



The Hidden Influence: How Bartenders Shape Customer Expectation and Experiences at Rusumo, Tanzania

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Abstract

Bartenders play a pivotal yet often overlooked role in shaping customer expectations and experiences within the hospitality industry. Their influence extends beyond simply preparing drinks; they act as intermediaries between customers and establishments, creating lasting impressions through their interactions, communication, and service delivery. This study explored the intricate role bartenders play in shaping customer expectations and enhancing overall experiences in bars, focusing on various factors such as communication skills, service quality, and management challenges. Using a sample of 85 respondents, the research employed qualitative interviews to gather insights into how bartenders influence customer perceptions and satisfaction. The findings revealed that effective bartender communication significantly contributes to positive customer expectations, while factors such as cleanliness, ambiance, and service speed are crucial for a favorable customer experience. Additionally, bartenders faced challenges in managing high customer expectations, particularly during peak hours, which sometimes hindered their ability to deliver exceptional service. The study also highlighted the importance of continuous training, customer feedback implementation, and incentives for bartenders to improve performance. The results provide actionable insights for bar management to enhance service delivery and foster customer loyalty through strategic interventions. In general, the study accentuates the pivotal role of bartenders in creating memorable experiences that meet and exceed customer expectations in the bar industry.

Keywords: Bartenders, bartender communication skills, challenges in bartending, customer expectations, customer experience, customer feedback implementation, bar industry.

1. Introduction

Bartenders play a pivotal yet often overlooked role in shaping customer expectations and experiences within the hospitality industry. Their influence extends beyond simply preparing drinks; they act as intermediaries between customers and establishments, creating lasting impressions through their interactions, communication, and service delivery. In regions like Rusumo, Tanzania, where hospitality plays a crucial role in local economies and social interactions, the bartender's role becomes even more significant. The way bartenders interact with customers, manage service expectations, and handle various situations can directly impact a customer's overall experience, satisfaction, and willingness to return. In the Rusumo area, bars and social establishments are not only places for leisure but also cultural hubs where community members gather, exchange ideas, and form social bonds. Bartenders, therefore, find themselves at the forefront of these interactions, often responsible for creating an environment that aligns with customer expectations while maintaining the unique cultural nuances of the local area. Their ability to shape experiences through personalized service, cultural sensitivity, and social cues is critical in ensuring customer satisfaction.

Research on customer expectations in the bar industry revealed several key factors shaping customer experiences. Product quality, including varied menus and tasty food, was found to be more important than infrastructure and services in customer evaluations (Almeida *et al.*, 2014) ^[1]. The servicescape, encompassing elements like ambiance and atmosphere, significantly influenced customers' decisions to enter venues (Grayson & McNeill, 2009; Skinner *et al.*, 2005) ^[12, 19]. Service quality was identified as a crucial component, with efficient and timely service positively impacting customer satisfaction and loyalty (Singh & Shih, 2011) ^[18]. Negative factors affecting customer experiences included fragile chairs, delayed service, and excessive noise (Almeida *et al.*, 2014) ^[1]. Interestingly, both managers and consumers shared similar desires for the bar environment, though they differed on how to achieve these goals (Grayson & McNeill, 2009) ^[12]. Overall, understanding and balancing these factors can lead to improved customer satisfaction and loyalty in bar-restaurants (Singh & Shih, 2011) ^[18].

Bartenders play a crucial role in shaping customer experiences and expectations in bars. Their service attributes and suggestive selling techniques significantly influence customers' behavioral intentions, including revisits and positive word-of-mouth (Bujisic *et al.*, 2014) ^[3]. The quality

of bartender service directly impacts customer satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of standardized operating procedures in drink service (Rais & Ambiyar, 2019) ^[17]. In professional services, managing customer expectations is vital for long-term satisfaction. This involves addressing fuzzy, implicit, and unrealistic expectations to achieve lasting quality (Ojasalo, 2001) ^[15]. In restaurant settings, customer perceptions of service quality are influenced by both the physical environment (mechanic clues) and employee behavior (humanic clues). While the ambiance sets expectations, the performance and behavior of staff, including bartenders, have a dominant impact on overall service evaluation (Wall & Berry, 2007) ^[23].

Research has shown that bartenders can significantly influence customer experiences through their interactions and skills. Bartenders' knowledge and passion for their craft were found to enhance their ability to persuade customers and create positive experiences (Wagn & Penner, 2024) ^[21]. However, studies also revealed potential negative impacts, such as bartenders' involvement in promoting sexual relationships that could lead to assault situations (Duque *et al.*, 2020) ^[9]. The working environment and drinking culture were identified as factors affecting bartenders' decisions to serve intoxicated patrons, often prioritizing a good atmosphere over responsible serving (Buvik, 2013) ^[5]. In the context of robotic bartenders, research suggested that socially intelligent behavior could improve interaction efficiency, although its impact on customer satisfaction was limited (Giuliani *et al.*, 2013) ^[11]. These findings highlight the complex role of bartenders in shaping customer experiences and the importance of balancing social skills with responsible service practices.

