

An Evidence Synthesis Protocol for Exploring African Customers' Experiences in the Hospitality Industry: A Review of Service Perceptions in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Background: This qualitative systematic review protocol aims to explore the experiences of African customers in white-owned restaurants and hotels in post-apartheid South Africa, focusing on the dynamics of service interactions and their implications for racial relations within the hospitality industry. Despite the end of apartheid in 1994, the echoes of historical racial disparities and power imbalances persist, potentially influencing customer experiences in this sector, particularly in establishments owned by individuals of European descent. In view of above, the research question for this study is "How do African customers in white-owned restaurants and hotels in post-apartheid South Africa perceive and experience service interactions, and what are the underlying factors influencing these perceptions, considering historical power imbalances, societal perceptions, lingering effects of apartheid, inclusive practices, and the varied experiences across different hospitality establishments?"

Study objectives: Objectives include examining the dynamics of service interactions, identifying factors influencing perceptions and experiences, evaluating alignment with inclusive practices and post-apartheid ideals, and describing African customers' experiences regarding service.

Methods: The study will employ the Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, And Research type (SPIDER) framework to design a nuanced research question that seeks to understand how African customers perceive and experience service interactions in these settings, considering historical power imbalances, societal perceptions, the lingering effects of apartheid, inclusive practices, and varied experiences across different types of hospitality establishments. This approach aims to dissect the complex interplay of historical, societal, and economic factors that shape these experiences, providing insights into the complexities of achieving a truly inclusive and equitable hospitality landscape in post-apartheid South Africa.

Expected contribution to knowledge and practice: This review will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the hospitality industry in encouraging environments that reflect the nation's diversity and commitment to reconciliation and social cohesion. By highlighting the lived experiences of African customers and examining the extent to which white-owned establishments embody post-apartheid ideals, this study aims to offer valuable recommendations for industry practitioners and policymakers to promote cultural sensitivity, equity, and inclusivity, thus enhancing the role of the hospitality industry in South Africa's broader societal transformation.

Keywords: African customer's perceptions; Post-apartheid South Africa; Service interactions; Economic disparities

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INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry plays a pivotal role in shaping the perceptions and experiences of customers, reflecting the cultural and social dynamics of a given region. In post-apartheid South Africa, where historical racial tensions persist, examining the interactions between African customers and staff members in white-owned restaurants and hotels becomes a critical lens through which to understand societal changes and challenges.

South Africa, with its diverse landscapes and rich cultural heritage, has emerged as a prominent destination in the global tourism landscape. The hospitality industry, encompassing a spectrum from upscale hotels to quaint bed-and-breakfast outlets, has witnessed significant growth, attracting a broad range of customers. However, this sector's evolution has not been immune to the historical complexities that have characterized the nation's past, particularly the apartheid era.

The apartheid system, which officially ended in 1994, institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination, leaving a lasting impact on social structures. In the aftermath of apartheid, the hospitality industry underwent transformative changes, adapting to the new democratic order and, ostensibly, striving to be inclusive. However, the echoes of historical racial disparities continue to reverberate within the industry, influencing the dynamics between customers and staff members, particularly in establishments owned by individuals of European descent.

Despite the apparent strides towards a more equitable society, anecdotal evidence suggests that African customers may encounter distinctive challenges and varying levels of service quality in establishments owned by white individuals. These challenges are often rooted in historical power imbalances, societal perceptions, and the lingering effects of a deeply divided past.

The post-apartheid era in South Africa has witnessed a surge in discussions surrounding racial reconciliation and social cohesion. However, the hospitality industry's role in encouraging inclusive and unbiased environments has not been comprehensively explored, especially from the perspective of African customers.

The problem at hand lies in understanding the nuanced interactions between African customers and staff members, resolving the layers of perception and service quality. Do these interactions reflect a genuine commitment to post-apartheid ideals, or do they underscore persistent challenges in dismantling racial hierarchies within the hospitality sector? What narratives emerge when considering the experiences of African customers in the diverse array of establishments, ranging from luxurious hotels to intimate guest houses?

This paper begins on a qualitative systematic review to address these questions, seeking to amplify the voices of African customers and explain on the dynamics at play in the post-apartheid South African hospitality industry. By doing so, it aims to contribute valuable insights for both academics and

industry practitioners, encouraging a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist in building a more inclusive and equitable hospitality landscape.

Research problem

The research aims to investigate the experiences of African customers in white-owned restaurants and hotels in post-apartheid South Africa, with a focus on understanding the dynamics of service interactions and their implications on racial relations within the hospitality industry. The identified problem indicators highlight specific challenges and nuances in this context, as discussed below:

Problem indicator 1:

Historical power imbalances: The legacy of apartheid has left deep-rooted historical power imbalances that continue to influence social dynamics. In the hospitality industry, the interactions between African customers and staff members may be shaped by historical prejudices and hierarchies, leading to disparate treatment. Historical power imbalances manifest in subtle ways, from differential service quality to more overt forms of discrimination, raising questions about the industry's commitment to dismantling the vestiges of apartheid.

Problem indicator 2:

Societal perceptions and stereotypes: Societal perceptions and stereotypes play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of African customers in white-owned establishments. Preconceived notions about service expectations, behavior, and cultural understanding may contribute to biased interactions. Stereotypes can manifest in the form of microaggressions, reinforcing racial divides within the hospitality industry. Understanding how these perceptions influence service provision is important in dissecting the broader issues of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.

Problem indicator 3:

Lingering effects of apartheid: Despite the formal end of apartheid, its effects linger in the social fabric of South Africa. The hospitality industry, as a microcosm of society, may grapple with the remnants of systemic discrimination. African customers may encounter challenges rooted in economic disparities, access to opportunities, and a general hesitancy to fully integrate. Exploring how these lingering effects manifest in day-to-day interactions within white-owned establishments exposes the ongoing complexities in achieving genuine post-apartheid transformation.

