributed amongst the theme park visitors. The literature in Chapter 2 was used to help design questionnaires that were used to collect quantitative data. The research questions were linked to the researcher's interest in the perceived service quality required to guarantee customer satisfaction in a theme park. The literature in Chapter 2 was used to design the questionnaire based on the research objectives. The intention was to acquire knowledge in terms of how the park provided the desired customer service quality with the aim of creating a memorable customer experience through customer service.

3.7.2.1 Questionnaire administration

The researcher administered the questionnaires in person, due to the concurrent COVID-19 situation and therefore the participants were required to respond orally. Filling in the questionnaires took only a few minutes per respondent (Richter, 2009). The researcher remained neutral during the time that participants answered each question. According to Richter (2009), the researcher may not

interrupt or interject with own views or opinions during the questionnaire answering session, as doing so may skew the results.

3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

According to Smith (2014:106), validity refers to the degree to which the researcher evaluates and sets out to examine the data. Simon *et al* (2012:70) state that validity is when the survey present information that is required to achieve the purpose of the study. Validity is vital as it controls and determines what research questions to adopt and assists in ensuring that the questions of the study accurately determine matters of significance. The tools of research analysis are assessed by academics and the analysis of instruments is done by experts. The pilot study will have confirmed the validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

The researcher pilot-tested research instruments prior to full-scale data collection. This was to ensure that the questions asked actually addressed research objectives and questions. The pilot study was done using uShaka Marine Customers that were not sampled in order to enhance reliability of the instruments. The concept of reliability of the study is about consistence and stability, hence being predictable and accurate. Reliability is important and is to ensure that when a study is done repeatedly it should be able to yield same results. According to Yin (1989), the goal of reliability is to reduce the errors and biasness in a study.

3.9 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

According to Simon (2011), delimitations of the study refer to the limitations to researchers' ability that forms the margins of the research study, as well as limitations to the study.

This study focused on the perceptions of customers in terms of service quality in theme parks. This study was confined to uShaka Marine World theme park in Durban. The study sample population selected for this study was linked to uShaka Marine World theme park in Durban, located in the coastal region of KwaZulu Natal.

- The study sample population was limited to customers who are beneficiaries of the provisioned service quality.
- The findings therefore apply to uShaka Marine World establishments within the context of uShaka Marine World as a theme park.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical considerations of this research were aligned with those of DUT and were ensured as the proposal was submitted to the HoD (supervisor), faculty research committee, faculty research ethics committee and the institutional research committee. According to Joel (2016), research participants should not be subjected to harm in any way. Respect for their dignity had to be prioritised. The full consent allowing the researcher to conduct the study was obtained from the participants prior to their participation in the study. This was voluntary, therefore participants had a right to withdraw their participation from the study or refuse to give information (Brink *et al.* 2018:35). According to Rubin and Babbie (2005:8), the protection of the privacy of research participants must always be guaranteed. A copy of the information letter and consent form were issued to participants so that they were informed about the research. Consent from the participants was stored in the supervisor's office where they could not be accessed by anyone.

3.11 DISCUSSION

This chapter illustrated how the research was conducted, indicated the method that was adopted to select participants, explained the adopted method of collecting data and also indicated research approach. The research aim was to analyse the impact of customer service quality that was perceived by customers in the theme park to determine the desired level of customer satisfaction at uShaka Marine World. It looked closely at hindrances and accomplishments with a view of improving on desired service quality. In the subsequent chapter, more information regarding the data-analysis process will be presented as well as the research findings.

3.12 CONCLUSION

This Chapter outlined how the research was conducted, demonstrated the process used to select the participants, the method used to collect data as well as the approach. Data

analysis was done manually by the researcher and through the quantitative SPSS data analysis. The research aim was to measure the perception of customers regarding service quality at uShaka Marine World theme park by examining the impact of the physical environment, social interaction and perceived quality with the intention of adopting strategies that will lead to the maximum level of customer satisfaction.

The next chapter details the analysis process and describes the findings of the research. In consideration of the nature of the investigation and information from the literature, the study adopted a quantitative research method. Quantitative questionnaires were used to collect data. This was done to elicit clear, reliable and valid data sets. The research methods were carefully selected for relevance, validity and reliability on the study. This chapter, as a fore runner to the following chapters, and correlated methodology with the research aims and objectives, hence, it is open to accept uncertainty in terms of new findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents, analyses and also interprets the research findings based on the views of customers at uShaka Marine World theme park in Durban. The questionnaire as a data collection tool was used as a primary instrument to collect data. The questionnaires were examined and considered ready to be analysed. The collected data were expected to satisfy the research objectives below that are listed in Chapter 1.

- To measure the gap between customer desired service and actual service received.
- To determine how staff interaction impacts on the overall customer experience.
- To measure the impact of the physical environment as a contributor to customer satisfaction.

The SPSS data analysis was used to analyse the quantitative data collected through the questionnaire because the number of questionnaires was too big to handle manually.

4.2 QUANTITATIVE DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

This section of the chapter presents questionnaire data. As stated in Chapter 3, the questionnaire was to be completed by the customers of uShaka Marine World theme park in Durban. This research was conducted with the aim of understanding the perception of customer service quality regarding the service delivery that is rendered by the theme park. The research was also conducted to create new knowledge drawn from the perspective of customers.

4.2.1 Demographic of participants

The quantitative data collected was analysed and presented in the subsections that follow.

The demographics of this data consists of the gender of participants, age of participants, and the type of visitor within uShaka Marine theme park.

4.2.1.1 Gender distribution of participants

Figure 4.1: The distribution of gender of participants

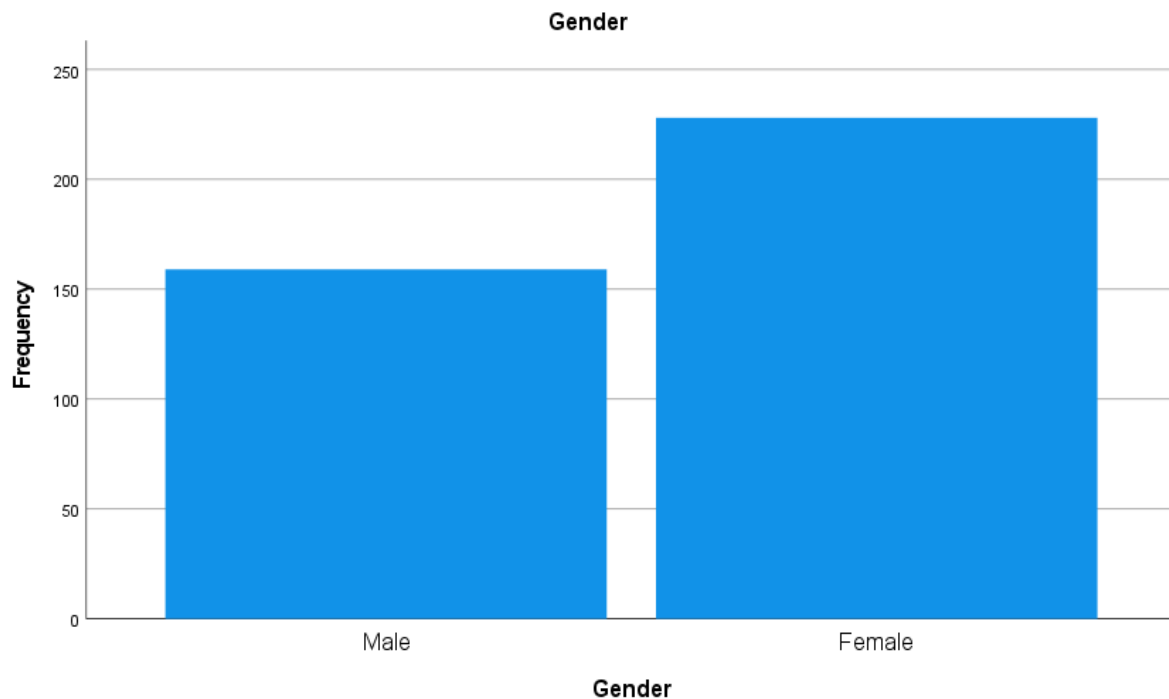


Figure 4-1 shows that the largest percentage of the participants were in the female group with a high level percentage of (226 females) that being 58.9% and the male group (158 males) being 41.1%.

4.2.1.2 The distribution of age group of participants

Table 4-1 reveals the age distribution of participants. The largest percentages of the responses fell into the 21-30 age category at 41.1%, followed by the 31-40 age category at 32%; the 51 and over age category followed at 9.6%, 20 years and less at 9.3% and the 41-50 age category at 8%.