Research in Tanzania highlighted the importance of bartenders' and service employees' interactions and skills in enhancing customer experiences. Bartenders' interactions with customers in nightlife settings were found to potentially influence sexual assault situations (Duque *et al.*, 2020) ^[9]. Service delivery training for employees improved communication skills, patience, and attentiveness, leading to increased customer satisfaction (Minja, 2015) ^[13]. Entrepreneurship skills, including customer care, were identified as crucial for the performance of women-owned micro and small enterprises (Msoka, 2013) ^[14]. In the tourism industry, customer information sharing, particularly post-service feedback and interaction behaviors, positively influenced new service development (Busagara *et al.*, 2020) ^[4]. These studies emphasized the significance of employee training, customer care skills, and effective communication in improving service quality and customer satisfaction across various sectors in Tanzania, including nightlife establishments, banking, small businesses, and tourism.

Employee service quality had a greater impact than company-related factors on trust and satisfaction, which in turn affected loyalty and word-of-mouth recommendations (Chiou *et al.*, 2002) ^[7]. Customer experience, particularly in hospitality settings, strongly influenced loyalty and recommendation behaviors (Cetin & Dincer, 2014) ^[6]. The quality of loyalty programs also indirectly affected word-of-mouth recommendations through customer satisfaction and brand attachment (Bahri-Ammari, 2018) ^[2]. These studies collectively emphasize the importance of frontline employees, such as bartenders, in shaping customer experiences and fostering positive outcomes. By focusing on enhancing service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty program

effectiveness, businesses can improve customer loyalty and encourage positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Research on bartender-customer interactions revealed complex dynamics affecting customer experiences. Bartenders played a significant role in shaping the nightlife environment, with some male bartenders potentially influencing sexual assault situations through their interactions with male customers (Duque *et al.*, 2020) ^[9]. Guest satisfaction with bartender services was generally high, though improvements in coordination and service timing were recommended (Di Nugraha *et al.*, 2020) ^[8]. Effective communication and personal interaction between bartenders and customers were found to be crucial in creating customer satisfaction (Wahjudi, 2022) ^[22]. Bartenders in hip venues emphasized practices such as treating visitors as guests, correcting guest behavior, and "being themselves," which granted them authority and freedom in their profession (Wigenstad, 2019). These studies highlighted the importance of effective communication, personality, and product knowledge for bartenders in creating positive customer experiences and maintaining control over the venue atmosphere.

Bartenders in high-end establishments were found to possess extensive knowledge, positive attitudes, and strong practical skills in mixology (Gaviola & Maming, 2022). Key characteristics of professional bartenders included friendliness, approachability, and drink expertise (Pramita & Parma, 2020) ^[16]. Bartenders in hip venues emphasized treating customers as guests, correcting guest behavior, and maintaining authenticity, which granted them significant authority and professional freedom (Wigenstad, 2019) ^[24]. While general mental ability (GMA) was valued in hiring decisions, personality traits such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability were considered more important for server positions (Tews *et al.*, 2011) ^[20]. To enhance bartending skills, strategies like specialized training and participation in competitions were recommended (Pramita & Parma, 2020) ^[16]. Challenges faced by bartenders included varying coffee flavors, equipment issues, and customer complaints, highlighting the need for adaptability and problem-solving skills (Pramita & Parma, 2020) ^[16].

The problem addressed in this study arose from the need to better understand the ways in which bartenders shaped customer expectations and influenced overall experiences in the bar industry at Rusumo, Tanzania. Although bartenders play a pivotal role in creating positive customer interactions, there has been limited research on the specific factors that contribute to customer satisfaction and loyalty in this context. Questions remained about how bartenders manage customer expectations, the key elements that lead to positive experiences, and the challenges they face in meeting diverse customer needs. The study sought to explore these gaps and provide insights into how bartenders could enhance their performance and improve customer experiences in a highly competitive service environment.

The study aimed to investigate the role of bartenders in shaping customer expectations and experiences in the bar industry. Specifically, it sought to understand how bartenders influence customer perceptions, identify the key factors contributing to positive customer experiences, analyze the challenges faced by bartenders in managing expectations, and develop strategies for bartenders to improve their performance and enhance customer satisfaction.

The main contribution of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of the pivotal role bartenders play in shaping

customer expectations and experiences in the bar industry. By identifying and analyzing the key factors that contribute to positive customer interactions, such as effective communication, product knowledge, and the ability to create an inviting atmosphere, the study provides valuable insights for bar owners and managers seeking to enhance service quality. Furthermore, by addressing the challenges bartenders face in managing customer expectations, the research highlights the need for targeted training and support. Ultimately, this study contributes to the existing literature on hospitality and service management by emphasizing the significant impact bartenders have on customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the overall success of bar establishments.

2. Methodology

The methodology of the study was designed to investigate the influence of bartenders on customer expectations and experiences in the bar industry, focusing on Rusumo, Tanzania. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

A total sample size of 85 participants was selected using a convenience sampling technique. This sample consisted of bar patrons who frequented various bars in the Rusumo area, ensuring a diverse representation of demographics, including age, gender, and social background. Participants were approached during their visits to the bars and invited to participate in the study through structured questionnaires. The questionnaires included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture quantitative data on customer experiences and qualitative insights into their interactions with bartenders.

In addition to the patron surveys, in-depth interviews were conducted with bartenders from different establishments in Rusumo. These interviews aimed to gather detailed perspectives on how bartenders perceive their roles in shaping customer expectations, the challenges they encounter in managing those expectations, and strategies they employ to enhance customer experiences. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in responses while ensuring that key topics were covered.

Data analysis involved statistical methods to interpret the quantitative survey results, including descriptive statistics to summarize patron demographics and experiences. The qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire responses and bartender interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes and patterns related to customer expectations and experiences.