Problem indicator 4:

Inclusive practices and post-apartheid ideals: The extent to which white-owned restaurants and hotels genuinely embody post-apartheid ideals of inclusivity and equality is a central concern. While there may be efforts to project an image of progress, the lived experiences of African customers reveal whether these establishments actively engage in practices that encourage a sense of belonging. Evaluating the alignment between proclaimed ideals

and the ground-level experiences of customer's offers insights into the industry's commitment to social cohesion and the extent to which it contributes to broader societal change.

Problem indicator 5:

Varied experiences across hospitality establishments: The diversity within the hospitality sector, ranging from upscale hotels to intimate bed-and-breakfast outlets, introduces a nuanced layer to the research problem. African customers' experiences may differ significantly depending on the type of establishment, raising questions about the universality of challenges and the impact of socio-economic factors. Investigating these variations provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of racial dynamics within the hospitality industry.

In view of the above, the research problem revolves around the need to dissect the complex interplay of historical, societal, and economic factors shaping the experiences of African customers in white-owned restaurants and hotels in post-apartheid South Africa.

Research question: In view of the fact that this study is a qualitative systematic review that seeks to describe experiences as opposed to providing an intervention, the authors opted to use the SPIDER framework to craft a research question [1]. Thus, the research question for this study is, "How do African customers in white-owned restaurants and hotels in post-apartheid South Africa perceive and experience service interactions, and what are the underlying factors influencing these perceptions, considering historical power imbalances, societal perceptions, lingering effects of apartheid, inclusive practices, and the varied experiences across different hospitality establishments?"

Research objectives:

- Examine the dynamics of service interactions
- Identify influencing factors on perceptions and experiences
- Evaluate alignment with inclusive practices and post-apartheid ideals
- Describing experiences of African perceptions regarding service in post-apartheid South Africa

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework is a critical aspect explicitly stated by educational researchers. It shapes the research questions, informs the method of data collection and analysis, and guides the discussion of study results. It also exposes the researcher's subjectivities, including values, social experiences, and viewpoints. Recognizing and articulating the theoretical framework is important for novice researchers, as it reveals the implicit or explicit assumptions underlying their exploration of a phenomenon of interest. Thus, the theoretical framework not only elucidates the lens through which the phenomenon is examined but also influences the entire research process, from formulating questions to interpreting findings. In this study, the Consumer Brand Theory (CBT) was used to define customer experiences [2].

In the context of exploring African customers' experiences in the hospitality industry in post-apartheid South Africa, while the CBT as mentioned provides a valuable lens for defining customer experiences by focusing on the relationship between consumers and brands, it is not the only applicable theory. CBT is instrumental in understanding how brand perceptions influence consumer behavior and experiences.

However, other theories could also enrich the research by offering different perspectives and insights into customer experiences:

Service-Dominant logic (S-D Logic)

Proposed by Vargo and Lusch, S-D logic shifts the focus from transactions to value co-creation between providers and consumers. In the hospitality industry, this perspective can help understand how customers co-create their experiences through interactions with the service environment and personnel, influencing their overall perception of the service.

Experience economy theory

Pine and Gilmore introduced the concept of the experience economy, where businesses are seen as staging experiences to engage customers in a personal and memorable way. This theory could be particularly relevant for the hospitality industry in South Africa, as it emphasizes the importance of creating unique and engaging customer experiences.

Cultural theory

Considering the socio-cultural context of post-apartheid South Africa, incorporating theories that address cultural dynamics and consumer behavior can provide deeper insights. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, for example, could help in understanding how cultural values influence customer expectations and experiences in the hospitality sector.

Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT)

ECT, as proposed by Oliver, is a cognitive theory that explains post-purchase or post-use satisfaction as a function of initial expectations, perceived performance, and confirmation of those expectations. This theory could be particularly useful in understanding customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry.

Relationship marketing theory

This theory focuses on long-term customer engagement and the development of ongoing relationships between businesses and their customers. In the context of the hospitality industry, this theory could provide insights into how customer loyalty and repeat business can be encouraged through personalized service and customer recognition.

Each of these theories offers a different lens through which to examine customer experiences in the hospitality industry, and their inclusion could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence customer perceptions and behaviors in post-apartheid South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review is based on the application and operationalization of the research objectives as identified in the previous section. The transition from apartheid to a democratic society in South Africa marked a significant shift in the socio-political landscape, signaling a new era of hope and expectations for equality and improved quality of life for all its citizens. However, the legacy of apartheid, characterized by profound racial, spatial, and economic divisions, continues to influence the country's development trajectory, particularly in terms of service delivery. This literature review aims to explore the complex dynamics of service delivery in post-apartheid South Africa, focusing on the disparities that exist across different sectors and communities, the impact of these disparities on social cohesion and identity, and the role of white-owned entities in providing services to the African population.

The review will delve into the economic disparities that basis the challenges in service delivery, highlighting how the apartheid-era economic structure continues to affect access to quality services. It will examine the state of healthcare, education, and basic utilities, illustrating how inadequacies in these areas contribute to a sense of neglect and marginalization among the African population. Furthermore, the review will consider the role of white-owned businesses in sectors such as banking, hospitality, and healthcare, exploring how their practices may influence service accessibility and quality for African consumers.

Examination of service dynamics interactions

Investigating nuanced experiences of African customers in white-owned establishments: In the landscape of consumer experiences, a compelling exploration unfolds as we delve into the nuanced interactions of African customers within white-owned establishments. This inquiry seeks to resolve the complex layers of identity, culture, and consumption dynamics, offering a deep understanding of the intersectionality at play.

