

## Strategic Innovations and Competitiveness in Hotel Industry: a Survey of Selected Hotels in Nakuru Town, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to establish effects of strategic innovation management on competitiveness in the hotel industry. The specific objectives of the study were to; determine the effects of products and service innovations on competitiveness in hotel industry and establish effects of technology innovations on competitiveness in hotel industry. The study adopted Organizational Performance Model (OPI) developed by Kenya Institute of Management. OPI model was developed to promote organizational excellence and competitiveness in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study was done in seven selected hotels in Nakuru town which were selected based on the ratings by international booking companies namely; Eagle Palace Hotel, Hotel Waterbuck, Midland Hotel, Merica Hotel, Emboita Hotel, Milele Resort, and Avenue Suites Hotel. Simple random sampling was used to select 44 support staff. Purposive sampling was used to select heads of departments in the five departments in each hotel giving a sample of 35 HODs and one overall manager in each hotel giving a sample of 7 managers hence an overall sample size of 86 respondents. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the heads of department and support staff while interviews were used to collect data from the managers. The questionnaires were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics using regression model to test the strength of association between the independent and dependent variables. The analysis was done with the aid of SPSS version 20. The data from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis. The findings and recommendations of the study are to provide empirical information to the government of Kenya in policy formulation for revamping the tourism sector. The findings are also to be of significance to the managers in the hotel industry in formulating innovative strategic plans. Finally, the study will contribute to the existing literature on strategic management practices in the hotel industry. The study established that product/ service innovations significantly predict competitiveness in the hotel industry ( $\beta_1 = 0.583$ ,  $P = 0.00$ ). Technology innovations significantly affect competitiveness in the hotel industry ( $\beta_2 = 0.098$ ,  $P = 0.033$ ). The researcher recommends that as the hotels innovate their products and services, they should design to meet the needs of particular target customers. The researcher recommends that; the hotel managers should place more emphasis on product and service innovation in order to remain competitive, investment in technology by the management to enhance their competitiveness, as the hotels innovate their products and services, they should design to meet the needs of particular target customers.

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### Introduction

#### Background to the Study

The historical backdrop of strategic planning goes back to long-range planning (Cappelli, 2005). Strategic planning was accordingly a proactive different option for long-range planning which was observed to be old in light of the fact that it was not expanding company's actual worth. Strategic planning is a center assignment of senior management which includes fourteen (14) forms (Armstrong, 2010). These procedures are outlining objectives, arranging strategies, setting up goals, creating organization philosophy, policies, procedures, organization structures, building up staff and offices, capital, building up norms, projects and operational arrangements and standardization, evaluation and control.

Pearce and Robinson (2008) view strategic planning as a hierarchical procedure that is vision driven and that goes for adding to the future estimation of an association. Dan (2009) states that strategic planning procedure includes the usage of a methodology in an organization which ought to be overseen through sequence of steps. These steps incorporate setting of goals, examination of environmental patterns & abilities, assessment of the accessible alternatives and planning, execution, operationalization and regulation of strategies.

Barney and Hesterly (2006) are of the perspective that the procedure of strategic planning must be designed well such that it meets the particular needs of the organization. The strategic management procedures includes; the mission and vision of the organization, environmental assessment,

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selection of objectives and analyzing strategic choices (Porter, 2004). Johnson and Scholes (2003) state that there is not any most ideal method for directing the procedure of strategic planning in an organization and subsequently methodologies ought to be planned unequivocally and with certainty. Hotels have recognized the significance of strategic planning in different firms. This is on the grounds that key strategic planning helps firms to unmistakably distinguish and organize their goals, and targets (Johnson and Scholes, 2003). Strategic planning however must be done under specific environment which has the suitable structures for legitimate coordination and collaboration (Dobini, 2003). Managers' observation is likewise essential to the strategic management procedure on the grounds that they are the initiators and in addition the plans' implementers (Balogun, 2003).