In general, this methodology provided a well-rounded exploration of the study's objectives, capturing both customer perceptions and bartender insights to better understand the dynamics at play in the bar industry.

3. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion section of the study presents a comprehensive analysis of the data collected from a sample size of 85 participants, comprising both bar patrons and bartenders from various establishments in Rusumo, Tanzania. This section aims to illuminate how bartenders influence customer expectations and experiences within the bar industry. By synthesizing quantitative survey findings and qualitative insights gathered through in-depth interviews, the analysis seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics between bartenders and patrons. Through

this exploration, the section addresses key research questions, highlighting the critical factors contributing to positive customer experiences, the challenges bartenders face in managing expectations, and the strategies they employ to enhance service delivery. The ensuing discussion emphasizes the significance of these findings in fostering better practices within the hospitality sector and enhancing the overall bar experience for customers.

3.1. Bartenders' Influence on Customer Expectations

The investigation into bartenders' influence on customer expectations revealed significant insights regarding how their interactions shaped patrons' experiences. Respondents highlighted that bartender communication skills played a crucial role in establishing a welcoming atmosphere and fostering trust, making customers feel valued and setting realistic expectations for service quality. Moreover, the promotion and marketing strategies employed by bartenders were seen as instrumental in framing customer perceptions before their arrival, effectively managing what patrons anticipated from their experience. Additionally, the practice of actively seeking customer feedback was recognized as a vital component in this dynamic, allowing bartenders to adapt their approaches and enhance customer satisfaction. This interplay between communication, marketing, and feedback accentuated the profound impact bartenders had on shaping customer expectations within the bar environment.

Table 1: Showing the Bartenders' Influence on Customer Expectations

Sub-indicator	Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)
Bartender Communication Skills	15(18%)	40(47%)	30(35%)
Promotion and Marketing Strategies	10(12%)	35(41%)	40(47%)
Customer Feedback and Interaction	12(14%)	30(35%)	43(51%)

3.1.1. Bartender Communication Skills

The study as per table 1, revealed diverse opinions regarding the influence of bartender communication skills on shaping customer expectations. Among the respondents, 15 individuals, or 18%, acknowledged that they perceived bartender communication as low in effectiveness. These respondents expressed that their interactions with bartenders often lacked the personal touch that could elevate their experiences. One participant stated:

"...there were times when I felt like just another customer. The bartender didn't engage much, which left me feeling disconnected from the experience..."

This reaction reflected a segment of the patrons who found that the bartenders' communication did not significantly enhance their expectations or overall experience.

In contrast, a considerable portion of respondents, totaling 40 individuals or 47%, indicated a moderate appreciation for bartender communication skills. They noted that while the bartenders were generally friendly, the interactions sometimes lacked depth or personalization. One respondent shared:

"...the bartenders were nice enough, but the conversations were often surface-level. I would have liked to feel more of a connection, perhaps if they had asked more about my preferences or made suggestions based on my tastes..."

This viewpoint highlighted a desire for improved engagement that could bridge the gap between mere service and an enhanced customer experience.

Significantly, 30 respondents, accounting for 35%, rated bartender communication skills as high, underscoring the pivotal role effective communication played in shaping their expectations. Many of these patrons recalled instances where bartenders went above and beyond in their interactions, creating a welcoming and engaging atmosphere. One respondent remarked:

"...there was this one bartender who remembered my drink from a previous visit and asked how I was doing. It made me feel valued and special. That's the kind of service that makes you want to come back..."

This appreciation for personalized communication illustrated how bartenders who effectively engaged with customers could significantly enhance their expectations, leading to a more memorable and satisfying experience overall.

In summary, the findings accentuated the varying degrees of impact bartender communication skills had on customer expectations. While some respondents felt that the interactions were lacking, a substantial number recognized the potential for effective communication to create meaningful connections that elevate the overall bar experience. The quotes from respondents emphasized the importance of bartenders not only delivering drinks but also engaging customers in a way that fostered a sense of belonging and satisfaction.

3.1.2. Promotion and Marketing Strategies

The study explored the varying perceptions of respondents regarding the influence of promotion and marketing strategies employed by bartenders on customer expectations. As per data illustrated on table 1, among the participants, only 10 individuals, or 12%, reported a low impact of promotional strategies on their expectations. These respondents expressed skepticism regarding the effectiveness of promotional campaigns in the bar industry, often feeling that they did not translate into meaningful experiences. One individual commented:

"...I've seen a lot of promotions advertised, but they rarely match up with what I actually experience at the bar. Sometimes it feels more like a gimmick than a genuine offer..."

This response highlighted a disconnect between marketing efforts and the realities of customer experience, indicating that mere promotion did not sufficiently shape their expectations.

Conversely, a significant portion of respondents 35 individuals, or 41% indicated a moderate appreciation for the influence of bartenders' promotional strategies. These participants acknowledged that while promotions played a role in drawing them to a bar, they were not always the decisive factor in shaping their overall expectations. One respondent shared:

"...I noticed the happy hour deals and special events, which got me interested, but it was the quality of service that kept me coming back. Promotions are good, but they need to be backed up by great experiences..."

This perspective underlined the idea that while promotions could attract customers, they needed to be complemented by high-quality service to meet and exceed customer expectations.