Rooted in the theoretical framework of consumer brand identification [3], our investigation aims to explain on the convergence of brand identity and consumer identity. As Addie, et al. [4], point out, consumer brand identification becomes salient when the brand aligns with the social identity of the consumer. This lens proves important in understanding the complex relationships between African customers and white-owned establishments, where cultural dynamics and societal norms come into play.

For African customers, entering white-owned establishments is more than a transactional experience. It involves a negotiation of cultural dynamics, where their individual cultural identities intersect with the dominant culture represented by these establishments [5].

In today's globalized world, brands play a pivotal role in cultural representation [6]. For African customers, navigating white-owned establishments involves not only a transaction but also a negotiation of cultural representation. This process is significant in shaping their engagement with brands and their overall consumer experiences.

As highlighted by Starkey, understanding consumer brand identification is important for marketers. African customers, like any other consumer group, perceive brands beyond their functional attributes. Brands become an extension of their identity, influencing their choices and preferences [3]. This understanding is vital for businesses and marketers aiming to create inclusive and culturally sensitive environments within white-owned establishments.

In exploring nuanced experiences, our research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with African customers frequenting white-owned establishments. This method aligns with Creswell's recommendation of employing narrative inquiry, allowing participants to share their stories, perspectives, and emotions, providing a rich and contextual understanding of their experiences.

Analyzing positive and negative service interactions and impact on customer perceptions: In the complex blend of customer relations, the examination of positive and negative service interactions holds dominant importance, influencing customer perceptions in profound ways.

The exploration begins with an acknowledgment of the foundational role that service interactions play in shaping customer perceptions. As emphasized by Parasuraman, et al. [7], service encounters serve as critical touchpoints where customers interact directly with a brand, influencing their overall perception of the service quality and the brand itself. Positive service interactions contribute to favorable customer perceptions, encouraging loyalty and positive word-of-mouth [8].

Conversely, negative service interactions carry the potential to leave lasting impressions that can tarnish customer perceptions. Research by Tax highlights that dissatisfying service encounters can lead to customer dissatisfaction, negatively impacting brand loyalty and potentially resulting in customers sharing their negative experiences with others [9]. In a world where customer reviews and feedback hold significant sway, negative service interactions can reverberate widely, influencing potential customers and affecting the brand's reputation.

Understanding the nuances of positive and negative service interactions requires an examination of the factors contributing to customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Service quality, as conceptualized by Parasuraman, et al. [7], plays a pivotal role.

The impact of service interactions extends beyond individual transactions. Pine and Gilmore introduced the concept of the "experience economy," emphasizing that customers seek memorable and positive experiences. Positive service interactions contribute to creating such experiences, enhancing customer perceptions not only of the specific service encounter but also of the brand as a whole. This aligns with the broader notion that service quality is a critical driver of brand equity [10].

Moreover, the emotional dimension of service interactions adds another layer to customer perceptions. Positive service interactions

evoke positive emotions, contributing to customer satisfaction. In contrast, negative service interactions can evoke negative emotions, leading to heightened dissatisfaction and potential disengagement with the brand.

Recognizing the significance of service interactions, businesses are increasingly investing in training their frontline staff to enhance customer service skills. Employees' interpersonal skills, as noted by, can significantly impact service interactions. Positive and effective communication during service encounters can mitigate potential issues and contribute to positive customer perceptions.

Assessing hospitality staff's impact on service dynamics and overall customer experience: In the dynamic landscape of the hospitality industry, the influence of staff on service dynamics and the overall customer experience stands as a pivotal factor shaping the success of establishments.

Recent research by Choi and Chu emphasizes the central role of frontline staff in delivering positive customer experiences within the hospitality sector [11]. As the industry is inherently service-oriented, the interactions between staff and customers become critical touchpoints that influence the overall perception of the establishment. Competence and friendliness of staff emerge as key factors influencing customer satisfaction, as highlighted in studies by Kandampully and Suhartanto. Competent and amiable staff contribute to a positive service encounter, ultimately enhancing the overall experience for guests.

The emotional labor undertaken by hospitality staff adds a nuanced layer to service dynamics. Hochschild's concept of emotional labor, particularly relevant in the context of the hospitality industry, refers to the effort employees invest in managing their emotions to meet organizational expectations. Recent studies indicate that emotional labor is a significant aspect of service delivery, impacting customer perceptions and satisfaction [12]. Genuine care and empathy expressed by staff contribute to creating a positive emotional connection with customers, encouraging a memorable and satisfying experience.

In the contemporary hospitality landscape, employee engagement has gained prominence as a critical factor influencing service quality. Recent work by Kim, et al. [13], emphasizes the link between organizational leadership, employee engagement, and customer satisfaction.

Importantly, the impact of hospitality staff extends beyond face-to-face interactions, particularly in the digital era. Harrington, et al. [14], highlight the role of online interactions and the digital presence of staff in influencing the overall customer experience.

Finally, recent literature underscores the critical role of hospitality staff in influencing service dynamics and overall customer experiences. Competence, friendliness, emotional labor, and employee engagement emerge as key factors that contribute to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the success of hospitality establishments in a competitive and evolving industry.

Identifying the influencing factors on customer perceptions and experiences

This objective is focused on identification and explication of key factors that influence customer perceptions.

Historical power imbalances in service provision and customer perceptions: In the complex blend of service provision, the historical power imbalances rooted in the legacy of apartheid have left an enduring imprint on customer perceptions, shaping the dynamics between service providers and recipients.

The apartheid era in South Africa, characterized by institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination, significantly shaped power dynamics in various aspects of society, including service provision. The work of Nkomo, [15], highlights that apartheid entrenched deeply rooted social hierarchies, where racial identity determined access to resources, opportunities, and services. This historical backdrop laid the foundation for enduring power imbalances that continue to influence customer perceptions.