Table 4.1: The distribution of age of participants

		Age groups			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20 and less	36	9.3	9.3	9.3
	21-30	157	41.1	41.1	50.4
	31-40	123	32.0	32.0	82.4
	41-50	31	8.0	8.0	90.4
	51 and over	37	9.6	9.6	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

4.2.1.3 The distribution regarding the type of visit made by participants

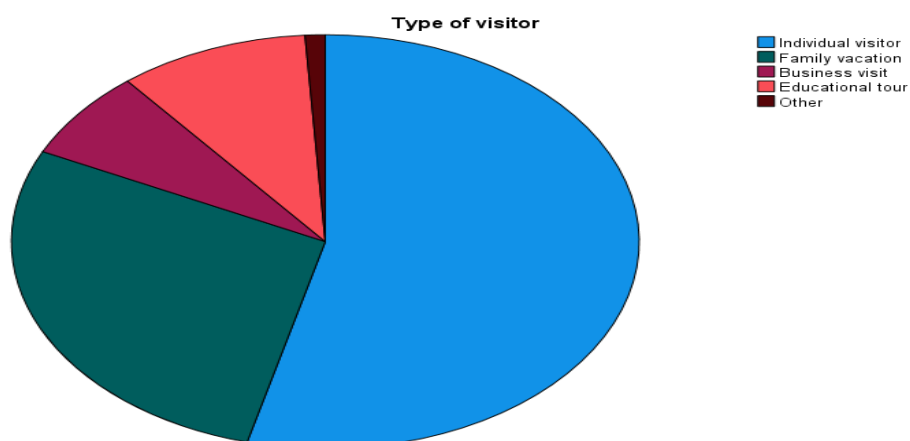


Figure 4.2: Type of Visitor: Distribution of responses

Figure 4.4 shows the visitor type distribution of participants. The largest percentages of the responses fell into the individual visitor category with a high level percentage of 54%, followed by the family vacation category at 28.2%, while educational tour visitors followed at 9.8%. Business visitor comprised 7% and others comprised 1%.

4.2.2 uShaka Marine World; visitors service experience

This sub-section presents the customer service experience at uShaka Marine World for visitors.

4.2.2.1 Is this your first visit to uShaka Marine World?

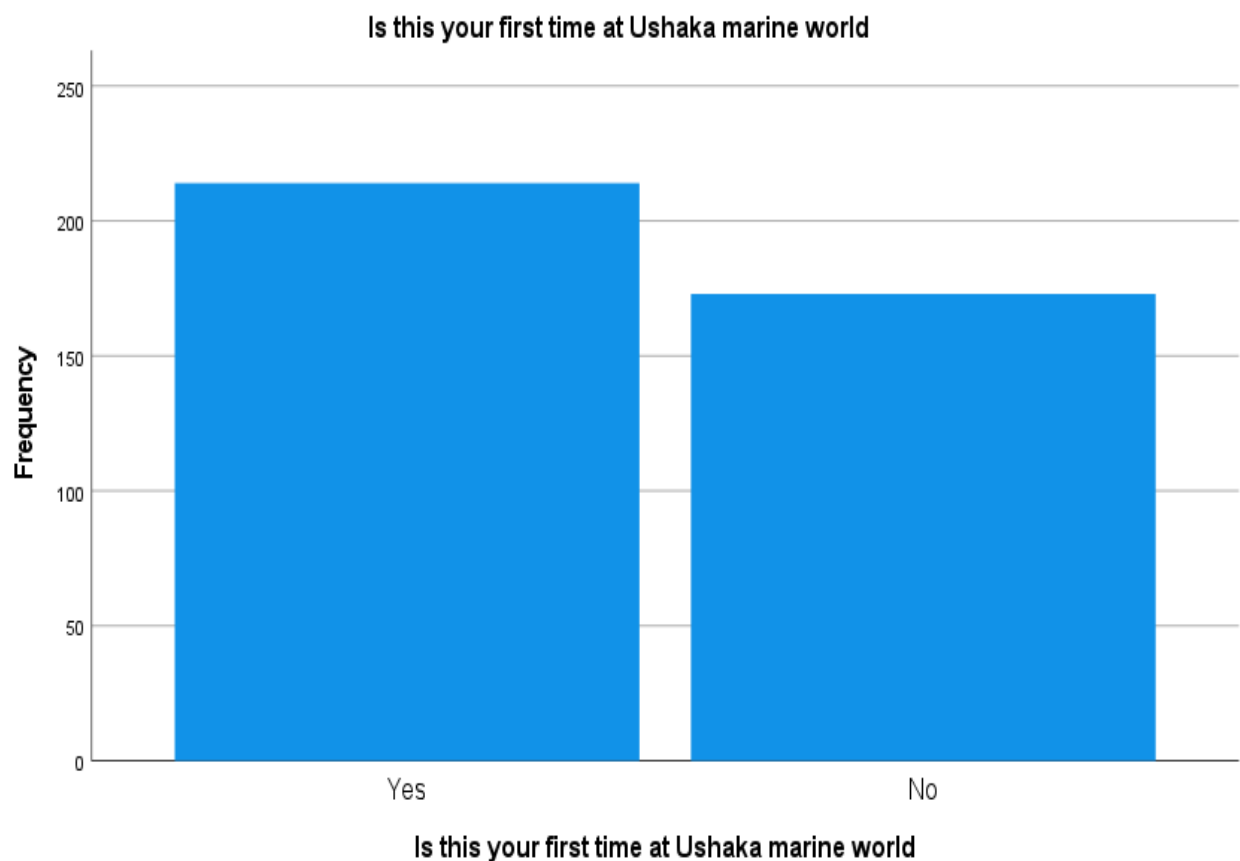


Figure 4.3: Is this your first visit to uShaka Marine World?

Figure 4.3 presents the distribution regarding first-time or other visits to uShaka Marine World participants. The largest percentage of the responses fell into the “yes” category (212) with a high level percentage of 55.3% and the “no” category (172) at 44.7%.

4.2.2.2 Before coming to uShaka Marine World, what level of service were you expecting?

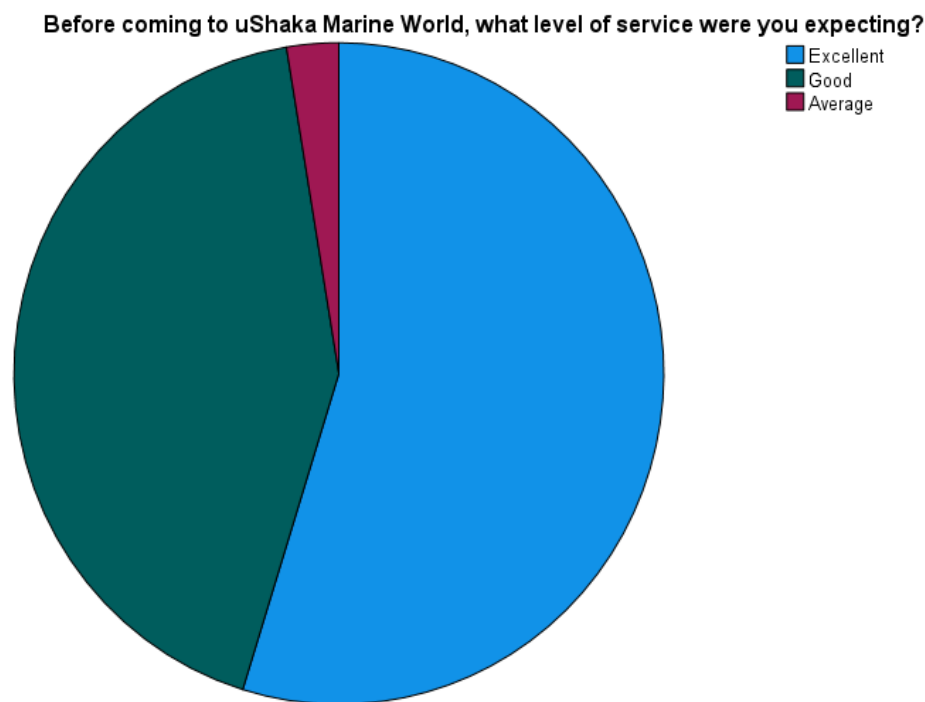


Figure 4.4: Expected level of service: Distribution of responses

The figure above illustrates the expected level of service distribution of responses. The largest percentages of the participants fell into the excellent category with a high percentage of 54.6%, the “good” category comprised 42.7% and the “average” category stood at 2.6%.

4.2.3 Rating of service quality regarding uShaka Marine World attractions

This sub-section illustrates the rating of service quality by customers from the perspective of their service experience.

4.2.3.1 Since visiting uShaka Marine World, how would you rate the level of service you have received?

The data regarding uShaka Marine World attractions, specifically shows the level of service received by customers at each attraction site.