Notably, 40 respondents, accounting for 47%, recognized the high impact of bartenders' promotional and marketing strategies on their expectations. Many of these patrons recalled how effective marketing initiatives had not only

drawn them to the bar but also shaped their perceptions of what to expect from their visits. One participant expressed:

"...the way the bar marketed its themed nights made me excited to go. It wasn't just about the discounts; it was the whole experience they created around it. I felt like I was part of something special, which definitely elevated my expectations..."

This reflection illustrated how well-executed promotions could foster a sense of community and anticipation, enhancing the overall customer experience.

The findings illustrated the varied perceptions surrounding the impact of promotion and marketing strategies on customer expectations. While some respondents viewed promotional efforts as insufficient or disconnected from actual experiences, many recognized the potential of effective marketing to engage and excite customers. The quotes from participants emphasized the need for promotional strategies to not only attract patrons but also deliver on the promises made through marketing efforts, ultimately shaping a more satisfying bar experience.

3.1.3. Bartenders' Ability to Create a Welcoming Atmosphere

The study according to data on table 1, dug into how bartenders' ability to create a welcoming atmosphere influenced customer expectations in the bar environment. The data indicated that only 10 respondents, accounting for 12%, perceived the bartenders' efforts in creating a welcoming atmosphere as having a low impact on their expectations. These individuals often expressed feelings of indifference towards the bar's ambiance, suggesting that they placed more importance on other factors, such as drink quality or promotions. One respondent remarked:

"...I've been to bars like The Cross road where the bartenders hardly spoke to me, and it didn't really bother me as long as my drink was good. A nice atmosphere is great, but if the drinks are bad, it doesn't matter..."

This awareness highlighted a segment of customers who prioritized service quality over the overall atmosphere, suggesting a varied approach to expectations in the bar industry.

In contrast, a substantial group of 35 respondents, or 41%, recognized a moderate influence of bartenders in creating a welcoming environment. These participants acknowledged that while a friendly atmosphere was appreciated, it was not always the primary factor driving their expectations. One of the respondents noted:

"...I think a bartender can make or break the atmosphere, but it's not the only thing I look for. I enjoy a chat and a smile, but I'm also there for the drinks and the vibe of the place..."

This comment illustrated a nuanced understanding among customers, where the bartenders' ability to foster a welcoming environment contributed to their experience but was balanced by other important elements.

Notably, the majority of respondents 40 individuals, representing 47% emphasized a high level of appreciation for bartenders' role in creating a welcoming atmosphere. Many articulated how the interaction and friendliness of bartenders significantly shaped their expectations and overall experience. One participant stated:

"...when I walk into a bar and the bartender greets me with a smile and engages me in conversation, it sets the tone for my whole night. I instantly feel more relaxed and ready to enjoy myself..."

This comment highlighted the vital role of bartenders in establishing an inviting ambiance, reinforcing the idea that their approach could lead to heightened customer expectations and satisfaction.

The findings revealed a range of perceptions regarding the impact of bartenders' ability to create a welcoming atmosphere on customer expectations. While a minority viewed this aspect as less significant, a substantial portion of respondents recognized its importance, indicating that a friendly and engaging environment can profoundly influence customer experiences. The quotes from participants emphasized the essential role bartenders played in not only serving drinks but also in shaping the overall ambiance of the bar, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

3.2. Factors Contributing to a Positive Customer Experience

The investigation into factors contributing to a positive customer experience at a bar revealed several critical elements that shaped patrons' perceptions and satisfaction levels. The quality of drinks and service emerged as a primary indicator, with many respondents emphasizing how exceptional beverage offerings and attentive bartenders significantly influenced their overall experience. Additionally, the cleanliness and ambiance of the bar were noted as vital aspects, with customers expressing appreciation for well-maintained environments that enhanced their enjoyment. Moreover, the efficiency and speed of service played a crucial role, as patrons valued prompt attention and timely deliveries, which collectively shaped their positive experiences. These factors intertwined to create a holistic atmosphere that not only met but often exceeded customer expectations.

3.2.1. Quality of Drinks and Service

The study on factors contributing to a positive customer experience as indicated on table 2, revealed significant insights into the quality of drinks and service as a key determinant of patron satisfaction. Among the 85 respondents, a notable portion, totaling 20 individuals or 24%, considered the quality of drinks and service as not effective in enhancing their overall experience. These respondents often expressed disappointment with their encounters, emphasizing that low-quality drinks or inattentive service detracted from their time spent at the bar. One participant reflected on their experience, stating:

"...I came in expecting a great cocktail, but what I got was a drink that tasted watered down and it was at Local Joints. It really put a damper on my evening..."

Conversely, 30 respondents, accounting for 35%, found the quality of drinks and service to be somewhat effective. These individuals recognized improvements but still felt that there were areas for enhancement. A respondent commented:

"...the drinks were decent, but the service felt a bit rushed. I appreciate when bartenders take the time to engage with customers, even when it's busy..."

This reaction highlighted the importance of a balanced approach to both drink quality and service interaction, suggesting that even minor lapses in either area could impact customer satisfaction.

In contrast, a majority of respondents 35 individuals or 41% reported that the quality of drinks and service was highly effective in contributing to their positive experiences. This group praised the bartenders' skills and the exceptional drinks served, often recounting how these elements transformed their

visits into memorable occasions. One enthusiastic patron shared:

"...the bartender crafted a perfect mojito just for me, and their attention to detail made all the difference. It felt like they genuinely cared about my experience, and I left feeling satisfied and eager to return..."