Recent studies by Essid, [16], emphasize that the legacies of apartheid persist in contemporary South Africa, impacting customer experiences and interactions. Customers who have experienced the inequalities of apartheid may approach service interactions with heightened sensitivity to issues of power and fairness.

The influence of apartheid-era power imbalances is evident not only in face-to-face service encounters but also in the broader socio-economic disparities that persist. Research by Harris, et al. [17], points out that economic disparities resulting from apartheid policies continue to shape access to quality services, education, and opportunities. Customers from historically disadvantaged backgrounds may carry these socio-economic disparities into their service interactions, affecting their perceptions of fairness and equality.

Furthermore, the digital age has brought new dimensions to historical power imbalances. Research by Mutsvairo, [18], suggests that digital platforms can either amplify or mitigate existing power imbalances. In the context of apartheid's historical legacies, the ability to access and utilize digital tools may vary, further influencing the power dynamic within the service exchange. Digital disparities can perpetuate historical inequalities, impacting the overall customer experience.

Societal perceptions and stereotypes in African customer-hospitality staff dynamics: In the complex interplay between African customers and hospitality staff, societal perceptions and stereotypes weave a complex blend that influences the dynamics of service encounters. This narrative explores the multifaceted dimensions of how societal attitudes and preconceived notions impact the interactions between African customers and hospitality staff, drawing insights from recent literature.

The relationship between societal perceptions and hospitality staff dynamics is deeply rooted in cultural and social constructs. Recent research by Anaza, et al. emphasizes that cultural stereotypes can shape the expectations and behaviors of both African customers and hospitality staff. Stereotypes related to

hospitality roles or cultural backgrounds can influence how staff approach their interactions and how customers perceive the service they receive [5].

The impact of societal perceptions is particularly pronounced in the context of racial and ethnic stereotypes. In the hospitality sector, racial biases can shape how staff members perceive and interact with African customers, as highlighted by Okumus, et al. [19]. Similarly, African customers may enter service interactions with awareness of prevalent stereotypes, influencing their expectations and responses.

Moreover, the work of Mbaiwa, [20], underscores how societal perceptions extend beyond individual interactions to shape broader service experiences. Hospitality staff, consciously or unconsciously influenced by societal stereotypes, may inadvertently contribute to a sense of exclusion or discomfort for African customers.

The power dynamics inherent in societal perceptions also play a role in service exchanges. Studies by Nkomo, [15], indicate that power imbalances rooted in societal structures can impact the communication and negotiation process between African customers and hospitality staff. These power dynamics may contribute to a sense of vulnerability or marginalization for customers, influencing their overall perception of the service encounter.

The digital era introduces new dimensions to societal perceptions, with online platforms becoming spaces where stereotypes can be perpetuated or challenged. Research by Mutsvairo, [18], suggests that online reviews and social media discussions can reflect and reinforce societal attitudes, affecting the reputation of hospitality establishments and shaping customers' decisions.

The intricate dynamics between African customers and hospitality staff are significantly influenced by societal perceptions and stereotypes. Recent literature highlights the profound impact of cultural, racial, and power-related stereotypes on service interactions.

Apartheid's lingering effects on African customer service experiences: In the complex blend of South Africa's history, the legacy of apartheid continues to cast a long shadow over contemporary African customer service experiences.

The apartheid era, marked by institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination, has left an indelible mark on the social fabric of South Africa. Recent research by Adams, [21], emphasizes that the historical injustices of apartheid persist in the collective memory of the nation, influencing societal attitudes, expectations, and interpersonal dynamics.

One of the lingering effects of apartheid on customer service experiences is evident in the socio-economic disparities that persist. Studies by Seekings, et al. [22], highlight that historical inequalities in access to education, employment, and resources have created enduring socio-economic imbalances.

The psychological impact of apartheid is explored by Bhana, et al. [23], who argue that the legacy of racial trauma continues to affect individuals and communities. African customers may

approach service encounters with heightened sensitivity, influenced by the historical context of systemic discrimination. This psychological baggage can manifest in interactions with service providers, influencing trust, communication, and overall satisfaction.

Moreover, the spatial legacy of apartheid has tangible effects on service accessibility. Research by Turok and Borel-Saladin highlights the persistent spatial inequalities, where historically disadvantaged communities often have limited access to quality services. This spatial segregation can contribute to disparities in the availability and quality of services for African customers, shaping their service experiences based on geographical factors.

The workplace dynamics within service-oriented industries also reflect the enduring effects of apartheid. Research by Nkomo, [15], emphasizes that power imbalances rooted in historical structures can manifest in the workplace, influencing the treatment of African staff and, consequently, the service experiences of African customers.

In the digital age, online platforms become spaces where the legacy of apartheid is both reflected and contested. Research by Mutsvairo, [18], suggests that social media discussions and online reviews can amplify or challenge societal attitudes, influencing the reputation of businesses and shaping customer decisions. The digital space serves as a mirror reflecting the ongoing societal dialogue about the consequences of apartheid on service experiences.

Finally, the persistent effects of apartheid continue to reverberate in African customer service experiences. Recent literature underscores that the historical injustices, socio-economic disparities, psychological trauma, spatial inequalities, and workplace dynamics rooted in apartheid collectively contribute to shaping the contours of service interactions.

Evaluation of alignment with inclusive practices and post-apartheid ideals

Integrating post-apartheid ideals with African customer perceptions: In the wake of the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, the quest for societal healing and integration of post-apartheid ideals has become intertwined with the dynamics of African customer perceptions.

The post-apartheid era has ushered in an era of transformative change, characterized by efforts to establish a more inclusive and equitable society. Research by Magadla, [24], emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the historical context of apartheid while striving to build a nation rooted in principles of equality, justice, and reconciliation.