- **Attraction one: Wet 'n Wild**

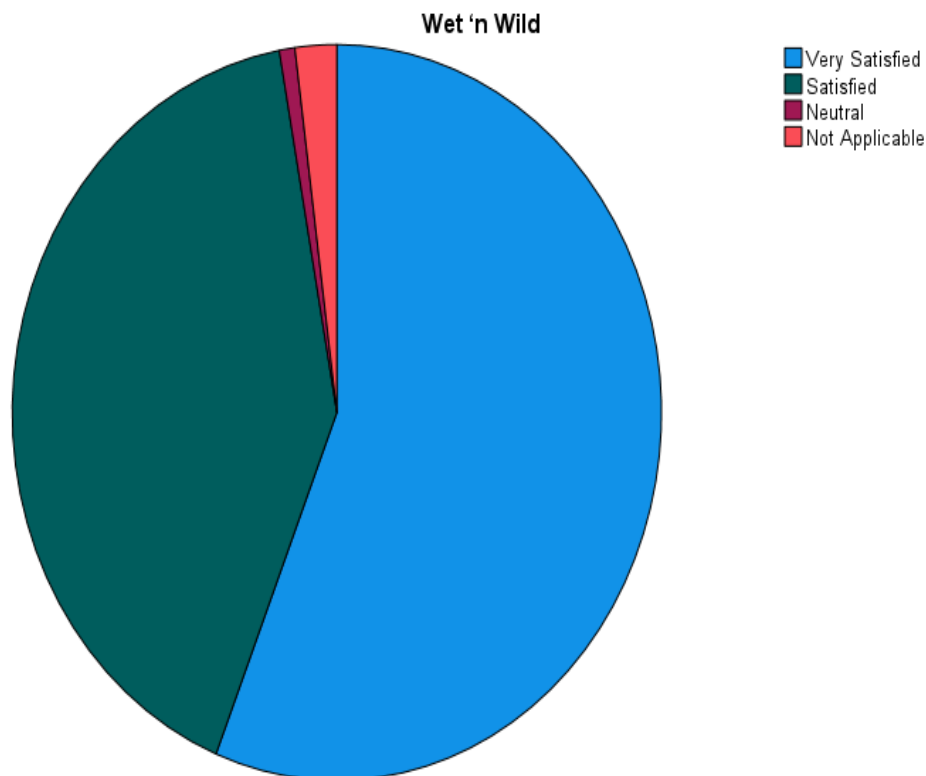


Figure 4.5: Wet 'n wild: Distribution of responses

Figure 4-5 presents the Wet 'n wild distribution of responses regarding service. The largest percentages of participants fell into the "very satisfied" category with the highest percentage been 56%, followed by the "satisfied" category at 41.1%, while "not applicable" comprised 2.1% and the "neutral" category comprised 0.8%.

- **Attraction two: Sea World**

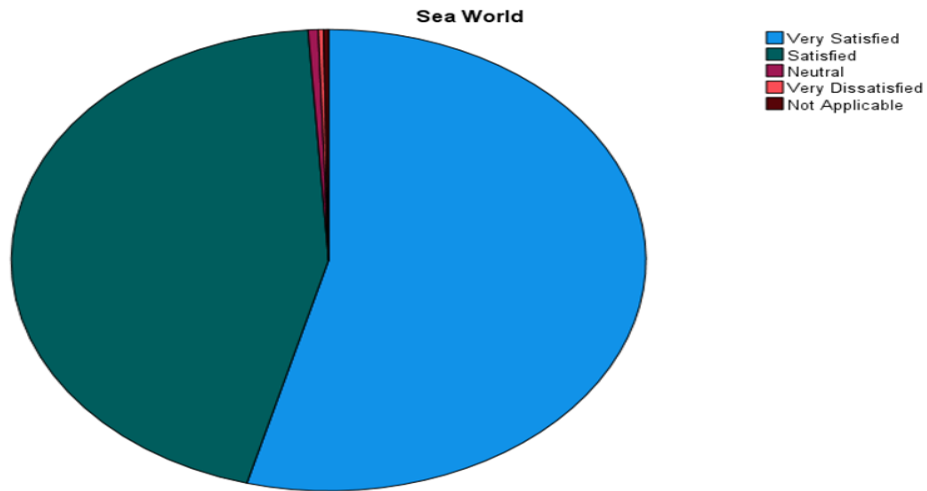


Figure 4.6: Sea world: Distribution of responses

The above figure shows the sea world distribution of participants regarding service. The largest percentages of the participants fell into the “very satisfied” category with the high percentage been 53.4%, followed by the “satisfied” category at 44.7%. The “neutral” category comprised 0.5%, followed by “very dissatisfied” category at 0.5%, “not applicable” at 0.5% and “no response” at 0.4%.

- **Attraction three: uShaka Kids' World**

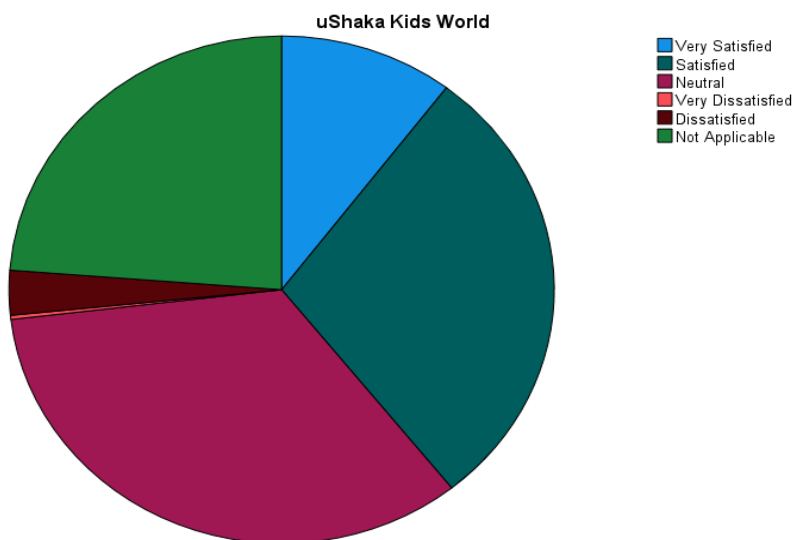


Figure 4.7: uShaka Kids' World distribution of responses

Figure 4-7 presents the uShaka Kids World distribution of participants regarding service. The percentages of the participants fell into the “very satisfied” category at 10.3%, followed by the “satisfied category at 28.9%, “dissatisfied” at 2.8% and the “very dissatisfied” category at .3%, “neutral” category with the highest percentage being 33.5%, and “not applicable” at 23.8%.

- **Attraction four: Village Walk**

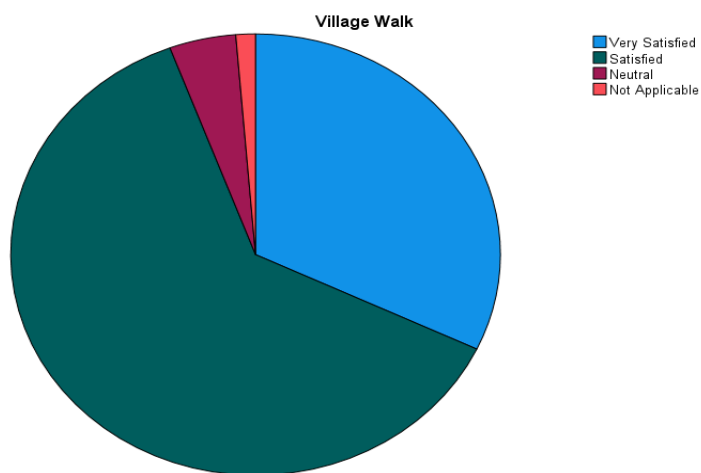


Figure 4.8: Village Walk: Distribution of responses

Figure 4-8 shows the village walk distribution of participants regarding service. The largest percentages of the participants fell into the “satisfied” category with a high percentage of 62.2%, followed by the “very satisfied” category at 32%, “neutral” category at 4.4% and not applicable at 1.3%.

- **Attraction five: Dangerous Creature**

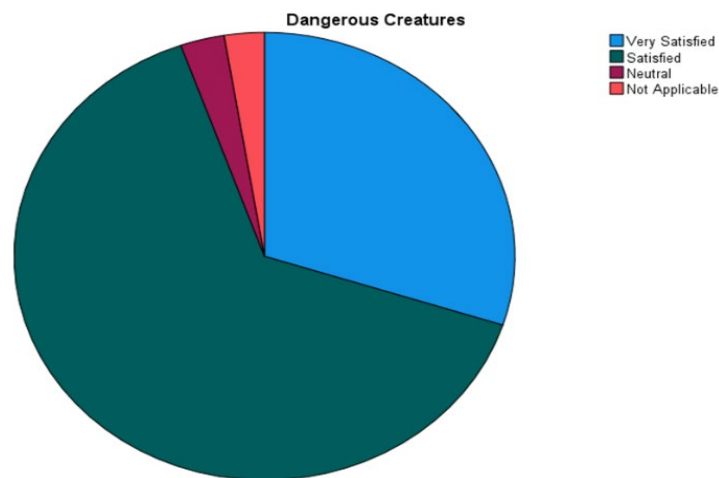


Figure 4.9: Dangerous creatures: Distribution of responses

Figure 4-9 reveals the dangerous creatures' distribution of participants regarding service. The largest percentages of the participants fell into the satisfied category with the high percentage being 64.6%, followed by "very satisfied" category at 30%, "neutral" category at 2.8% and "not applicable" at 2.6%.