The idea of strategic planning has been broadly embraced by hotels yet its measurements, roles and effect to the general performance of hotels is still questionable. Making a winning strategy is not a one-time activity on the grounds that a decent strategy today may not be fruitful tomorrow. Changes in the business environment are prompting new and more noteworthy planning systems. Jehad and Adel (2013) affirm that there are numerous planning systems utilized by hotels as a part of managing change and these frameworks have developed to adapt to the constantly evolving environment. Strategic management can assist hotels with conveying their objectives, systems and operational tasks to internal and external partners (Galbreath, 2010). Higher formality is advantageous for firms that work in exceedingly competitive situations like hotels and this may help them address threats more efficiently (Law and Jogaratnam, 2005). Hotels can adopt techniques from both the internal and external environment. The internal environment incorporates the physical and social components within the hotels or particular units that are taken into consideration on the behavior of those units (Richard *et al.*, 2009).

Internal environment likewise can allude to the measure of attention committed to hotels' recent history and current circumstance, its past performance and an examination of its strengths and shortcomings. Then again, external orientation includes the capacity to acquire dependable research data with a specific end goal to find out about external environment opportunities and dangers (Dinceret *al.*, 2006). These opportunities and dangers allude to those significant elements outside the hotels (Pinea and Phillips, 2005). Johnson and Scholes (2003) state that for a formal planning procedure to help with organisation advancement, it must incorporate mechanisms to embrace proper customer services, efficiency of operations, retaining high quality employees, and analysis of financial performance. The external orientation will make investigation of investment opportunities, examination of competitors and changing market research.

Wheelen and Hunger (2008) presume that strategic planning endeavors to look ahead to where you need to go and with the financial support to arrive. In the later times, the hotels business has distinguished the significance of strategic planning so as to define the mission of their organizations with the goal that they are better ready to offer their services. Strategic planning helps the managers to recognize clear-cut ideas of their Hotels and as a consequence of this make it conceivable to plans and activities that will make them realize their objectives (Pearce and Robinson, 2008). Kenyan hotel managers' work in a world that is perpetually changing and nothing is static whether in innovation, governmental issues or

society. They accordingly must choose the option to think of strategic planning as a tool for the future prospects of their hotels.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Advanced technology and shifting market environments have made strategic management strategies a fundamental requirement for every organization (Kaliappen & Hilman, 2013). The hotel industry has witnessed growing competition as guests become more classy (Wang *et al.*, 2012). To overcome these challenges, the hotels need to embrace strategic innovations in order to remain competitive (Okumus, 2003). Hoteliers today cannot escape from strategic innovations that assist to make enrichment, uphold the existing market and acquire new business. Given the stiff competition in the hotel industry, there is need to implement innovative strategies that will make the organization competitive. The hotel industry in Kenya is facing several challenges which have been affecting their performance. These challenges encompass; inadequate skilled employees, lack of infrastructure, insecurity, and poor strategic planning, inconsistent organizational structure among others (Onyango and Kipchumba, 2012). The current study therefore seeks to study the strategic management innovations employed in the selected hotels and the extent in which they influence their competitiveness.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to establish effects of strategic innovation management on competitiveness in the hotel industry. To achieve the above aim, the study was guided by the following specific objectives;

1. To determine the effects of products and service innovations on competitiveness in hotel industry
2. To establish effects of technology innovations on competitiveness in hotel industry

### **Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub>; Products and service innovation does not significantly affect competitiveness in hotel industry

H<sub>02</sub>; Technology innovations does not significantly affect competitiveness in hotel industry.

### **Significance of the Study**

The future achievement of firms will rely upon capacity of directors to settle on long term choices not in light of long-standing principles and regulations but in view of intensive filtering of inside and outside situations (Pearce, 2011). The findings and recommendations of the study are to serve as empirical information to the government of Kenya in policy formulation for revamping the tourism sector. The findings are also to be of significance to the managers in the hotel industry in formulating innovative strategic plans. Finally, the study is to contribute to the existing literature on strategic management practices in the hotel industry.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The interaction of the independent and the dependent variables are illustrated in figure 2.1. The independent variables are; product and service innovation and technology innovation, while the dependent variable is competitiveness in the hotel industry.