The data indicated a strong correlation between the quality of drinks and service and customer satisfaction, with many respondents emphasizing that these aspects were pivotal to their overall enjoyment. The varying perspectives on effectiveness emphasized the complex dynamics of customer expectations in the bar environment, highlighting the necessity for establishments to prioritize quality to foster positive customer experiences.

Table 2: Showing the Factors Contributing to a Positive Customer Experience

Sub-indicator	Not Effective (%)	Somewhat Effective (%)	Highly Effective (%)
Quality of Drinks and Service	20(24%)	30(35%)	35(41%)
Cleanliness and ambiance of the bar	15(18%)	25(29%)	45(53%)
Efficiency and speed of service	18(21%)	30(35%)	37(44%)

3.2.2. Cleanliness and Ambiance of the Bar

The study on factors contributing to a positive customer experience emphasized the significant role that cleanliness and ambiance play in shaping patrons' perceptions and satisfaction. As per table 2, among the 85 respondents surveyed, 15 individuals, representing 18%, deemed the cleanliness and ambiance of the bar as not effective in enhancing their overall experience. These respondents often shared that a lack of cleanliness or an uninviting atmosphere detracted from their enjoyment. One participant noted:

"...I walked into the bar and immediately felt put off by the sticky tables and dirty floors. It made me question how much attention they paid to the drinks if they couldn't even keep the place clean..."

Such observation highlighted how cleanliness issues can lead to immediate negative impressions, overshadowing other positive aspects of the bar.

On the other hand, 25 respondents, or 29%, viewed cleanliness and ambiance as somewhat effective. This group acknowledged that while the bar met some standards of cleanliness, there were still areas needing improvement. One respondent remarked:

"...the place looked decent overall, but the dim lighting made it hard to appreciate the decor fully. A little more attention to detail could elevate the experience significantly..."

This feedback highpoints the importance of creating a well-maintained environment that not only meets basic cleanliness standards but also enhances the overall ambiance through thoughtful design and lighting choices.

In contrast, a significant majority of 45 respondents, accounting for 53%, expressed that cleanliness and ambiance were highly effective in contributing to their positive experiences. Many of these respondents praised the bar for its inviting atmosphere and well-maintained surroundings. One enthusiastic patron elaborated:

"...The moment I stepped in, I was impressed by how clean everything was and the cozy ambiance created by the soft music and tasteful decor. It made me feel relaxed and ready to enjoy my evening..."

This comment was echoed by several others who noted that a clean and aesthetically pleasing environment significantly influenced their decision to return. Another respondent shared:

"...for me, the ambiance is everything. I love a place that feels welcoming and clean; it makes my experience much more enjoyable..."

The findings illustrated a clear link between the cleanliness and ambiance of the bar and customer satisfaction, with the majority of respondents highlighting its critical importance. The data suggested that maintaining high cleanliness standards and creating a pleasant ambiance not only contribute to immediate customer comfort but also foster long-term loyalty and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Finally, the study underlined the necessity for bar owners and management to prioritize these aspects as integral components of a successful customer experience strategy.

3.2.3. Efficiency and Speed of Service

The study on factors contributing to a positive customer experience according to table 2, highlighted the critical role of efficiency and speed of service in shaping customer satisfaction at bars. Among the 85 respondents, 18 individuals, or 21%, felt that the speed and efficiency of service were not effective in enhancing their overall experience. These respondents often recounted instances where they encountered long wait times and inattentive staff, leading to frustration and dissatisfaction. One participant expressed:

"...I remember waiting at the bar for over twenty minutes without being acknowledged. It was frustrating because I could see the staff socializing rather than attending to customers. That really dampened my mood and made me reconsider coming back..."

This feedback illustrated how delays in service could quickly overshadow other positive aspects of a bar visit, emphasizing the need for attentive and prompt service to keep customers engaged and satisfied.

Conversely, 30 respondents, representing 35%, viewed the efficiency and speed of service as somewhat effective. While these patrons acknowledged that their experiences varied, they recognized that certain busy nights could lead to slower service. One respondent noted:

"...I've been to the bar on quieter nights, and the service was fantastic. However, during peak hours, I've noticed the staff struggled to keep up with the demand, which was a bit disappointing..."

This viewpoint highlighted the inherent challenges bars face during busy periods but also pointed to the potential for improving service through better staffing strategies and training.

In contrast, a significant portion of the respondents 37 individuals, or 44% considered efficiency and speed of service to be highly effective in contributing to their positive experiences. Many praised the staff's ability to serve drinks promptly and manage orders with agility. One satisfied patron remarked:

"...what I loved about this bar was how quickly the bartenders moved. I barely had time to finish my drink before they were already asking if I wanted another. It made the experience so much more enjoyable, like they truly valued my time..."

This response was echoed by others who emphasized that swift service allowed them to fully engage in their night out without unnecessary delays. Another respondent added:

"...fast service is a game-changer. It makes me feel prioritized as a customer, and I appreciate being able to get my drink without waiting forever. It keeps the atmosphere lively and fun..."

In general, the findings underlined the importance of efficiency and speed of service as critical components of a positive customer experience in bars. The data reflected a general consensus that prompt service significantly enhanced satisfaction, while inefficiencies could lead to dissatisfaction and deter future visits. As such, bar management should focus on optimizing service processes, especially during peak hours, to maintain high customer satisfaction levels and foster loyalty.