- **Attraction six: Sea Animal Encounter Island**

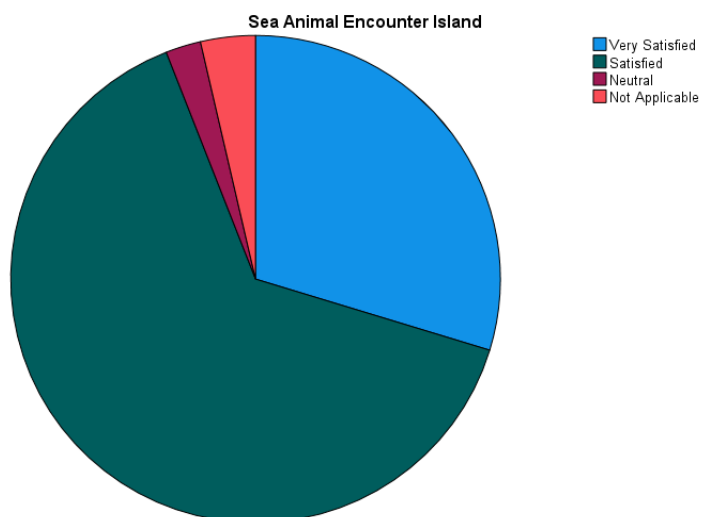


Figure 4.10: Sea Animal Encounter Island: Distribution of responses

Figure 4-10 shows the sea animal encounter island distribution of participants regarding service. The largest percentages of the participants fell into the “satisfied” category with the highest percentage being 64.3%, followed by the “very satisfied” category at 29.7%, “not applicable” at 3.6% and the “neutral” category at 2.3%.

- **Attraction seven: Food and Beverage offerings**

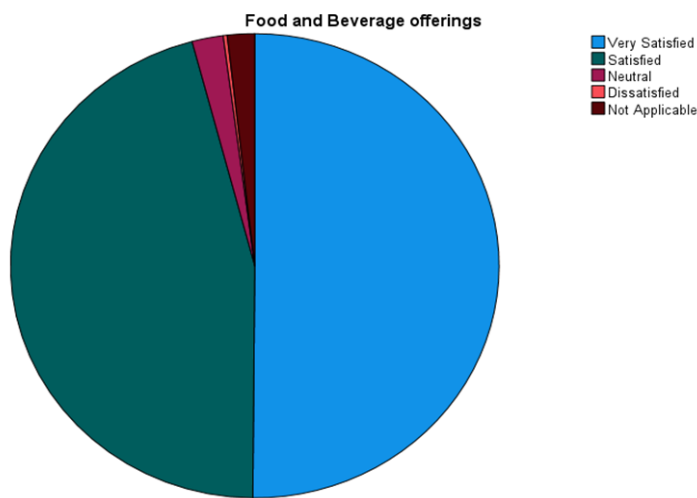


Figure 4.11: Food and Beverage Offerings: Distribution of responses

Figure 4-11 reveals the food and beverage offerings' distribution of participants regarding service. The largest percentage of the participants fell into the “very satisfied” category with the highest percentage being 50.1%, followed by the “satisfied” category at 45.7%. The “neutral” category at 2.1%, followed by “not applicable” at 1.8% and “dissatisfied” at 0.3%.

4.2.3.2 Revisit uShaka Marine World: Distribution of responses

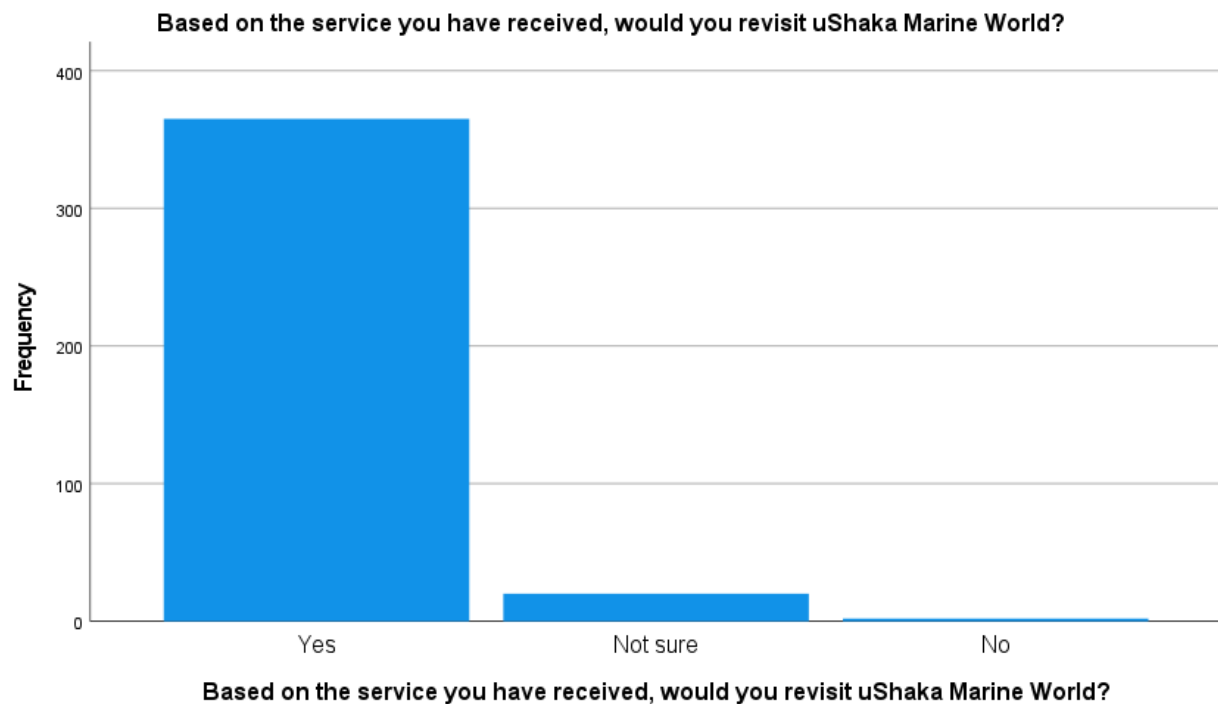


Figure 4.12: Revisit uShaka Marine World: Distribution of participants

The above figure illustrates the revisiting at uShaka Marine World distribution of participants regarding service. The largest percentages of the participants fell into the “yes” category with the highest level percentage being 94.5%, followed by “not sure” category at 5.0% and “no” at 0.5%.

4.2.3.3 How soon would you consider revisiting the theme park?

The table below shows how soon participants would consider revisiting the theme park. The distribution of participants showed the largest percentage of the participants fell into the “one year” category with a percentage of 42.6%, followed by the “one month” category at 39.5%, the “one week” category at 17.6% and “never” at 0.3%.

Table 4.2: Visitor considering revisiting theme park: Distribution of responses

How soon would you consider revisiting the theme park?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Valid	One week	68	17.6	17.6	17.6
	One month	152	39.5	39.5	57.1
	One year	163	42.6	42.6	99.7
	Never	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

4.2.3.4 Service culture at uShaka Marine World

Table 4-3 reveals the description on the service culture at the theme park and the distribution of participants. The largest percentages of the participants fell into the “good” category with a percentage of 53%, followed by the “excellent” category at 43.1% and “average” at 3.9%.

Table 4.3: Description of the service culture in the theme park: Distribution of participants

How can you describe the service culture in the theme park?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Excellent	166	43.2	43.2	43.2
	Good	203	53.0	53.0	96.1

	Average	15	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

4.2.3.5 Staff interaction with customers



Figure 4.13: Staff interaction with customer distribution of participants

Figure 4-13 reveals the importance of staff interaction with customer and the distribution of participants. The largest percentages of the participants fell into the “yes” category with a percentage of 92.4%, followed by the “not sure” category at 7.3% and “no” at 0.3%.

4.2.4 Physical service environment

4.2.4.1 Design and layout of the theme park being user friendly

Table 4-4 shows the importance of design and layout of the theme park distribution of participants. The largest percentages of the participants fell into the “agree” category with a percentage of 62.5%, followed by the “strongly agree” category at 30.5%, “neutral” at 6.5% and “disagree” at 0.5%.

Table 4.4: Design and layout of the theme park being user friendly: Distribution of responses

Did you find the design and layout of the theme park user friendly?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	117	30.5	30.5	30.5
	Agree	240	62.5	62.5	93.0
	Neutral	25	6.5	6.5	99.5
	Disagree	2	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

4.2.4.2 Conditions of park facilities

Table 4-5 shows the importance of park conditions and the distribution of participants. The largest percentages of the participants chose the “yes” category with a high percentage of 92.7% and no at 7.3%.