One of the key aspects of post-apartheid integration is the emphasis on cultural diversity and inclusivity. The work of Mokubung, et al. [25], highlights the importance of recognizing and celebrating diverse cultural identities within the nation.

Moreover, the activity of economic empowerment and redress for historical inequalities has implications for African customer perceptions. Research by Rwigema, et al. [26], discusses the challenges and opportunities associated with economic

transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. African customers, particularly those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, may view economic empowerment initiatives positively if they perceive tangible improvements in access to opportunities and services.

The discourse on reconciliation and nation-building is also integral to the post-apartheid narrative. The work of South African Human Rights Commission emphasizes the importance of encouraging a sense of belonging and shared identity. In the zone of customer service, efforts to create an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere contribute to shaping how African customers perceive their interactions with service providers [27].

The education sector plays a pivotal role in promoting post-apartheid ideals and encouraging awareness. Research by Modiba, et al. [28], highlights the role of education in promoting social cohesion and understanding. This has implications for customer service interactions, as a more informed and socially aware customer base may engage with service providers in a way that aligns with the values of post-apartheid South Africa.

The digital landscape provides a platform for the expression of post-apartheid ideals and their integration into customer experiences. Research by Boonzaaier, et al. [29], discusses how digital platforms can be controlled for storytelling and narrative-building that promotes inclusivity and understanding. Social media, in particular, becomes a space where customers and businesses can engage in conversations that reflect and contribute to post-apartheid ideals.

The integration of post-apartheid ideals with African customer perceptions is an ongoing and dynamic process. Recent literature underscores the importance of cultural inclusivity, economic empowerment, reconciliation efforts, education, and the digital space in shaping how African customers engage with various services.

Inclusive policies and training in the hospitality industry: The hospitality industry, with its diverse clientele and multicultural workforce, has been increasingly recognizing the importance of inclusive policies and training to encourage a welcoming and equitable environment. Recent literature explains on the implementation and impact of such initiatives within the industry.

Inclusive policies in the hospitality sector are designed to create an environment where diversity is not only acknowledged but celebrated. Studies by Gursoy, et al. [30], emphasize that inclusive policies encompass a range of practices, from non-discrimination and equal opportunity policies to initiatives that actively promote diversity in hiring and service provision. These policies extend beyond compliance with legal requirements to encourage a culture of inclusivity that resonates with both customers and employees.

Training programs play a pivotal role in translating inclusive policies into actionable practices within the hospitality industry. Research by Tews underscores the importance of training in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors. Inclusive training goes beyond traditional diversity training by addressing biases,

encouraging cultural competence, and equipping staff with the skills to navigate diverse interactions effectively. This approach is important in an industry where customer satisfaction is deeply intertwined with the quality of service provided.

Furthermore, the work of Saenz, et al. [31], emphasizes that inclusive policies and training are not only responsive to legal and societal expectations but are integral to the strategic success of hospitality businesses. In an era where customers increasingly value socially responsible and ethical practices, businesses that grab inclusivity can gain a competitive edge. This underscores the broader impact of inclusive policies, extending beyond the internal work culture to influence customer perceptions and loyalty.

The notion of inclusivity in the hospitality industry extends to considerations of accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Recent research by Kim, et al. [32], highlights the importance of creating physically accessible spaces and training staff to cater to the needs of guests with diverse abilities. Inclusive policies that address physical accessibility, coupled with training initiatives, contribute to creating a hospitable environment for all guests, regardless of their physical abilities.

Importantly, the digital era has opened new avenues for inclusivity in the hospitality sector. Studies by Gretzel, et al. [33], discuss the role of technology in enhancing the inclusivity of services, particularly for diverse customer segments. Mobile apps, online platforms, and virtual concierge services can be designed to accommodate different preferences, languages, and cultural sensitivities, contributing to a more inclusive and personalized guest experience.

Variations in inclusivity across establishments: In the landscape of the hospitality industry, variations in inclusivity across establishments reflect the complex interplay of organizational culture, leadership, and the industry's response to societal expectations. Recent literature provides insights into the factors contributing to divergent levels of inclusivity and the impact on customer experiences.

Organizational culture plays a central role in shaping inclusivity within hospitality establishments. Research by Kang, et al. [34], underscores that a culture that values diversity and inclusion at its core creates an environment where employees feel supported and engaged.

Leadership within hospitality establishments emerges as a critical factor in determining the level of inclusivity. The work of Aycan, et al. [35], emphasizes that leaders who champion inclusivity set the tone for the entire organization. Establishments with leaders committed to encouraging an inclusive culture are more likely to implement policies and practices that prioritize diversity, creating a ripple effect throughout the organizational hierarchy.

The industry's response to societal expectations and trends significantly influences variations in inclusivity across establishments. Studies by Gursoy, et al. [30], highlight that hospitality businesses operating in diverse and dynamic markets may be more inclined to prioritize inclusivity as a strategic imperative. Conversely, establishments in more homogenous

environments may not face the same external pressures to diversify their workforce or tailor their services to meet the needs of a diverse clientele.

Moreover, the level of inclusivity can vary based on the size and resources of the hospitality establishment. Research by Shin suggests that larger establishments may have the capacity to invest in comprehensive training programs, specialized services, and resources dedicated to encouraging inclusivity. Smaller establishments, on the other hand, may face limitations in terms of budget and manpower, impacting the extent to which they can implement inclusive policies and practices.

The local and cultural context within which hospitality establishments operate also contributes to variations in inclusivity. The study by Kim, et al. [32], highlights that establishments situated in culturally diverse regions may naturally adopt more inclusive practices to cater to a heterogeneous customer base. Conversely, establishments in more homogeneous cultural settings may not perceive the same urgency to prioritize inclusivity in their operations.