3.3. Challenges Faced by Bartenders in Managing Customer Expectations

The exploration of challenges faced by bartenders in managing customer expectations revealed significant insights into the pressures inherent in the bar industry. Bartenders reported grappling with high customer expectations, particularly in an environment where patrons often anticipated exceptional service and quality. Additionally, many respondents highlighted the difficulty of time management during peak hours, where the rush of customers could overwhelm even the most skilled staff. Furthermore, dealing with difficult customers emerged as a common challenge, with bartenders recounting experiences that tested their patience and conflict resolution skills. These factors collectively underlined the complex dynamics bartenders navigated while striving to meet and exceed customer expectations in a demanding environment.

Table 3: Showing the Challenges Faced by Bartenders in Managing Customer Expectations

Sub-indicator	Minor (%)	Moderate (%)	Major (%)
High Customer Expectations	30(35%)	40(47%)	15(18%)
Time Management during Peak Hours	25(29%)	45(53%)	15(18%)
Dealing with Difficult Customers	20(24%)	40(47%)	25(29%)

3.3.1. High Customer Expectations

The challenges of managing customer expectations in the bar industry were evident, with respondents expressing a range of observations as shown on table 3, regarding high customer expectations. A significant portion of bartenders, 40 individuals or 47%, acknowledged that they faced moderate challenges stemming from the increasingly demanding nature of patrons. Many bartenders noted that customers often entered the bar with predefined notions of what constitutes excellent service, which placed immense pressure on staff to deliver. One bartender elaborated, saying:

"...every time I walk into work, I know that the customers expect not just good drinks but also a whole experience. They want to feel special, and that pressure can be overwhelming, especially during busy hours..."

Conversely, 30 respondents, accounting for 35%, reported experiencing minor challenges related to high customer expectations. These bartenders conveyed a sense of adaptability, indicating that while the pressure existed, they

felt capable of meeting customer needs effectively. As one bartender explained:

"...I think managing expectations is part of the job. I try to gauge what people want as soon as they sit down. If I can read their moods and preferences quickly, I feel more confident in delivering what they expect..."

This proactive approach, however, was not universally shared; some bartenders faced greater obstacles in this regard. In stark contrast, 15 respondents, representing 18%, described their challenges as major, highlighting instances where the weight of customer expectations led to significant stress and burnout. They shared anecdotes of particularly difficult nights when the rush of customers made it nearly impossible to meet expectations consistently. One bartender recounted:

"...there were nights when I felt like I was drowning. Customers wanted everything done instantly, and if I didn't deliver, I could see disappointment on their faces. It really affected my confidence..."

This comment illustrated the fine line bartenders walked in balancing customer service with their own well-being, underscoring the substantial challenges they faced in navigating high customer expectations.

3.3.2. Time Management during Peak Hours

The study on the challenges faced by bartenders in managing customer expectations revealed significant insights into the critical issue of time management during peak hours. According to the data presented on table 3, 25 respondents, representing 29%, indicated that time management was a minor challenge. These individuals often felt that while busy times could create some pressure, they had developed effective strategies to cope with the demands. One bartender noted:

"...during busy shifts, I often focus on prioritizing tasks. I learned to take a deep breath and organize my workflow. It helps me stay calm and efficient..."

This perspective underlined the ability of some bartenders to navigate high-pressure situations, allowing them to maintain a level of service that met customer expectations even during rush periods.

In contrast, a substantial portion of the respondents, 45 individuals (53%), viewed time management during peak hours as a moderate challenge. These bartenders acknowledged the difficulties posed by increased customer volume and the corresponding pressure to deliver prompt service. One respondent shared:

"...I always felt like I was running against the clock during busy nights. There were times when I couldn't even catch a breath. It's exhausting trying to keep everyone happy when the bar is packed..."

This feedback illustrated the reality of bartending during peak hours, where the demands often exceeded what could realistically be managed without impacting service quality.

Only 15 respondents, or 18%, reported time management as a major challenge. These individuals expressed significant frustration regarding their ability to meet customer expectations amid high demand. One bartender explained:

"...It can feel overwhelming when you have a line of customers waiting and you're trying to juggle multiple orders. I remember one night where I dropped a drink because I was trying to serve too many people at once. It was embarrassing, and I could feel the customers' impatience..."

This comment revealed the intense pressure bartenders faced during peak hours, where even minor mistakes could lead to customer dissatisfaction and heightened stress.

The findings highlighted the complex nature of time management as a challenge for bartenders, particularly during busy periods. The data illustrated a range of experiences, from those who felt they had the situation under control to those who struggled significantly under pressure. This variance indicated that while some bartenders could effectively manage time and expectations, others faced considerable difficulties that impacted their performance and customer satisfaction. Consequently, bar management should consider implementing better training and support systems to help bartenders navigate peak hours more efficiently, thereby enhancing the overall customer experience.

3.3.3. Dealing with Difficult Customers

The research into the challenges faced by bartenders in managing customer expectations as per table 3, uncovered significant insights into the difficulties of dealing with difficult customers. Among the respondents, 20 individuals, representing 24%, categorized this challenge as minor. These bartenders often shared that they had developed strategies to handle difficult customers effectively. One bartender recounted:

"...I've learned that staying calm and polite goes a long way. Most of the time, if you just listen to the customer and acknowledge their frustration, it helps diffuse the situation. It's about showing them that you care..."

This viewpoint highlighted how some bartenders could navigate challenging interactions without it becoming a significant issue, often seeing such encounters as part of the job rather than a major hurdle.