Table 4.5: Conditions of park facilities distribution of participants

Were the state/conditions of the park facilities to your satisfaction?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	356	92.7	92.5	92.5
	No	28	7.3	7.5	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

4.2.4.3 Theme park attractions

Table 4.6 shows the importance of the park having enough attractions to cater for various needs. The largest percentage of the participants chose the “yes” category with a high percentage of 86.9%, followed by “not sure” at 11.5% and “no” at 1.3%.

Table 4.6: The Park has enough attractions to cater for various needs: Distribution of responses.

Do you think the park has enough attractions to cater for the various needs of customers?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	334	86.9	87.0	87.0
	Not sure	44	11.5	11.5	98.7
	No	5	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	383	99.7	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.3		
Total		384	100.0		

4.2.5

Improvement of uShaka Marine World attractions.

- Attraction one: Wet 'n Wild

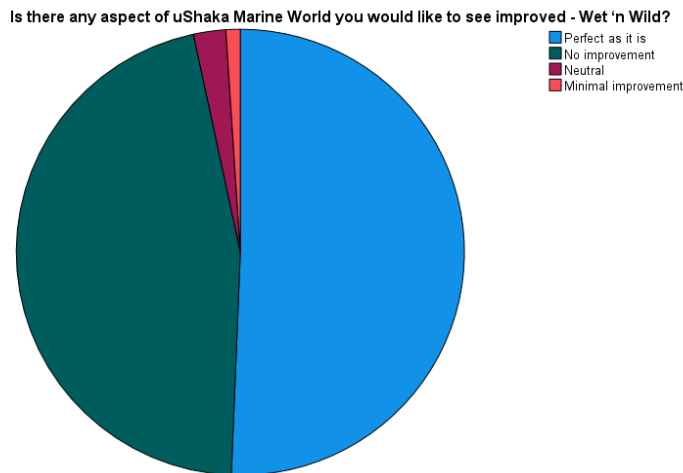


Figure 4.14: Improvement of Wet 'n Wild distribution of responses

Figure 4.14 presents opinions regarding improvements to Wet 'n Wild. The largest percentages of the participants chose the “perfect as it is” category with a percentage of 50.6%, followed by “no improvement” at 46%, “neutral” at 2.3% and “minimal improvement” at 1%.

- Attraction two: Sea world

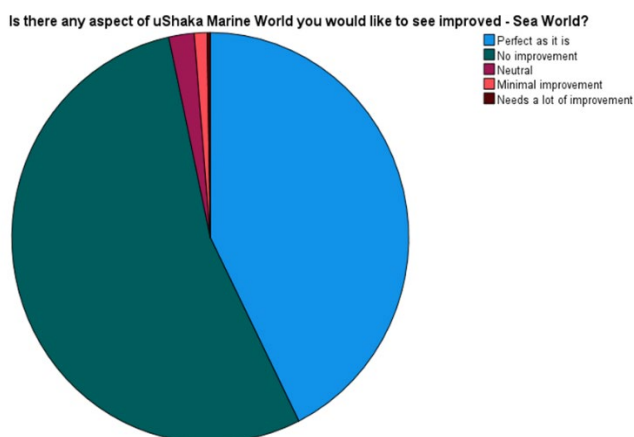


Figure 4-15 shows the improvement of sea world distribution of participants. The largest percentages of the participants fell in the no improvement category with a high level

Figure 4.15: Improvement of Sea world: Distribution of responses

Figure 4-15 shows the percentage of “no improvement” at 54%, followed by “perfect as it is” at 42.6%, “neutral” at 2.1%, “minimal improvement” at 1% and needs a lot of improvement at 0.3%.

- Attraction three: uShaka Kids’ World

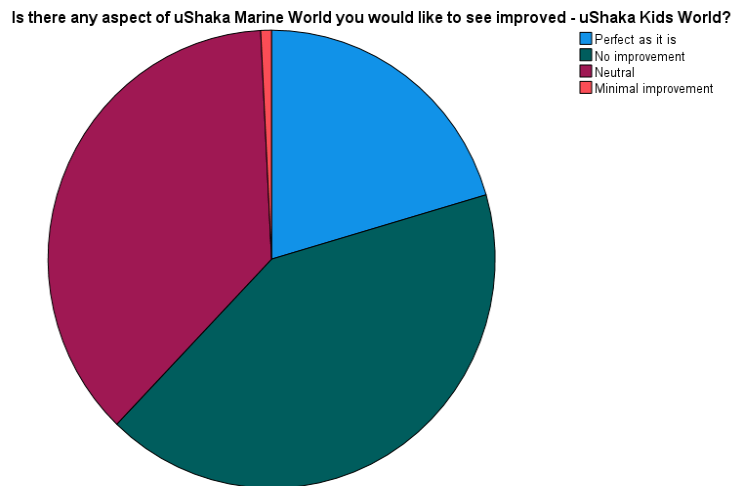


Figure 4.16: Improvement of uShaka Kids’ world: Distribution of responses

Figure 4-16 illustrates views about the improvement of uShaka Kids’ world. The largest percentages of participants chose the “no improvement” category with a percentage of 41.6%, followed by neutral at 37%, “perfect as it is” at 20.4%, “minimal improvement” at 8% and a “no response” at 0.3%.

- Attraction four: Village Walk

Table 4-7 shows the opinion regarding the improvement of Village Walk. The largest percentages of participants chose the “no improvement” category with a high percentage of 71.1%, followed by “perfect as it is” at 23.5%, “neutral” at 3.9%, “minimal improvement” at 1.3% and “needs a lot of improvement” at 0.3%

Table 4.7: Improvement of Village Walk: Distribution of responses

Village Walk: Is there any aspect of uShaka Marine World you would like to see improved					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Perfect as it is	90	23.4	23.4	23.4
	No improvement	273	71.1	71.1	94.6
	Neutral	15	3.9	3.9	98.4
	Minimal improvement	5	1.3	1.3	99.7
	Needs a lot of improvement	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

- Attraction five: Dangerous Creatures

Table 4-8 presents the opinions regarding the improvement of the dangerous creatures. The largest percentages of the participants chose the “no improvement” category with a percentage of 66.7%, followed by “perfect as it is” at 29.9%, “neutral” at 2.1% and “minimal improvement” at 1.3%.

Table 4.8: Improvement of dangerous creatures: Distribution of responses

Dangerous Creatures: Is there any aspect of uShaka Marine World you would like to see improved					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Perfect as it is	115	29.9	30.0	30.0
	No improvement	256	66.7	66.7	96.6
	Neutral	8	2.1	2.1	98.7
	Minimal improvement	5	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

- Attraction six: Sea Animal Encounter Island

Table 4-9 presents the opinions regarding the improvement to Sea Animal Encounter Island. The largest percentage of participants chose the no “improvement category” with a percentage of 61.2%, followed by “perfect as it is” at 35.7%, “neutral” at 2.3% and “minimal improvement” at 0.8%.

Table 4.9: Improvement of Sea Animal Encounter Island: Distribution of responses

Sea Animal Encounter Island: Is there any aspect of uShaka Marine World you would like to see improved					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Perfect as it is	137	35.7	35.7	35.7
	No improvement	235	61.2	61.2	96.9
	Neutral	9	2.3	2.3	99.2
	Minimal improvement	3	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

- Attraction seven: Food and Beverage Offerings

Is there any aspect of uShaka Marine World you would like to see improved - Food and Beverage offerings?

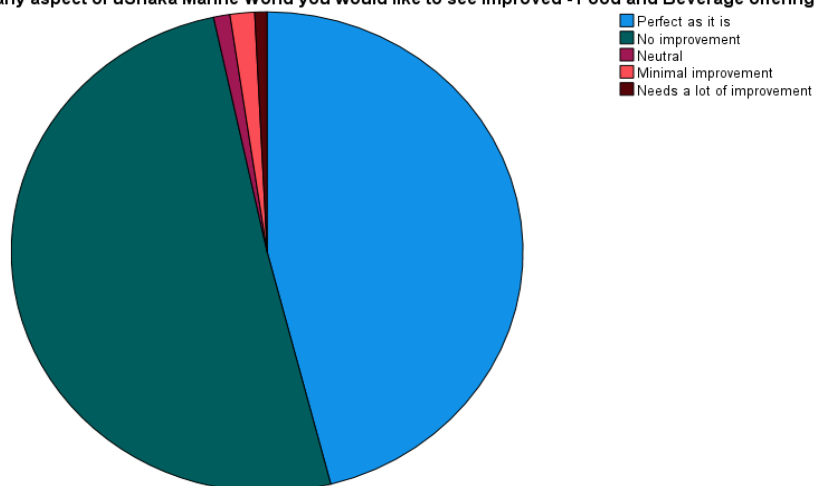


Figure 4.17: Improvement of food and beverage offerings distribution of participants

Figure 4-17 presents the opinion regarding the improvement of Food and Beverage Offerings. The largest percentages of the participants chose the “no improvement” category with a percentage of 50.6%, followed by “perfect as it is” at 46%, “minimal improvement” at 1.6%, “neutral” at 1% and “needs a lot of improvement” at 0.8%.