Digital advancements in the hospitality industry introduce additional dimensions to variations in inclusivity. Research by Sigala, [36], discusses how technology can be leveraged to enhance accessibility and inclusivity for diverse customer segments. Establishments that strategically incorporate digital tools to accommodate different needs, preferences, and abilities may exhibit higher levels of inclusivity compared to those slow to adapt to technological advancements.

Describing experiences of African perceptions regarding service in post-apartheid South Africa

These service delivery shortcomings contribute to perceptions of neglect and marginalization, reflecting a continuity of apartheid-era spatial and social divisions. The frustration and dissatisfaction arising from these challenges have led to numerous protests and public expressions of discontent, highlighting the critical need for improvement and equality in service provision. In the context of this study, exploring African perceptions of service in post-apartheid South Africa requires an understanding of the socio-economic dynamics that shape these experiences, divided into three critical areas: Economic inequality, service delivery, and social cohesion and identity.

Economic inequality: Economic inequality in post-apartheid South Africa is a pervasive issue that profoundly influences the perceptions and experiences of service delivery among the African population.

The apartheid system, which was officially dismantled in 1994, institutionalized racial segregation and economic discrimination, creating deep-rooted inequalities that persist in the post-apartheid era. Despite the end of formal apartheid, the socio-economic landscape of South Africa remains starkly divided, with a significant portion of the African population continuing to live in poverty and experiencing limited access to quality services [37].

This disparity is particularly evident in the healthcare sector, where private healthcare facilities, predominantly accessible to

the affluent, provide a stark contrast in quality and efficiency compared to the under-resourced public healthcare system relied upon by the majority of the African population.

Schools in economically deprived areas often suffer from inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and a scarcity of teaching resources, which significantly hampers the quality of education provided.

The housing sector further reflects the economic divide's impact on service delivery. Many South Africans, particularly in the African population, reside in informal settlements with limited access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity. The government's efforts to provide housing have been hampered by challenges such as resource constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and corruption, exacerbating the housing crisis and contributing to widespread dissatisfaction and protests over service delivery.

Moreover, the economic inequality in South Africa is not merely a matter of material deprivation but also contributes to a sense of social injustice and marginalization among the African population. The persistent economic disparities serve as a reminder of the apartheid past and undermine the social cohesion and inclusive citizenship envisioned in the post-apartheid era. This sense of injustice is further exacerbated by perceptions of corruption and inefficiency within the government, leading to mistrust in the state's ability and willingness to address the needs of its most disadvantaged citizens.

Service delivery in post-apartheid South Africa encapsulates a complex array of issues, significantly shaped by historical injustices and contemporary socio-economic disparities. The challenges faced by the African population in accessing quality services are multifaceted, spanning various sectors including healthcare, education, and basic utilities.

Disparities in service provision: In the context of South Africa, where the legacy of apartheid has left indelible marks on the socio-economic landscape, disparities in service delivery often mirror the racial and economic divides. White-owned businesses and service providers, operating within this historical and socio-economic framework, may inadvertently perpetuate these divides. For example, the location of businesses, pricing strategies, and even the level of service can reflect and reinforce existing inequalities. In areas where infrastructure is lacking, predominantly affecting African communities, the presence and quality of services from white-owned entities can be noticeably different.

Healthcare services: In the healthcare sector, disparities are evident in the distribution and quality of services between urban and rural areas, and between private and public healthcare facilities. Private healthcare facilities, which are often better resourced and provide higher quality care, are disproportionately owned and used by the white and affluent segments of the population. This leaves the majority of the African population reliant on underfunded and overstretched public healthcare services, exacerbating health inequalities [38].

Financial services: The banking and financial services sector also reflects disparities in service provision. Historically, white-owned banks have been concentrated in urban and economically developed areas, making access to financial services more challenging for individuals in rural or impoverished areas, who are predominantly African. This lack of access to financial services hinders economic opportunities and perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality.

Hospitality and retail services: In the hospitality and retail sectors, experiences of discrimination and unequal treatment in white-owned establishments, such as restaurants and shops, have been reported. These experiences range from overt racial discrimination to more subtle forms of exclusion, such as assumptions about purchasing power based on race. Such incidents not only reflect individual prejudices but also point to systemic issues within the service industry that can alienate African customers and reinforce feelings of marginalization.

Addressing service delivery challenges: Addressing the challenges of service delivery in post-apartheid South Africa, especially in the context of white-owned entities, requires a multifaceted approach. Policies aimed at redressing historical inequities, promoting equal access to services, and ensuring non-discriminatory practices within the private sector are essential. Moreover, initiatives to improve infrastructure, particularly in underserved areas, and to enhance the capacity and quality of public services, can help bridge the gap in service delivery. Encouraging corporate social responsibility and community engagement among white-owned businesses can also play a role in fostering more inclusive service provision.

Social cohesion and identity: The struggle against apartheid was not only a fight for political freedom but also a quest for dignity, equality, and recognition for the majority of South Africans who had been marginalized and dehumanized under the apartheid system. In the post-apartheid context, access to quality services is emblematic of the broader aspirations for a just and equitable society. For many in the African population, the ability to access quality healthcare, education, and housing is seen as a reaffirmation of their rights and citizenship in the new South Africa. These services are perceived as tangible manifestations of the promises of freedom and equality that were at the heart of the anti-apartheid struggle [39].

Equitable service delivery is important for encouraging social cohesion and building a shared national identity. The disparities in service provision that mirror the socio-economic inequalities inherited from the apartheid era serve to perpetuate feelings of exclusion and alienation among disadvantaged communities. The perception that the state is failing to provide adequately for the needs of all its citizens can undermine trust in public institutions and erode the social fabric necessary for a cohesive society [40].