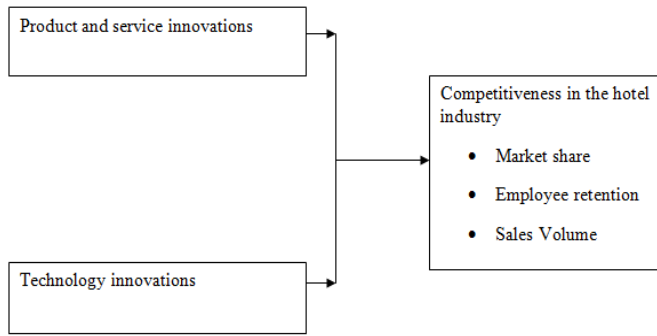
### **Research Design**

This study adopted a mixed methods research design which includes qualitative and quantitative research to establish the associations among the key study variables, to verify results and enable greater accuracy in measurement. In this study, qualitative data was collected by use of interviews to get the opinions, perceptions and experiences of the

managers in the hospitality industry. The quantitative data was collected using structured questionnaires.

**Independent Variable (IV)**  
**Strategic Competitiveness**

**Dependent Variable**  
**Innovations**



Source: (Author, 2015)

**Research Design**

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**Geographic Description of the Study Area**

Nakuru town is the fourth largest town in Kenya, and one of the fastest growing towns in Kenya. The town is famous for its tourist attraction sites among them Lake Nakuru, Menegai Crater and Hyrax Hill among others.

**Target Population**

The target population was 286 employees in administrative positions in the seven hotels in Nakuru town.

**Table 1.Target population.**

Hotel	Staff Establishment	Percentages
Eagle Palace Hotel	35	12.2
Hotel Waterbuck	40	14.0
Star bucks	37	12.9
Merica Hotel	29	10.1
Emboita Hotel	43	15.0
Milele Resort	65	22.7
Avenue Suites Hotel	37	12.7
Total	286	100

(Source: Hotels records)

**Sample Size and Sampling Procedure**

The study involved selected hotels in Nakuru town; the selection was based on rating of international booking company (www.Jumia.com/Kenya). The hotels rated as four star by the booking company within Nakuru town were selected. The ratings were based on popularity, pricing and customer reviews. The hotels rated as four star are; Eagle Palace Hotel, Hotel Waterbuck, Midland Hotel, Merica Hotel, Emboita Hotel, Milele Resort and Avenue Suites Hotel. A total of 30% of the 286 employees yielding a total of 86 respondents were sampled for the study. Simple random sampling was used to select the support staff, while purposive sampling was used to select heads of departments and one manager in each hotel.

**Research Findings**

**Demographic information**

**Gender**

Figure 4.1 indicates that majority of the respondents 44(55%) were males while 36(45%) were females. the results therefore reveal that the responses given will reflect both gender.

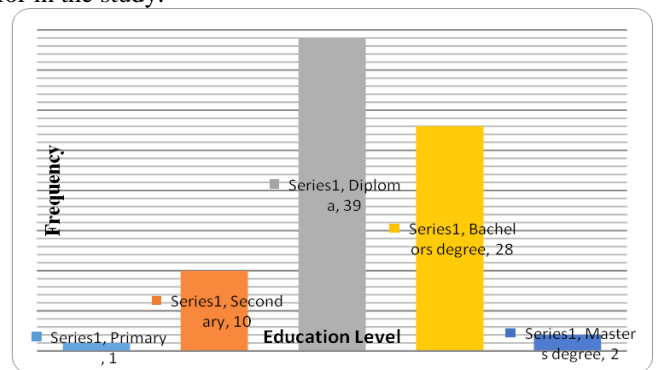
This indicates that the hotel industry is embracing the gender rule in its constitutional mandate of observing the one third gender rule in recruitment.

**Age of the respondents**

Majority of the respondents 43(53.8%) aged between 26-35 years, 34(42.5%) aged 18- 25 years, 2(2.5%) aged 36-45 years while 1(1.3%) aged between 46-55 years as indicated in figure 4.2. The study revealed that majority of the employees in the hotel industry are youths. This is valuable in terms of innovativeness since youth are responsive and open to new ideas. They are likely to embrace creativeness and use latest technology to drive competitiveness in the organization.