4.2.6 Investment in theme park improvement.

Table 4-10 presents the opinions regarding whether the lack of investment would deter repeat visits by participants. The largest percentage of responses fell in the “no” category with a percentage of 65.5%, followed by “not sure” category at 30.5%, 51 and “yes” at 3.9%.

Table 4.10: Lack of investment as a deter and to a repeat visit distribution of responses

Would the lack of investment regarding your suggested improvements deter you from a repeat visit?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	15	3.9	3.9	3.9
	Not sure	117	30.5	30.5	34.4
	No	252	65.6	65.6	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

4.2.7 Improvement of uShaka Marine facilities.

What kind of improvements could uShaka Marine World make?

Table 4-11 presents opinions regarding the kind of improvements to make in relation to uShaka Marine World attractions. The participants suggested improvements per attraction site within the theme park.

- **Wet ‘n Wild**

The participants suggested that the theme park personnel should introduce more attractions by adding more aquatic creatures, including more equipment and more sea animals.

- **Sea World**

The participants suggested the inclusion of 3D features in the Sea World section, adding more staff members inside to assist visitors around, having more creatures to view, updating tanks and displays, as well as adding more water species.

- **uShaka Kids' World**

The participants suggested the improvement in terms of incorporating a wider range of attractions based on age, adding more kids' attraction.

- **Village Walk**

The participants suggested improvements on by adding more and a better range of shops for visitors, the inclusion of genuine structures instead of replicas, more outlet food and the sale of Brazilian accessories which means there is a Brazilian market within the park. The participants also suggested expanding the space for more reptiles. The introduction of more interesting and more relevant shops.

- **Dangerous Creatures**

The participants suggested the introduction of more animals, enlarging the gallery space for more reptiles, and introducing more live animals.

- **Sea Animal Encounter Island**

The participants suggested the introduction of a greater variety of aquatic animals for more interesting viewing.

- **Food and Beverage Offerings**

The participants suggested the sale of Shembe food for religious purposes on the Sabbath, while others suggested the inclusion of an indigenous food menu, others wanted more healthy food, while some wanted a greater variety of food. Certain customers suggested the addition of Halaal food, more food stalls, and provision of Brazilian food.

Table 4.11: What kind of improvement could uShaka Marine World make?

Wet 'n Wild	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional attractions • additional aquatic creatures • additional equipment • additional animals • additional displays
Sea World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include 3D features • Add more staff members inside the venues • Add sea creatures to view and update tanks and displays • Add more fresh water species
uShaka Kids World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate a wide range of activities based on age • Add more attractions • Add more kids' attractions
Village Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add more shops. • Include genuine structures not replicas • Improve the range of shops with possibly more food offerings • Sell Brazilian commodities • Expand the space for more reptiles • Introduce interesting shops • Add more relevant shops
Dangerous Creatures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include more animals • Enlarge the gallery space • introduce more real animals • Expand the space for more reptiles
Sea Animal Encounter Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a greater variety of aquatic animals • introduce more animals (variety) • Add a variety of sea animals
Food and Beverage offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cater for people of the Shembe religion • Include more indigenous menus • Add more outlets selling healthy food • Having more food • Introduce Halaal food offerings • Introduce more food stalls and include healthier options • Provide Brazilian food • Add more choices of food on the menus

4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter gave an overview of the different responses in the quantitative data sets. It threw light and provided insight into the importance of customer service quality at uShaka Marine World theme park. It appears that some of the customers' views regarding quality of service cannot be determined only by tourism facilities; food services also play a vital role in contributing to customer service quality. Some of the customers at uShaka Marine World confirmed that adding employees within the attraction sites as guides could improve the level of service quality and customer satisfaction.

Chapter three presented the research methodology and research design of the study which included the adopted data collection method to use when collecting data from uShaka Marine World customers. (Quantitative questionnaires were used to collect data from the customers).

This study discovered that staff interaction with customers was very important and could enhance the desired experience of customers during service encounters. Employee visibility helps to increase customer satisfaction in theme parks by providing information and guide to customers as part of the tourism experience.

The physical environment and layout of theme parks assists customers to navigate the area easily and be able to locate other attractions within the theme park. This study revealed that customers were satisfied with the variety of attractions that appealed to the different needs of customers. Most customers were eager to revisit the theme park even if their suggested improvements were not considered, however, some customers confirmed that the lack of investment in improvements could determine their decision to revisit the site.

In all, findings presented in this chapter have illustrated that different attraction areas of uShaka Marine World needs some minimal improvement to meet the needs of customers. Chapter 5 provides a summary of these findings linked to the research objectives and the aim of the study. Chapter 5 also highlights the recommendations based on findings, the contribution of the study and areas for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, RECCOMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the study aimed to assess the findings of the study as presented in chapter four regarding the research objectives. This chapter is important because it links the entire research project including the research objectives, the literature, methodology and data collection. It also identifies projects for further research. According to Clark *et al* (2015), the goal of the findings is to provide the interpretation of the outcomes which relate to all preceding chapters. This study aimed to measure customers' perceptions of uShaka Marine World regarding customer service within the theme park. It aimed at investigating customers' perceptions of service quality and evaluating the satisfaction level.

5.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND FINDINGS

As stated in chapter one, the aim of this study was to measure the perception of customers regarding service quality at uShaka Marine World theme park. The findings of the study are discussed in relation to each objective. The research aimed to fulfill the following three research objectives used to structure the presentation of the findings.

5.2.1 To measure the gap between customer desired service and actual service received

✓ Theoretical findings

The study found through the review of the literature that customer service quality is considered to be a major factor regarding theme park customer relationship with staff and customer experience. The quality of service is mostly enhanced based on expectations of services and perceptions of the service provided (Hussain, 2015). The study also found that customers often assessed the quality of services by comparing what they wanted or assumed to what they actually received.

Chen (2019) states that the best quality of service depend on the consumer's appraisal of the effort of the theme park employees, and whether the effort suits the desires of customers and their anticipation of outcomes. This ultimately enhances their repurchase decisions. The study also revealed that the provision of best quality service was tricky to estimate and the expected service performance can be actually compared with the process involving evaluation of the service delivered. Ban *et al* (2017) argue that having an insight into the desired quality of service helps with useful knowledge and qualities of a theme park, and visitors' opinions may be the priority when advancing customers fulfilment within theme park. The study revealed that the visitors' opinions on the total value of the quality of service could be measured. This encompasses technical quality such as the delivered services and also functional quality, which is how the services are rendered.

The study used a service quality model that consists of 3 elements, they being engagement between customers and employees in the environment and the result of the service rendered. Ang *et al* (2015) contend that quality of engagement is determined by a psychological response such as attitude as well as pleasing surroundings, condition of the environment, layout, and lastly, aspects of a societal nature. Alshaibani *et al* (2017) state that some of these aspects have a meaningful, desired impact on the quality of services to theme parks.

This study also revealed that the desired quality of service can be categorized into two sections which are: technical and functional quality. Technical satisfaction comprises the delivered service such as food quality while functional high-quality pertains to psychological and behavioural factors and the manner in which service is delivered to consumers through contact and surroundings. Alshaibani *et al*, (2017) attest to the view that the functional aspect is even more important than the technical aspect.

It is also believed that elements such as negative hygiene visitor experience affects their perceived best encounter with regards to desired experience of services, and undesired aspects can affect a visitor's depth of satisfaction (Fotiadis, 2016). Hall (2016) maintains congenial feelings towards tourism organisation having an impact on fulfilment as well as good behaviour at this site.

✓ Empirical findings

The study revealed that most customer expected excellent service from theme park service providers, however, sometimes it is difficult for theme park planners to design and cater for the various and changing needs of customers. This study found that “*Dangerous Creatures*” at uShaka Marine World reflected the highest satisfaction rate at 64.6% of all the attractions within the theme park.

As regard repeat visits, the study found that 42.6% of participants were likely to revisit uShaka Marine World after a year, while 39.5% of the participants were likely to revisit in a month, also 17.6% of the participants would visit within one week, and lastly, about 0.3% of the participants were not likely to visit again.

5.2.2 To determine how staff interaction impacts on the overall customer experience

✓ Theoretical findings

The literature connected found that the interactions between consumer and service industry employees can have an effect on the appraisals done by visitors both from an attitudinal and affective viewpoint. The study also revealed that interactions in theme parks related to touristic enjoyment as it is not often spent in isolation but in groups of diverse backgrounds.

The literature also shows that employee to customer engagement involves the dominance of direct and oblique interplay amongst team of workers and the clients. Workers to consumer interactions occur through numerous channels inclusive of physical interaction, social media, on line boards (Stein *et al*, 2016). Stein (2016) reveals that personnel-customer interaction requires employees to display proper interaction competencies inclusive of friendliness providing satisfaction, reliability and also useful throughout these streams and levels there has to be a purpose to supply an exceptional, first-class experience to customers.