Conversely, a more considerable proportion of respondents, 40 bartenders (47%), indicated that dealing with difficult customers posed a moderate challenge. These individuals acknowledged that while they managed to handle difficult situations, they often found them draining. One respondent noted:

"...there are nights when you just get those customers who seem unhappy no matter what you do. It can be exhausting to keep trying to turn their mood around while also serving others. It really tests your patience..."

This feedback revealed the psychological toll that frequent interactions with difficult customers could take on bartenders, illustrating that while they might cope, the emotional strain was palpable.

Finally, 25 respondents, or 29%, viewed dealing with difficult customers as a major challenge. These bartenders expressed feelings of frustration and anxiety regarding their ability to meet expectations in such scenarios. One bartender candidly shared:

"...I remember a specific night when a customer became verbally aggressive over a drink order. It escalated quickly, and I felt powerless to make it right. It was embarrassing and made me dread going back to work. I worried about how often I would face such confrontations..."

This testimony underlined the reality that some bartenders experienced significant stress and fear in handling difficult customers, which could affect not only their job satisfaction but also the overall customer experience in the bar.

In summary, the findings indicated that while some bartenders felt adequately prepared to deal with difficult customers, many others faced considerable challenges. The data revealed a spectrum of experiences, from those who managed such interactions with ease to those who found them emotionally taxing and detrimental to their work environment. As such, bar management should consider implementing training

programs that equip bartenders with additional tools and techniques for managing difficult customer interactions, fostering a healthier work atmosphere and improving customer satisfaction.

3.4. Strategies to Improve Bartender Performance and Enhance Customer Experiences

In exploring the strategies to enhance bartender performance and improve customer experiences, several key themes emerged from the data collected. Respondents highlighted the importance of continuous training and development as vital for equipping bartenders with the necessary skills to meet customer expectations effectively. They also emphasized the significance of implementing customer feedback to inform service improvements and enhance overall satisfaction. Additionally, the role of incentives and rewards for excellent service was noted as a motivational factor that encouraged bartenders to strive for higher performance levels.

Table 4: Showing the Strategies to Improve Bartender Performance and Enhance Customer Experiences

Sub-indicator	Not Effective (%)	Somewhat Effective (%)	Highly Effective (%)
Continuous Training and Development	20(24%)	45(53%)	20(24%)
Implementation of Customer Feedback	15(18%)	50(59%)	20(24%)
Incentives and rewards for excellent service	25(29%)	40(47%)	20(24%)

3.4.1. Continuous Training and Development

The study as per table 4, revealed diverse perspectives on the effectiveness of continuous training and development in enhancing bartender performance and overall customer experiences. Among the 85 respondents, 20 individuals, representing 24%, believed that continuous training was not effective. Many of these participants expressed skepticism about the value of the training programs currently in place. One respondent shared their frustration:

“...I have attended several training sessions, but I still see the same mistakes being made on busy nights. It feels like a waste of time if we’re not actually applying what we learned...”

This comment highlighted the disconnect between training content and real-world application, suggesting that merely having training programs was not enough to drive change in bartender behavior and service quality.

In contrast, a significant portion of respondents, 45 individuals or 53%, found the training somewhat effective. These patrons acknowledged that while some improvements were noticeable, they felt there was room for enhancement. One participant noted:

“...I’ve seen bartenders improve after training sessions, but I think they need more frequent refreshers, especially with new cocktails and customer service techniques. It’s important for the staff to stay sharp...”

This feedback indicated a recognition of the benefits of training, yet it also pointed to a need for ongoing education to ensure bartenders remained adept and responsive to customer demands.

Lastly, 20 respondents (24%) rated continuous training and development as highly effective in improving bartender performance. These patrons praised the impact of well-structured training programs that focused not only on drink

preparation but also on customer interaction and conflict resolution. A satisfied customer remarked:

“...the bartenders here are exceptional. I’ve noticed that they handle busy nights with such poise, and I believe it’s because of the training they’ve received. They know how to engage with customers and make everyone feel valued, even when the bar is packed...”

This perspective underlined the importance of effective training programs in cultivating a skilled and responsive bar staff.

These findings emphasized that while there was a general appreciation for continuous training, its effectiveness varied significantly among respondents. The data suggested that enhancing the relevance and frequency of training sessions could lead to improved bartender performance, directly influencing the quality of customer experiences. For bar management, these insights highlighted the need to reassess their training strategies to ensure they effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice in a dynamic bar environment.

3.4.2. Implementation of Customer Feedback

The implementation of customer feedback emerged as a crucial strategy for improving bartender performance and enhancing customer experiences, although opinions on its effectiveness as per table 4, varied among respondents. Among the 85 participants, 15 individuals, or 18%, viewed the implementation of customer feedback as not effective. Many of these respondents expressed frustration with how their feedback was handled, often feeling that it did not lead to tangible changes. One patron lamented:

“...I’ve filled out feedback forms multiple times, but I rarely see any changes. It makes me wonder if they even take it seriously. If they want to improve, they need to listen to us better...”

This response highlighted a disconnect between the collection of feedback and the perceived responsiveness of the bar management, suggesting that merely soliciting feedback without action could undermine customer trust and engagement.

In contrast, a significant majority of respondents 50 individuals or 59% considered the implementation of customer feedback to be somewhat effective. These patrons recognized that while some of their suggestions were acted upon, they believed there was still considerable room for improvement. One respondent remarked:

“...I think they try to incorporate feedback, and I have seen some changes, like the addition of new drink options. However, it often feels like a slow process. It would be great to see them act on feedback more swiftly...”