Efforts to improve service delivery in underprivileged areas, therefore, have significance beyond the immediate benefits of the services themselves. They are part of a broader endeavor to heal the divisions of the past and weave a new social blend that includes all South Africans. When public services are delivered equitably and efficiently, they can act as powerful symbols of

inclusion and respect, reinforcing the idea that every citizen, regardless of race or economic status, is valued and has a place in the national community [41].

Moreover, issues of corruption and inefficiency within public service delivery mechanisms can further exacerbate feelings of disillusionment and mistrust among citizens, particularly those who are most in need of support.

Addressing these challenges requires a committed and multifaceted approach. Engaging communities in the process of service delivery can help to rebuild trust in public institutions and reinforce the sense of agency and inclusion among citizens [42].

In post-apartheid South Africa, the perceptions and experiences of service delivery are deeply intertwined with broader issues of social cohesion and national identity. Equitable and efficient public services are central to the project of building a united and inclusive society. By addressing the legacies of apartheid in the provision of services, South Africa can continue to move towards a future where all citizens feel valued, recognized, and included in the national narrative.

Summary

The experiences and perceptions of service among the African population in post-apartheid South Africa are shaped by a complex interplay of economic inequality, service delivery challenges, and the ongoing process of social cohesion and identity formation.

Economic inequality in post-apartheid South Africa has a profound impact on the perceptions and experiences of service delivery among the African population. Addressing these disparities requires a multifaceted approach that includes targeted interventions to improve the quality and accessibility of services in disadvantaged communities, along with broader economic reforms to reduce inequality and raise a more inclusive society.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

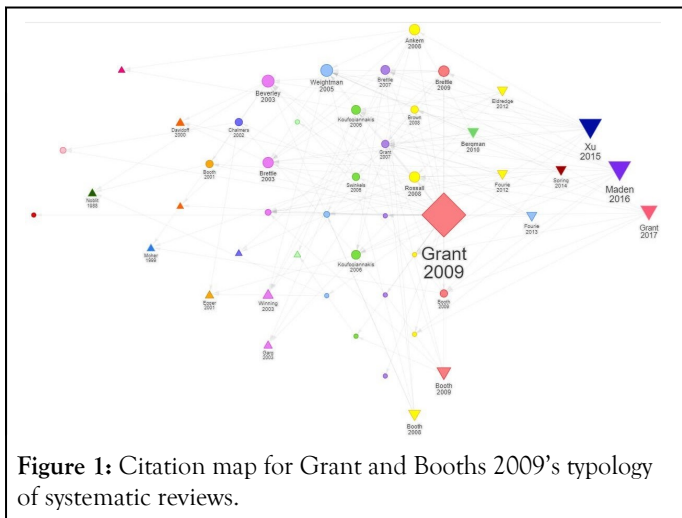
In the region of evidence synthesis, methodological frameworks play a important role in structuring the inquiry process and ensuring rigor in the analysis of existing literature. The SPIDER framework Cooke and the SALSA analytical framework Samnani, et al. [43], as employed by Maria J. Grant and Andrew Booth in their seminal work "A typology of reviews: An analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies" provide valuable tools for researchers engaged in qualitative evidence synthesis [44].

The SPIDER framework, an acronym for sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, and research type, offers a systematic approach to formulating specific and refined research questions in qualitative evidence synthesis. By delineating key elements such as the target sample, phenomenon of interest, research design, evaluation, and type, SPIDER ensures a structured and comprehensive framing of the research question.

This methodological clarity contributes to the precision and relevance of the qualitative evidence synthesis process [43].

The SALSA framework, encompassing search, appraisal, synthesis, and analysis, serves as a simple yet effective analytical tool tailored for examining various review types. It offers a structured approach to each phase of the evidence synthesis process [44]. The Search phase involves systematically retrieving relevant literature, the Appraisal phase focuses on critically evaluating the quality of the identified studies, the Synthesis phase entails integrating findings across studies, and the analysis phase involves interpreting and drawing conclusions from the synthesized evidence. SALSA's simplicity and comprehensiveness make it a valuable guide for researchers navigating the complexities of qualitative evidence synthesis.

Grant and Booth's work in developing a typology of reviews further enriches the landscape of evidence synthesis methodologies. Their analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies provides researchers with a comprehensive overview of diverse approaches to reviewing evidence, ranging from systematic reviews and meta-analyses to scoping reviews and realist reviews. This typology not only serves as a reference guide for researchers selecting an appropriate review type but also contributes to the ongoing discourse on methodological diversity within evidence synthesis. Thus, the framework for method used for research design, namely, QES, was hinged upon the seminal work of Grant and Booth (Figure 1).



Research design

A qualitative systematic review serves as a method for comparing and integrating findings from various qualitative studies, aiming to accumulate knowledge that may lead to the development of new theories, overarching narratives, wider generalizations, or interpretative translations [45]. This approach focuses on identifying themes or constructs within and across individual qualitative studies, with the goal of broadening the understanding of a specific phenomenon. Unlike meta-analysis, the objective is interpretative rather than aggregative, emphasizing the interpretation of findings rather than statistical combination [46]. The term "qualitative systematic review" has caused confusion, primarily stemming from historical associations with systematic reviews where meta-analysis is not

feasible. The Cochrane collaboration's qualitative research methods group advocates for the use of "qualitative evidence synthesis" to mitigate ambiguity in terminology. Alternative terms encountered include "qualitative meta-synthesis" and "meta-ethnography," the latter being somewhat misleading as it refers to a method adaptable to interpreting various types of qualitative research, not limited to ethnographies.

Qualitative systematic reviews offer strengths in exploring barriers and facilitators to service delivery, understanding user views, investigating perceptions of new roles, and informing service prioritization when evidence on effectiveness is inconclusive. This type of review complements research evidence with user-reported and practitioner-observed considerations, potentially offering more powerful insights than isolated comments from local questionnaires or surveys.