The literature found that pleasant customer to customer social interaction is perceived to enhance customer engagement among one another within the service environment. The

literature also found that customers that experience and enjoy good social interactions with like-minded customers were likely to enjoy the customer experience.

On the other hand, the literature revealed that customers that perceived other customers as tricky during social interaction may also avoid the premises if they felt the theme park was attracting too many or the wrong type of customers.

According to Stein *et al.*, (2016), unpleasant staff to visitor social engagement can have a damaging impact on opinions of consumers. The literature reveals that the pleasantness of service, and diversity of social and physical interaction is more important comparatively, then time spent inside the location of service.

The literature found that advantageous social engagement among customers at the destination could provide an explanation for greater devotion on the area than features is and what leads to this loyalty together with delight and trust. Xie *et al* (2016) state that a visitor's dedication develops when offerings involve contact and a strong opportunity for social engagement, which can be provided by tourism services.

The literature noted a high quality hyperlink between emotions of friendship and loyalty to the service provided in a theme park and lifestyles and social consciousness can also be linked to dedication to the service.

✓ Empirical findings

The findings revealed staff interaction with participants in that about 92.4% of the participants agreed that staff interaction with customers had a good impact on customer service quality, while 7.3% of the participants disagreed, and 0.3% of the participants were not sure.

5.2.3 To measure the impact of the physical environment as a contributor to customer satisfaction

✓ Theoretical findings

The literature of the study revealed that standards of hygiene had to be acceptance at a theme park. Ali *et al* (2016) also state that awesome feelings may be as a result of the

theme park's points of interest, service space, food service, interaction amongst consumers, as well as interaction amongst customers and employees.

The study noted that physical amenities included physical surroundings, such as rides, a parking lot, clean space and also interactions of visitors with personnel as well as different customers along with a perceived fee, and protection, together different perceptions inclusive of environment, preferred leisure, immersion, and surprise. The literature of the study also found that physical stimuli, social stimuli, such as interactions with employees, had an impact on customer support experiences. Chatzigeorgiou *et al.* (2017) state that excellent quality at food venues influences a purchaser's loyalty. This may increase profits and wonderful recommendations by word-of-mouth.

The study found that the contribution of theme parks to destinations in terms of sustainability with an intention to improve and invest in infrastructure was important. The literature of the study also listed some crucial functions for theme park customers as being good hygiene in the environment, control of queues, and a fun environment. The study emphasizes the significance of an acceptable physical environment and good service. Tangible cues serve to give customers a concept of exceptional of service as part of the service experience.

Torres *et al* (2017) point out six categories to quantify the service environment which include the environment within the park, thrill rides, ranges of crowding experience, relaxation areas and good entrance prices. The study found that visitors enjoyed the presence of others.

The literature revealed that a physical environment is operationalised as an assembly of components which includes a format, ecosystem that could add value to purchaser insight on high quality, while tangible service environment value could be located in customer feedback. The study also ascertained that internal design and the overall beauty of the environment is observed to add value to consumer discernments regarding high quality. Fong *et al* (2017) also maintain that in amusement offerings wherein visitors spend much time. The reviewed literature found that a suitably designed servicescape is reflected in tasteful tangible centres, attractive interior designs, comfortable lighting, sounds, and

unique fragrances and inviting customers into the constructed environment that please desires and expectancies.

The study pointed out that customers at times respond with negative emotions, which include anger, mistrust, and contempt whenever they come across noise polluted surroundings in tourism facilities which they did not assume would be noisy or congested. It also revealed that the density on the built environment servicespace can likewise influence purchaser insight into the quality of service due to its design, setting and not being user-friendly. The reviewed literature also found that the atmosphere affected the experience of visitors and the upgrading the capacity of the parks allow parks to remain competitive by creating visitor loyalty. Jamal (2017) believes that visitors who have wonderful memories of the ambience during their travel industry experience, will return and spread the news of their positive experience to other people.

✓ Empirical findings

The findings of the study revealed the design and layout of the theme park to be user friendly participants. According to the most as 62.5% of the participants agreed that the layout of the theme park was user friendly, and 30.5% of the participants strongly agreed, 6.5% were neutral, and lastly, 0.5% disagreed. The findings of the study revealed that the majority (92.7%) of the participants agreed that the state and conditions of the park facilities were to their satisfaction, while 7.3% of the participants disagreed.

The findings revealed that the largest portion (86.9%) of the participants agreed that the park had enough attractions to cater for the various needs of customers, while 11.5% were not sure, and 1.3% disagreed. The study revealed that there was a 0.3% missing error response.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study raised questions that need to answer through further research. According to this literature, the study of customer service quality has been an on-going concern over the years, especially within the tourism industry under which theme parks belong. Through the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

Based on the findings, customer service quality should be a priority for theme parks in order to increase the market share and enhance customer loyalty. According to Yelkur (2016), creating memorable experiences in theme parks through customer service quality is crucial in keeping old customers and attracting new customers. Theme park cleaners should consider suggestions of customers when planning on creating the service environment. The findings recommended that theme parks should recruit more staff to provide adequate services for customers.

The study found that regarding the different attractions within uShaka Marine World suggestions for improvements were made by customer. The customers clearly made recommendations based on wanting to improve the attractions to enhance customer satisfaction. The following suggestions were made by participants:

5.3.1 Suggestions of the study

The participants suggested that the theme park management should introduce more attractions by adding more aquatic creatures, more equipment, and by introducing more animals. The participants suggested the inclusion of 3D features in the sea world section, more staff members inside to assist visitors, introducing more creatures to view, updating tanks and displays, as well as adding more aquatic species. The participants also suggested the improvement in terms of incorporating wide a range of activities based on age, adding more attractions. Adding more kids' attraction is essential.

The participants suggested improvements on adding more and a better range of shops for visitors, including of genuine structures instead of replicas, more food offerings and Brazilian ware, some wanted a Brazilian market within the park. The participants also suggested expanding the space for more reptiles, introduction of relevant more shops. The participants suggested the introduction of more animals, also enlarging the gallery space for more reptiles and putting more real animals. The participants also suggested the introduction of a variety of aquatic creatures for more interesting viewing. The participants suggested the provision of Shembe food for religious purposes on Sunday while some suggested the inclusion of an outlet selling indigenous food and also health food to add variety for visitors. Some customers wanted the addition of Halaal food, and Brazilian food and in fact, more food outlets.

5.4 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

Currently most studies have focused on improving tourism facilities in theme parks to attract customers and provide the best quality of service to customers. Theme parks make a unique contribution which is broad. This study focused on the intangible service delivery that provides a good service encounter to customers, including important additional products such as food services as part of a customer service package within theme parks.

- The study adopted the SERVQUAL Model to inform the theoretical context of this research. The model also contributed to the study to create meaningful primary research that embodied the perception of service quality to customers at the uShaka Marine World theme park.
- This study will contribute to the body of new academic knowledge which will benefit customer service quality in theme parks because it shone a light on nature of problems and solutions regarding the uShaka Marine World customer service. This new knowledge will benefit the theme park in that respect.
- This study also revealed that customer service was very important at theme parks, however, it is very difficult to accommodate customers with different and changing preferences in the tourism industry. It is therefore vital for theme parks to be receptive to change and also reinvest on attractions to provide the desired service.
- The study found that interaction at uShaka Marine World between staff and customers during service encounters played a very important role in customer satisfaction that ultimately leads to customer loyalty and enhances the brand image.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Research limitations are the characteristics that impact on findings through the design or methodology used for a case study. They may be viewed as constraints that may limit the application in practice of the recommendations that made (Miles and Huberman., 1994).

The study cannot be generalised to other theme parks as this is purely a marine theme park. Due to Covid, the questionnaires were self-administered by the researcher and participants provided answers to questions which the researcher filled in on the questionnaire survey for them. It is a cross-sectional study as it provides a snap shot view of the situation that is the perceived service quality at uShaka Marine World theme park. The focus of this study was therefore on the perception customers regarding service quality and satisfaction.

5.6 CONCLUSION

As already stated, to provide the desired customer service quality does not only require tangible service or products but it also requires adequate human resources to guide and assist customers as well as providing effective social interaction between staff and customers at uShaka Marine World. Successful theme parks such as Disneyworld place a strong emphasis on staff recruitment, training and performance (Disneyworld, 2017).

The study has found that most theme parks consider service quality as an important factor in increasing sales and attracting customers to their establishments. Some researchers agree that tidy sites and minimising queues waiting times in a queue forms part of service quality, and it has a direct impact on customer satisfaction level. This is where the concept of customer satisfaction was presented and where attention was for the first time paid to cleanliness, visitor comfort and quality (Perkins, 2016). According to Ba-sarangil (2018), some important aspects of theme park customers is hygiene of the environment, control of queues.

The findings of the study reflected that some customers may not return to uShaka Marine World theme park until there is investment in improvements, however, most of the customers would revisit based on their suggestions for improvements. Food was a serious concern to some of the customers as part of service quality assurance. The customers requested uShaka Marine Food and Beverages Department to review their menus where food is offered and suggested different types of food to be added through outlets. The study also identified the fact that most of the customers visiting uShaka Marine World were in the 21-30 age group which suggests that the youth visit the theme park more than any other age group.