This standpoint emphasized the importance of responsiveness in the feedback loop; while there was acknowledgment of positive changes, many customers felt that timely adjustments were essential for enhancing their overall experience.

Lastly, 20 respondents, representing 24%, regarded the implementation of customer feedback as highly effective. These individuals shared experiences of witnessing substantial improvements based on their input. One satisfied customer stated:

“...I’ve noticed how the bartenders adapted their service after we shared our thoughts about the menu. They’ve introduced new cocktails that are fantastic, and the staff seems more knowledgeable now. It’s clear they’re taking our feedback seriously, which makes me more likely to return...”

This response illustrated how effective feedback implementation could create a more dynamic and customer-centric atmosphere, leading to greater satisfaction and loyalty. In general, the findings indicated a general recognition of the value of customer feedback in driving improvements in bartender performance and enhancing the customer experience. However, the data also suggested that for feedback to be truly effective, bar management needed to ensure a more robust system for acting on suggestions and communicating changes back to customers. By fostering a culture of responsiveness and accountability, bars could enhance the impact of customer feedback and further elevate the overall customer experience.

3.4.3. Incentives and Rewards for Excellent Service

In the study focusing on strategies to improve bartender performance and enhance customer experiences, the role of incentives and rewards for excellent service as illustrated on table 4, was examined, revealing varied perceptions among respondents. Of the 85 participants, 25 individuals, or 29%, viewed the system of incentives and rewards as not effective. Many of these respondents expressed skepticism about the existing rewards structure, stating that it failed to motivate bartenders adequately. One participant noted:

"...I've seen bartenders put in a lot of effort, but the rewards they receive are minimal. It doesn't really encourage them to go the extra mile. I think if there were better incentives, it would push them to provide even better service..."

This feedback illustrated a disconnect between the recognition of good performance and the tangible rewards offered, suggesting that without meaningful incentives, bartenders might not feel compelled to elevate their service levels.

Conversely, 40 respondents, or 47%, considered the incentives and rewards system to be somewhat effective. These individuals acknowledged that while they observed some improvements in service quality when bartenders were rewarded, they believed that the system could be further optimized. One patron shared:

"...I've noticed that when the bartenders are recognized for their hard work, they seem to be more engaged and enthusiastic. However, I still think there could be more creativity in how they are rewarded. Something beyond just a simple bonus would be nice..."

This insight highlighted the idea that while the current incentives had a positive effect, they lacked the depth and variety necessary to truly inspire bartenders and enhance the overall experience for customers.

In contrast, 20 respondents, representing 24%, viewed the incentives and rewards for excellent service as highly effective. These participants provided examples of how rewards systems had positively influenced their interactions with bartenders. One respondent remarked:

"...I could see the difference in service when the bar had a rewards program. Bartenders were genuinely excited to serve, and it showed in their attitude. I felt like they cared about making our experience memorable..."

This response underlined the potential for well-structured incentive programs to create a more vibrant atmosphere, fostering a sense of commitment among bartenders that translated into enhanced customer experiences.

In short, the findings suggested that while there was a recognition of the role of incentives and rewards in shaping bartender performance, the effectiveness of these strategies varied significantly among patrons. The data revealed a need for bar management to critically assess and refine their

incentives system to ensure it adequately motivates staff and aligns with customer expectations. By developing a more engaging rewards framework that resonated with bartenders, bars could ultimately enhance the quality of service and, by extension, customer satisfaction.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed critical insights into how bartenders shape customer expectations and experiences in bars, particularly in Rusumo, Tanzania. Through the exploration of various indicators, including communication skills, service quality, and the ability to manage customer expectations, it became evident that bartenders play a pivotal role in influencing customer satisfaction. The findings highlighted the significance of effective communication and service efficiency in creating a positive atmosphere for patrons. While challenges such as high customer expectations and time management during peak hours were noted, bartenders demonstrated resilience in navigating these obstacles. The data suggested that continuous training and effective implementation of customer feedback could enhance service quality, leading to improved customer experiences. Furthermore, the study emphasized the need for bars to adopt strategies that foster bartender development and promote an engaging environment for patrons. Incentives and rewards for excellent service were identified as essential components in motivating bartenders, though their effectiveness varied among respondents. As bars strive to enhance customer experiences, the importance of addressing the challenges bartenders face cannot be overstated. By investing in staff development and refining incentive structures, bar management can cultivate a culture of excellence that not only elevates bartender performance but also enriches the overall customer experience. The findings of this study serve as a foundation for future research and practical applications in the bar industry, providing valuable insights for stakeholders aiming to optimize service delivery and enhance customer satisfaction.

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations emerged to enhance bartender performance and improve customer experiences in bars. Firstly, it is crucial for bar management to implement regular and structured training programs focused on communication skills, customer service, and conflict resolution, enabling bartenders to effectively manage customer expectations and improve overall service quality. Secondly, establishing a robust system for collecting and implementing customer feedback can provide valuable insights into patrons' preferences and areas needing improvement. This approach not only empowers bartenders but also fosters a customer-centric culture. Additionally, introducing a well-defined incentive structure to reward excellent service can motivate bartenders, encouraging them to deliver exceptional experiences consistently. Finally, promoting teamwork and collaboration among staff will ensure a supportive environment that enhances service efficiency, particularly during peak hours. By addressing these key areas, bars can create a more engaging atmosphere that meets and exceeds customer expectations.

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