**Education level of respondents**

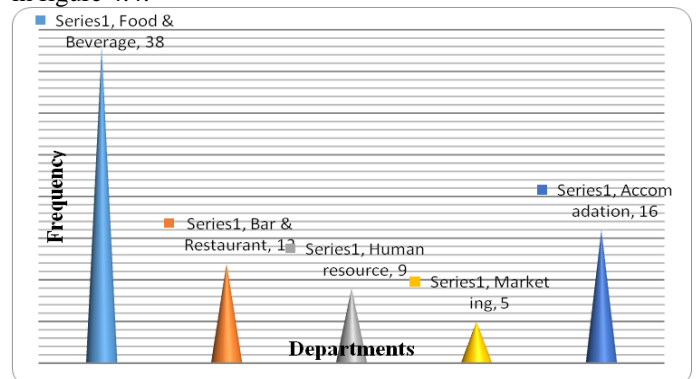
Figure 2 presents distribution of respondents by education level. Most of the respondents 39(48.8%) had diploma, 28(35.0%) had bachelors' degree, 10(12.5%) had secondary education while 2(2.5%) had masters degree. The results indicate that majority of the respondents had the requisite education level to comprehend the information being sought for in the study.



**Figure 2. Education level of the respondents.**

**Distribution of respondents by department**

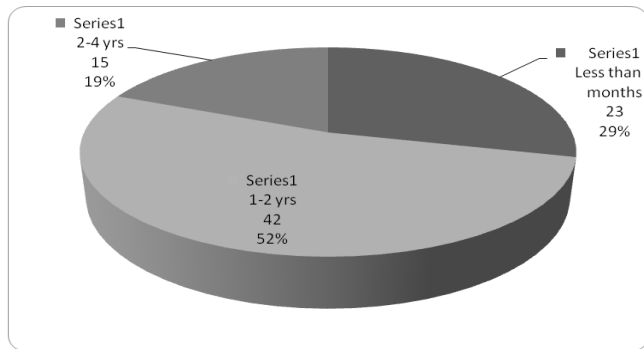
Figure 3 presents distribution of respondents as per the departments. Majority of the respondents 38(47.5%) were from the food and beverage department, 12(15%) were from bar and restaurant, 9(11.3%) were from human resource department, 5(6.3) were from marketing department, while 16(20.0%) were from accommodation department as indicated in figure 4.4.



**Figure 3. Distribution of respondents per department.**

**Years of experience in the current hotel**

The researcher sought to understand respondents' experience in the current hotel. It was established that majority of the respondents 42(52.5%) have been in the hotel for between 1-2 years, 15(18.8%) have been in the hotel for between 2-4 years, while 23(28.8%) have been in the current hotel for less than six months as indicated in figure 4.



**Figure 4. Years of experience of the respondents in the current hotel.**

### Effects of products and service innovations on competitiveness in hotel industry

The first objective of the study was to determine the effects of products and service innovations on competitiveness in hotel industry. The study established that new service development is well supported in our hotel as indicated by 40(50.0%) of the respondents who strongly agreed and 35(43.8%) who agreed. The hotels give special emphasis on service innovation as shown by 27(33.8%) of respondents that strongly agreed and 42(52.5%) who agreed. Majority of the respondents 45(56.3%) and 27(33.8%) strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the hotel is always seeking innovative features in the product/services.

The hotels change existing services to meet exclusive requirements, since 33(41.3%) of respondents strongly agreed and similar proportion agreed. The hotels also come up with new service offerings as indicated by 36(45.0%) of the respondents who strongly agreed and 35(43.8%) of the respondents that agreed. Most respondents 49(61.3%) strongly agreed that the hotels provide high quality services to customers. The hotels also emphasize improving the service delivery time to customers, as indicated by 44(55.0%) who strongly agreed and 30(37.5%) that agreed. Most respondents, 42(52.5%), and 30(37.5%) strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the hotel collect information from customers which is used to improve products and services to enhance competitiveness. The information is summarized in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Responses on Product and service innovation**