The findings noted in Chapter four and recommendations in Chapter five are crucial as they inform the direction on how best to deal the above this phenomena. The data collected also captured the magnitude of the phenomena. The reviewed literature and primary data revealed that customer service quality is a global concern that affects other theme parks around the world. The developments in the theme park market require that facilities be adjusted to the changing tastes and preferences of the customers and are integrated into the total development of the establishment of the park. The study highlighted the view that creating memorable experiences for visitors in theme parks through service delivery was essential to retaining existing customers as well as helping to attract a new market within the ambit of tourism.

5.7 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The areas for future research are based on the findings and the research limitations of time and resources. The study could not cover all the aspects of customer service quality, thus left more questions for future investigation. This study focused on the perception of customers on theme park's service quality. As research questions were answered more questions arose during the study. The natural direction for future studies on this topic would be to study the following:

- A study to investigate how to design theme park physical facilities that accommodates diverse markets.
- To invest in seasonal attractions for specific clients who that visit theme parks during specific periods.
- To investigate the competency of staff to deliver optimum customer service quality.
- To investigating how uShaka Marine World can adapt to the changing needs of customers.
- To learn about the grievances customers are facing during service encounters, and rectify them.

- To investigate the potential for improvement on all permanent and temporary attractions within uShaka Marine World.
- To add further services according to the suggestions of customers through surveys and suggestion boxes.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IREC LETTER



26 November 2021

Mr. T P Kalanga
13 FJ Sithole Road
Imbali Unit 1
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Dear Mr Kalanga

An investigation of Customer's perception of service quality: A case study of a selected theme park in KwaZulu-Natal

Ethical Clearance number IREC 244/21

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your notification regarding the piloting of your data collection tool.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the IREC according to the IREC SOP's.

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the IREC as outlined in the IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely

Professor J K Adam
Chairperson: IREC

APPENDIX B: GATE KEEPER'S LETTER



18 October 2021

RE: Gatekeepers Consent

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter follows a Gate keeper's application letter which was received by the Capacity Development Department. I, Bianca Xulu (Capacity Development and Performance Manager) give consent for Thembinkosi Peter Kalanga, student number 21345884, Tourism Research Student at Durban University of Technology, to gather information for the purposes of the research on **Customer's perception of service quality: A case study of Ushaka Marine World in Kwa-Zulu Natal** to be conducted at uShaka Marine World.

Hoping the student will gain an insight needed for his research so that we are able to come up with innovative ways of encountering our present challenges in the tourism industry.

Kind Regards

Bianca Xulu
Capacity Development and Performance Manager
031 328 8150

Tel: +27 (0) 328 8003 Fax: +27 (0) 328 8003 1 King Shaka Avenue Point I Durban I 4001 P.O. Box 38416 Point 4069
Durban Marine Theme Park SOC Limited (RF) Trading as uShaka Marine World | Reg: 2001/020025/30 | Vat: 4370211205
Non- Executive Directors: Mr ZS Gumede (Chairperson) Ms SP Lebenya Mr R Turner Mr LS Gabela Mr SS Ngcobo Dr P Dala Prof. AT Nzama Ms B Chiliza Ms H Mamabolo
Executive Director: Mr Ndabezitha Khoza (CEO)
www.ushakamarineworld.co.za



APPENDIX C: INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS



LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study:

An investigation of Customer's perception of service quality: A case study of a selected theme park in KwaZulu- Natal.

Principal Investigator/s/researcher:

Thembinkosi Peter Kalanga (B-Tech Tourism Management)

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:

Prof. BI Dlamini (PhD: Human Resources)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study will be to assess the perception of customers on customer service quality to determine the customer satisfaction challenges in the selected theme park.

Greeting:

How are you?

Introduce yourself to the participant:

I am a Masters student at DUT doing research for my Masters degree in Business Administration.

Invitation to the potential participant:

I would like to invite you to participate in the research.

W

hat is Research?

Research is a systematic search or enquiry for generalized new knowledge.

You are entitled to discuss the study with your family and friends and are under no obligation to commit at this stage. Should you no longer wish to participate, you can withdraw yourself from this study by informing the researcher. You can be fully assured that there will be no adverse or negative effects. For this purpose, a copy of the Letter of Information document is given to you and take it home.

Outline of the Procedures:

Participation in this study is voluntary. The questions are based on various aspects of customer service quality and customer satisfaction for theme parks. The information you provide will show helpful and contribute to the findings of this study. Customers will be requested to complete a questionnaire, which will be administered in the theme park.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:

There are no known or foreseeable risks to the participants chosen for this study.

Explain to the participant the reasons he/she may be withdraw from the Study:

Should you no longer wish to participate, you can withdraw yourself from this study by informing the researcher. You can be fully assured that there will be no adverse or negative effects.

Benefits:

The benefits of this study will be to understand the perception of customer service quality on customer satisfaction and service delivery culture to satisfy the needs of the customers at the selected theme park (uShaka Marine World) as a whole. The potential benefit to the researcher will be publishing of two peer reviewed journal articles.

Remuneration:

Please note that there is no monetary gain or other types of remuneration for your participation in this study.

Costs of the Study:

There are no costs to be borne by you as a participant.

Confidentiality:

All information provided by the participant is maintained strictly confidential, and names will not be disclosed under any circumstances. The participation will be on voluntary basis.

Results:

The findings of this study will assist theme parks with recommendations to improve the quality of their internal marketing activities to enhance their customer satisfaction.

Research-related Injury:

This study will not result in any injuries or adverse reactions.

Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings:

Data shall be stored for a period of 5 years and thereafter shredded to ensure participants confidentiality is maintained. Electronic data will be deleted after 5 years and hard copies will be locked in a cupboard and electronic on a password locked computer accessible to only the researchers. Data will be stored for a period of 5 years and thereafter shredded to ensure participants confidentiality is maintained.

Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

In the event of any problems arising, please feel free to contact the researcher (tel no. 071 172 2714), my supervisor, Prof. B.I Dlamini (tel no. 033-845-8851) or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031373 2375. Complaints can be reported to the Research Director: Dr L. Lingano on 031 373 0000 or researchdirector@dut.ac.za

APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire:

Dear participant

You are invited to participate in the survey by completing this questionnaire. The aim of this study is to measure uShaka Marine World visitor perceptions on customer service within the park.

Thank you in advance for your participation

1 Gender

☐ Male

☐ Female

2. Age group

☐ 20 and less

☐ 21-30

☐ 31-40

☐ 41-50

☐ 51 and over

3. Type of visitor

☐ Individual visitor

☐ Family vacation

☐ Business visit

☐ Educational tour

☐ Other

4. Is this your first time at Ushaka marine world?

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. Before coming to uShaka Marine World, what level of service were you expecting?

Excellent	Good	Average	Very poor	Poor
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

6. Since visiting uShaka Marine World, how would you rate the level of service you have received?

Please rate the service experience...						
<input type="text"/>	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Not Applicable

Wet 'n Wild						
Sea World						
uShaka Kids World						
Village Walk						
Dangerous Creatures						
Sea Animal Encounter Island						
Food and Beverage offerings						

7. How can you describe the service culture in the theme park?

Excellent	Good	Average	Very poor	Poor

8. Do you believe staff interaction with customers have a great impact on customer service quality?

Yes	Not sure	No

9. Based on the service you have received, would you revisit uShaka Marine World?

Yes	Not sure	No

10. How soon would you consider revisiting the theme park again?

One week	One month	One year	Never

11. Did you find the design and layout of the theme park user friendly?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

12. Were the state/conditions of the park facilities to your satisfaction?

Yes	Not sure	No

13. Do you think the park has enough attractions to cater for the various needs of customers?

Yes	Not sure	No

14. Is there any aspect of uShaka Marine World you would like to see improved?

	Perfect as it is	No improvement	Neutral	Minimal improvement	Needs a lot of improvement
Wet 'n Wild					
Sea World					
uShaka Kids World					
Village Walk					
Dangerous Creatures					
Sea Animal Encounter Island					
Food and Beverage offerings					

15. If you suggested an improvement was necessary in question 10, what kind of improvement could uShaka Marine World make?

Wet 'n Wild	
Sea World	
uShaka Kids World	
Village Walk	

Dangerous Creatures	
Sea Animal Encounter Island	
Food and Beverage offerings	

16. Would the lack of investment regarding your suggested improvements deter you from a repeat visit?

Yes	Not sure	No

Thank you so much for your participation and valuable input on this study. I wish to guarantee that all information given in this survey shall be treated with anonymity and confidentiality.

APPENDIX E: TURNITIN REPORT

TP Kalanga

ORIGINALITY REPORT

12%

SIMILARITY INDEX

9%

INTERNET SOURCES

5%

PUBLICATIONS

7%

STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

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3	www.ssoar.info Internet Source	<1%
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