Research process

Based on the works of Costa (2024,2022,2020), the review process outlined will cover the following seven steps:

Defining the review question: Establishing a clear and focused question that the review aims to answer. This step is important for guiding the entire review process, including literature search, selection criteria, and synthesis approach.

Developing a protocol: Before starting the review, a detailed plan or protocol is developed, outlining the methods that will be used throughout the review process. This includes search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data extraction methods, and plans for data synthesis and analysis. This document is a full representation of the review protocol to be used. This review will be registered with the Open Science Framework (OSF) registries.

Conducting a systematic search: A comprehensive search of relevant databases and sources will be conducted to identify studies that address the review question. This step involves using carefully chosen keywords and search terms to ensure that relevant literature is not missed. The search will be conducted on Harzing, [47], and Publish repository, an artificial intelligence-driven platform which is a compendium of databases such as Crossref, Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, Open Alex, Semantic Scholar and PubMed.

Screening and selecting studies: All identified records will be screened based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to select studies that are relevant to the review question. This usually involves a two-stage process of screening titles and abstracts followed by a full-text review.

Appraising study quality: The methodological quality and relevance of the selected studies will be assessed to determine the trustworthiness of their findings. In systematic reviews, various appraisal tools can be used depending on the types of studies included in the review. However, in this qualitative evidence synthesis, PRISMA Workflow, CASP and ENTREQ will be used [48-50].

Extracting and synthesizing data: Relevant data are extracted

from the included studies, and a synthesis is conducted to integrate the findings. In a qualitative evidence synthesis, this may involve thematic synthesis, meta-ethnography, or other methods suitable for handling qualitative data. In this particular study, thematic synthesis will be used to generate themes that are aligned to the research objectives of this inquiry. The COSTAQDA, a cloud-based qualitative data analysis software that is suitable for literature-based inquiry will be used [51,52].

Reporting and dissemination: The findings of the review will be compiled into a comprehensive report, which will then disseminated to relevant stakeholders within policy-making and academic circles. Furthermore, dissemination of findings will also be published in recognized journals. This report should include a detailed account of the review methods, findings, limitations, and implications for practice and research [53-55].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study holds significant importance in both academic and practical realms, offering critical insights into the ongoing challenges and opportunities within the hospitality industry in post-apartheid South Africa. By focusing on the experiences of African customers in white-owned restaurants and hotels, the research sheds light on the nuanced interplay between historical legacies, societal dynamics, and economic factors that continue to shape customer-service provider interactions in this context. The importance of this study can be articulated through several key dimensions:

Social reconciliation and transformation

The study contributes to the broader discourse on racial reconciliation and social transformation in South Africa, a country still grappling with the remnants of apartheid. Understanding the dynamics within the hospitality industry serves as a microcosm for examining the progress towards a more inclusive and equitable society, highlighting both strides and stumbling blocks in the drive towards social cohesion.

Industry practices and policy implications

Insights derived from this research can inform industry practices and policy formulation, guiding stakeholders in developing strategies that promote inclusivity and sensitivity towards the diverse clientele they serve. This is particularly relevant for training programs, service protocols, and corporate social responsibility initiatives aimed at fostering environments that are welcoming to all customers, irrespective of racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Enhancing customer experience

At the heart of the hospitality industry is the commitment to delivering exceptional customer experiences. This study underscores the importance of understanding the specific expectations and challenges faced by African customers in white-owned establishments, thereby enabling service providers to customize their offerings more effectively.

Academic contribution

From an academic perspective, the study adds to the body of knowledge on post-apartheid societal dynamics, particularly within the context of the service industry. By employing a qualitative systematic review approach, the research enriches the literature with empirical evidence and lived experiences, offering a grounded understanding of the intricate factors influencing service interactions in racially and culturally diverse settings.

Promoting economic inclusion

The hospitality industry is a significant contributor to South Africa's economy, offering numerous employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. By addressing the challenges faced by African customers in white-owned establishments, the industry can contribute to breaking down economic barriers and promoting broader participation in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Global relevance

While the study is centered on post-apartheid South Africa, its findings have broader implications for understanding racial dynamics in hospitality settings worldwide. In an increasingly globalized world, the lessons learned from this research can offer valuable insights for other regions confronting similar issues of historical discrimination and striving to create more inclusive service environments.

In sum, the importance of this study lies in its potential to influence a range of stakeholders, from policymakers and industry practitioners to academics and the wider society, driving forward the agenda for a hospitality industry that truly embodies the values of inclusivity, respect, and equality.

CONCLUSION

In anticipation of the forthcoming research, this study protocol sets the stage for a critical examination of the experiences of African customers in white-owned restaurants and hotels in post-apartheid South Africa. By delving into the nuanced interactions between service providers and African patrons, the study aims to uncover the underlying dynamics that continue to shape these encounters in the shadow of a historically divided society.

The importance of this research lies not only in its potential to highlight persistent challenges and inequities within the hospitality industry but also in its capacity to identify pathways towards more inclusive and equitable service practices. As South Africa continues to grapple with the legacies of apartheid, understanding the current state of racial dynamics within such a customer-facing industry offers invaluable insights into broader societal trends and challenges.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to a body of knowledge that informs both academic discourse and practical interventions. For industry practitioners, the insights gained may serve as a foundation for developing training programs, policies, and practices that actively promote inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. For policymakers and social

change advocates, the research could provide evidence to support initiatives aimed at encouraging racial reconciliation and social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa.

Ultimately, this study aims to not only document and analyze the current state of affairs but also to inspire action towards a more inclusive and understanding society, where the hospitality industry serves as a microcosm of progress and unity in diversity. As such, the conclusion of this study protocol underscores the importance of the upcoming research in contributing to the ongoing dialogue around racial equity, social justice, and the transformative potential of the hospitality industry in post-apartheid South Africa.

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