		SA	A	U	D	SD
New service development is well supported in our hotel	F	40	35	3	1	1
	%	50.0	43.8	3.8	1.3	1.3
The hotel gives special emphasis on service innovation	F	27	42	8	1	2
	%	33.8	52.5	10.0	1.3	2.5
The hotel is always seeking innovative features in our product/services	F	27	45	7	1	0
	%	33.8	56.3	8.8	1.3	0.0
The hotel change the existing services to meet exclusive requirement	F	33	33	7	3	4
	%	41.3	41.3	8.8	3.8	5.0
The hotel comes up with new service offerings	F	36	35	5	3	1
	%	45.0	43.8	6.3	3.8	1.3
The hotel provide high quality services to customers	F	49	28	1	1	1
	%	61.3	35.0	1.3	1.3	1.3
The hotel emphasize improving the service delivery time to customers	F	44	30	3	2	1
	%	55.0	37.5	3.8	2.5	1.3
The hotel collect information from customers which is used to improve products and services to enhance competitiveness	F	42	30	6	1	1
	%	52.5	37.5	7.5	1.3	1.3

Services that were identified during interviews included; tailoring services, laundry, first aid assistance, massaging and gym, Swimming pool and sauna, transportation, Health club, Social sites, Business centers, Teleconferencing, closed circuit television(CCTV) back up, Entertainment, Digital satellite television(DSTV) in every room, deluxe rooms and ensuite. The major food products offered were; different types of food, Local & continental dishes, Muslim dishes, Indian dishes, vegetarian diet, Different varieties of beverages. The researcher enquired what informed their Criteria for choice of products and service, the responses were; demand of quality hotels in the central rift region, marketing principle of central rift region to embrace hospitality industry, need for fresh foods and friendly rates as per the environment. The respondents mention that product and service innovations has lead to; increase in sales, repeat customers, staff retention and popularity within the region.

### Relationship between product/ service innovation on competitiveness in hotels

Correlation analysis indicated a positive correlation ( $r = 0.776^{**}$ ,  $p = 000$ ) between product/ service innovation on competitiveness, as indicated in table 2. These indicate that investment in product/service innovation in hotel industry positively influences competitiveness. The results are similar to Prajogo and Sohal (2006) who stated that there is an association between differentiation and product / service innovation.

**Table 3. Correlation of product/ service and competitiveness.**

		Competitiveness	Product service
Competitiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.776 <sup>**</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	80	80
Product service	Pearson Correlation	.776 <sup>**</sup>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

\*\*<sub>2</sub>. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Effects of technology innovations on competitiveness in hotel industry

The second objective of the study was to establish effects of technology innovations on competitiveness in hotel industry. The study established that technological innovation has resulted in development of new business markets, as indicated by 28(35.0%) of respondents who strongly agreed and 45(56.3%) that agreed. Most respondents 29(36.3%) and 45(56.3%) strongly agreed and agreed respectively that continuous technology innovations have enabled the hotel get satisfied customers and motivated employees. On the statement that investing in the latest and modern technology has added value to the products in our hotel, 36(45.0%) strongly agreed and 37(46.3%) agreed.

The study established that ICT has lead to the introduction of modern ideas within the hotel which is one of the driving forces of performance in the hotel, as indicated by 39(48.8%) and 35(43.8%). The hotels employ the use of technology in the management activities, 35(43.8%) strongly agreed and 37(46.3%) agreed. The hotels also employ the use of technology to improve security within the premise, 46(57.5%) strongly agreed and 28(35.0%) agreed.

On the statement that the hotel offers internet connection to their customers, 45(56.3%) strongly agreed and 29(36.3%) agreed. It was also established that the hotels use statistical analysis to understand the profitable segment of their customers, as indicated by 36(45.0%) of respondents who strongly agreed and 32(40.0%) that agreed. The information is presented in table 4 below.

**Table 4. Response on use of technology innovations .**

		SA	A	U	D	SD
Technological innovation has resulted in development of new business markets	F	28	45	3	4	0
	%	35.0	56.3	3.8	5.0	0.0
Continuous technology innovations have enabled the hotel get satisfied customers and motivated employees	F	29	45	4	1	1
	%	36.3	56.3	5.0	1.3	1.3
Investing in the latest and modern technology has added value to the products in our hotel	F	36	37	5	2	0
	%	45.0	46.3	6.3	2.5	0.0
ICT has lead to the introduction of modern ideas within the hotel which is one of the driving forces of performance in the hotel	F	39	35	5	1	0
	%	48.8	43.8	6.3	1.3	0.0
The hotel employs the use of technology in the management activities	F	35	37	5	1	2
	%	43.8	46.3	6.3	1.3	2.5
The hotel employs the use of technology to improve security within the premise	F	46	28	3	2	1
	%	57.5	35.0	3.8	2.5	1.3
The hotel offers internet connection to their customers	F	45	29	4	1	1
	%	56.3	36.3	5.0	1.3	1.3
The hotel uses statistical analysis to understand the profitable segment of their customers	F	36	32	9	2	1
	%	45.0	40.0	11.3	2.5	1.3

The technological innovations identified during the interviews includes; CCTV cameras, Use of wifi, Alarm responses, fire alarms, internet connections, lift machine, TVs in every room with international channels, free internets, weapon detecting devices, Use of key cards, chopping machines, water purification system, solar water heating system and Point of Sale soft ware (POS). It was established that technology innovations has; increased the sales in the hotel, led to high standards of security, improved entertainment services, enhanced data acquisition and mining, enhanced online booking, encouraged teamwork among the employees, improved the services to meets the client expectations, it increased the sales in the hotel, reduced wastage, enhanced systematic coordination of services, and made work easier and simpler.

#### Summary of findings

#### Effects of products and service innovations on competitiveness in hotel industry

The study established that; new service development is well supported in the hotels, the hotels give special emphasis on service innovation, and majority of the respondents agreed respectively that the hotels are always seeking innovative features in their product/services. It was also found that the hotels change existing services to meet exclusive requirements; the hotels come up with new service offerings. Most respondents agreed that the hotels provide high quality services to customers; the hotels also emphasize improving the service delivery time to customers and collect information from customers which is used to improve products and services to enhance competitiveness. Other products and

services identified were; tailoring services, laundry, first aid assistance, massaging and gym, Swimming pool and sauna, and transportation.

Correlation analysis indicated a positive correlation ( $r = 0.776^{**}$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) between product/ service innovation on competitiveness. The regression results indicates that product/ service innovations significantly ( $\beta = 0.493$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) predict competitiveness. The results concur with (Yeop, O.A (2014) the result also indicated that service innovation has a significant impact on organizational performance ( $\beta = 0.776$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, these results supported the prior notion of Projogo&Sohal (2006) and Frohwein&Hansjurgens (2005).

#### Effects of technology innovations on competitiveness in hotel industry

The study established that: technological innovation has resulted in development of new business markets, continuous technology innovations have enabled the hotel get satisfied customers and motivated employees, investing in the latest and modern technology has added value to the products in the hotels. The study also established that; ICT has led to the introduction of modern ideas within the hotels which is one of the driving forces of performance, the hotels employ the use of technology in the management activities, the hotels also employ the use of technology to improve security within the premise, hotels offers internet connection to their customers and use statistical analysis to understand the profitable segment of their customers. The technological innovations identified during the interviews includes; CCTV cameras, Use of wifi, Alarm responses, fire alarms, internet connections, lift machine, TVs in every room with international channels, Free internets, weapon detecting devices, Use of key cards and POS.

The results showed a positive correlation( $r = 0.485^{**}$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) between technology innovations and competitiveness. The results are similar with those of Jean *et al* (2013) the regression results reveal statistically significant effect of ICT and organizational performance ( $\beta = 0.442$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.004$ ).

#### Conclusion

The study sought to establish effects of strategic innovations management on competitiveness in hotel industry. The study established that product/ service innovations significantly predict competitiveness in the hotel industry. Technology innovations significantly affect competitiveness in the hotel industry. The study established that customer focus significantly affects competitiveness in the hotels industry. The researcher recommends that as the hotels innovate their products and services, they should design to meet the needs of particular target customers.

#### Recommendations

1. The researcher recommends that the hotel managers should place more emphasis on product and service innovation in order to remain competitive.
2. The researcher recommends investment in technology by the management to enhance their competitiveness.
3. The researcher recommends that as the hotels innovate their products and services, they should design to meet the needs of particular targeted customers.

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